

Stewardship for the Congregation: The Basics

1. Make the decision to switch the emphasis on money and budgets to helping persons gain insight and commitment to understanding the theology of stewardship, its place in their spiritual formation and their church community.

Some components of this theology:

+ Scriptural references

+ Tithing is the biblical *minimum* when referring to the stewardship of material possessions

+ Emphasis on God's abundance vs. scarcity

+ Everything is from God, we are called to be stewards of all God has entrusted to our care

+ Stewardship is holistic in the context of a congregation which includes:

* *Thoughtful stewardship of persons who are a part of this community includes knowing them, the gifts and talents they bring into the congregation, and their empowerment for ministry*

* *Environmental stewardship of the physical plant and surroundings*

* *Faithful, honest and trustworthy practices when it comes to financial oversight*

* *Prayerful, discerning leadership around decisions to set budgets and spend money*

* *Spiritual development of the stewardship of time for individuals and the congregation*

* *A theological perspective of being stewards of the "other"*

2. Putting people with gifts and passion for stewardship together, empowering them to be integral in the design and implementation of programs and activities that will foster good stewardship practices and understanding in a congregation.

Often this means the formation of a stewardship ministry team apart from

the finance ministry team or vestry but may include a few members of either group who have a passion/giftedness for stewardship. It is not unusual to find persons who tithe from their income that truly understand the theology of stewardship who want to be a part of an organized effort for responsible Christian stewardship. This group's motivation is a *theological* one.

They work with the rector and/or the vestry to approve program design and plans for the congregation. A stewardship ministry team could be large enough to have sub groups if needed to address specific aspects of congregational stewardship. This ministry team should meet year round and have a distinct, clear charge and mutually understood objective. These meetings are to help foster development of all areas of Christian stewardship, not only the annual pledge campaign.

3. The growth of healthy stewardship in a congregation takes intentionality, risk taking, creativity, trust and commitment on the part of the leaders of a congregation.

All leaders model for others behaviors that are desired in the community. Leaders must be visibly engaged through liturgical practices, witness, commitment of time, giftedness, treasure, other assets, and must "walk the talk". If the leaders aren't committed to living out the theology of stewardship, others will not follow. "The leaders" include everyone in leadership in the congregation: clergy, staff who are members, vestry, leaders of ministries and stewardship leaders.

4. The leaders of the stewardship efforts must understand the organic and relational nature of congregations. Regular assessment of stewardship efforts, having an openness to change in order to maximize effectiveness, and building in relational and spiritual aspects to stewardship efforts are keys to increasing the commitment to it.

Change in practices can be unsettling but are often necessary to move a congregation forward. Congregations are subtly but constantly changing. The stewardship efforts must be responsive to these changes yet sensitive to the culture of the group. The handling of finances is inherently conservative. Healthy monetary stewardship practices demonstrate fiscal responsibility coupled with faithful response to God's mission (purpose) and vision for the congregation.

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