

Faithful Property Stewardship – A Bible Study from the Church Property Resource Hub



Welcome and Gratitude

We welcome and thank you for participating in this Faithful Property Stewardship Bible study, which we hope is an invitation into seeing your land and buildings with new eyes. Faithful stewardship of church property looks different in the 21st Century, and many congregations may feel overwhelmed by the expense and labor of caring for buildings that sit emptier than they did 20, 30, or 50 years ago. It is no small thing to open ourselves up to God's imagination about the future of our churches and our property; your acceptance of the invitation to dream with each other, and with God, is appreciated.

This Study's Components

There are **four (4) sessions** in this study, each with a corresponding guide. Each of the guides is written for ease of use. You will note that *italicized text is directions for the leader*.

This four-session curriculum has been formatted to reflect that participation in this study is an act of faith. Each session grounds the group in Scripture and prayer. You may use the opening and closing prayer as printed or adapt them for your group, using your words.

The sessions begin with a word of **welcome**. This may be read aloud by the leader or by a volunteer. All sessions contain some version of **Inspiring Stories of Property Transformation**. The group will read a story of property transformation together, either silently or aloud (read by the facilitator or a volunteer). Individuals will then pair up to reflect on the story and where they see God at work. Challenge participants not to pair up with a friend or family member, but instead to seek out someone they do not know. Ask participants to create different pairs for different sessions.

Each session provides a **scripture** reading and **discussion questions**. Discussions should be intimate and lively, and so you are encouraged to create smaller discussion groups of four to five (4 – 5) individuals. Each session also provides **closing reflection questions** for the whole group and a time to share **insights** from small-group discussions.

The four sessions are designed for roughly an hour together and are written to be completed in numerical order. The curriculum is adaptable for various settings including a midweek Lenten study, Sunday educational hour, online, and so on. Included with each session is an optional **“Listening to our Property” activity** (to be completed in about half an hour) that allows participants to apply the discussion to the land and buildings that your church stewards.

The final session, “What is God dreaming for our building?” incorporates an **in-person activity** that invites participants to explore the building and grounds as an anchor for discussion. This session should be conducted on-site and may need to be scheduled at a different time than the previous sessions in order to maximize participation if your group has met online for sessions 1 – 3. Blessings on your journey!

Lesson 1 of 8

Session 1: What is Good Soil?

Grounding Our Journey in Prayer

Welcome to this foundational lesson on faithful stewardship. Together, we will explore how scripture shapes our understanding of stewardship and transformation, equipping you to lead reflective, collaborative discussions in your congregation. As we begin, know that your openness and leadership are vital to nurturing new possibilities for your church and community.

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 – 10 minutes)

Welcome each other to the study and introduce yourselves.

Leader: We believe in a God that is always doing a new thing, that God can bring even dry bones to life. God invites us to participate in creative imagination about how our hands – and our assets – can do God’s work in our communities. The land and buildings that our congregation calls home are resources that we can use to live out God’s call for our church, but it’s not easy. Maintenance is expensive. Congregation membership is shrinking. And our churches aren’t always seen as valuable to our neighbors. The offering plate and annual pledges don’t always cover our expenses. And yet, we know that the Holy Spirit is moving.

The ELCA, and our sibling denominations, are being challenged to look at our property with new eyes and to get creative about how we use, manage, and finance our land and buildings. Congregations across the United States are experimenting with new models of stewardship and transforming not only their property, but their congregations and neighborhoods. This study invites us into conversation about how our facilities might still facilitate the work of God.

Invite participants to pray, using this or your own prayer.

Loving Creator, you call on your people to think beyond obstacles and restrictions, beyond history and tradition, beyond “how it’s always been.” Help us be faithful disciples who dream as big as you do. We give thanks for the land and buildings that you have charged us with, and remind us that they are not ours, but yours. Be with each of us as we open our imaginations about what these resources can be used for. We give thanks for all the people who have called this land home, all who have stewarded it in honor of our shared Creator. May we also be good and faithful stewards. May our thoughts and words be honest, insightful, and faithful. We give thanks for each other as siblings in Christ, help us to strengthen each other in all that we say and do. Amen.

Inspiring Story of Property Transformation

Real-world stories of transformation can spark our imagination and offer practical guidance for our own congregations. By learning from others' experiences, we discover new possibilities and approaches to visioning and property use. As you engage in the following story, look for both inspiration and practical lessons that you can adapt for your unique context.

Inspiring Story (15 minutes)

Arrange the participants into groups of 2 or 3, where they will discuss the following story together. The leader or a volunteer may read for the whole group.



Paintings by Messejah Washington are displayed in First Presbyterian's narthex. Washington is one of the many artists in residence who both create and exhibit in the church. Photo: Sarah Jones

From a Fallow Field to a Wildflower Garden – First Presbyterian Cultivates a Community of Artists

If you were to walk past First Presbyterian Church of Chicago (“First Church”) five years ago, you might have thought it a hollow reminder of a once-thriving church. There were holes in the sanctuary’s stained-glass windows, an adjacent lawn was overgrown and dotted with dried-up flowers, and the enormous building was empty just about every day of the week. But when the Rev. David Black first came to First Presbyterian in 2020, he saw potential waiting to be tapped. Pastor Black was coming to the South Side of Chicago from New York City, where he had been on staff at Judson Memorial Church in Manhattan. Judson had been transformed into a vibrant arts hub, serving artists of every medium and inspiration. “In churches, I usually saw high institutional art,” Pastor Black says. “Judson embraced those at the fringe. ... It illuminated how embracing the fullness of artists does so much for our theological imagination.”



Students with 773 Dance Project practice in First Presbyterian's gym. 773 Dance Project provides dance instruction to kids and adults on the South Side of Chicago.

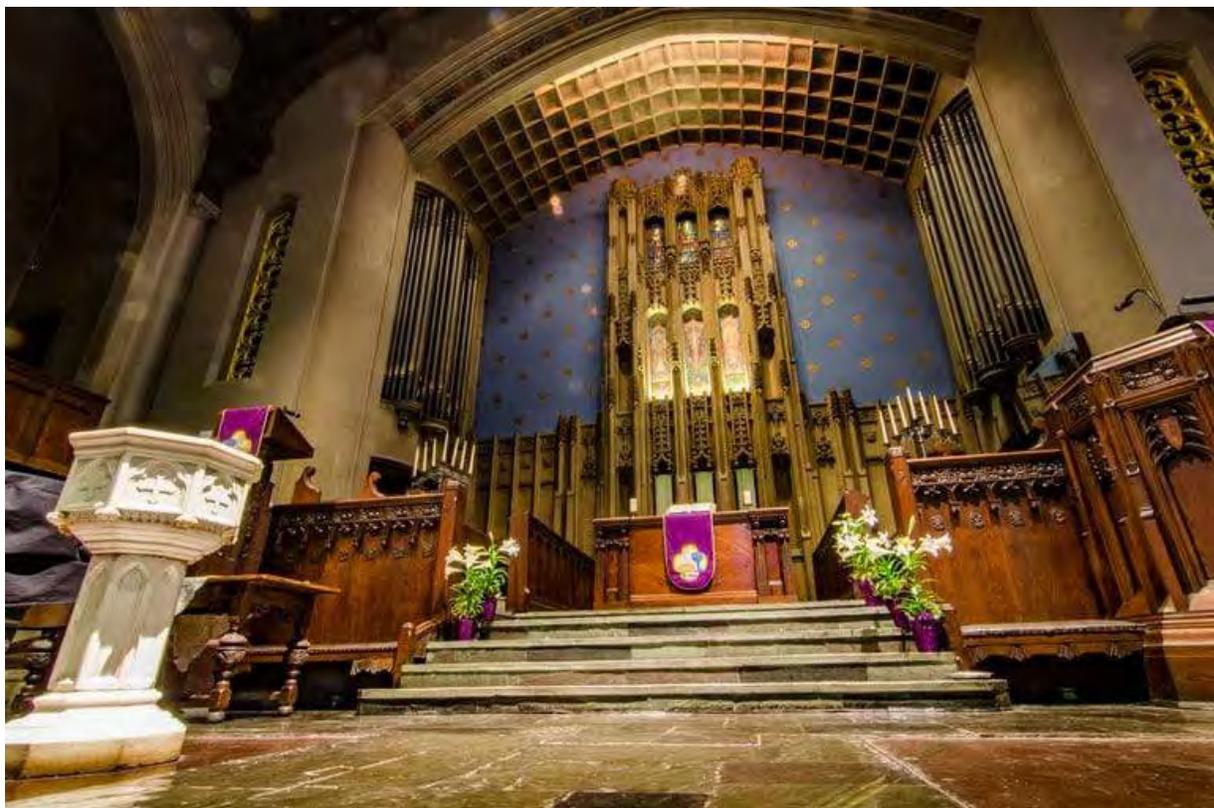
Photo Credit: 773 Dance Project

Artists are natural partners for congregations with excess space. Not only do they have the imagination and resourcefulness to use buildings in a different way, they are often in need of local, affordable space in which to create, rehearse, exhibit and perform. Churches often have the kinds of spaces that artists need, though congregations may not immediately think of that possibility.

First Presbyterian had three floors of unused classrooms and offices, four performance spaces, a gymnasium and a commercial-grade kitchen. Many people saw these underutilized rooms as a sad reminder of the church's past, but Pastor Black and members of the congregation saw an opening to do what Judson had done — become a home for artists.

It didn't take long for the Spirit to affirm Pastor Black's vision. One warm day in 2021, an interdisciplinary artist named Max Li decided to bike to a cemetery on the South Side, and his route took him by First Church. He was struck by the church's gothic-style architecture and had stopped to take photographs when Pastor Black emerged. "He immediately invited me for a tour of the building," says Li.

As Li walked through the halls, he was dumbstruck by the number and quality of spaces. He happened to be in the market for a low-cost studio and soon became the church's first artist in residence. "The church was in great shape," says Li. "It was just frozen." He began bringing in friends and other artists as subjects for a tintype photography project and would give each of them a tour of the facilities. They were similarly awestruck, and over several months, artists of many disciplines began activating the spaces in the building — from dance classes to oil painting to concerts.



First Presbyterian Church of Chicago uses its sanctuary to host concerts, art installations, and lectures. This space is one of the most used in the entire building by artists and other partners. Photo Credit: Chicago Architecture Center

First Presbyterian is now a bustling building, alive with volunteers, artists and community programs seven days a week. In addition to individual artists, the church is home to two weekly feeding programs, an arts nonprofit serving differently abled adults, and a food entrepreneur who manages the kitchen. The majority of these users found the church through their relationships with Pastor Black and Li, through other artists and through word of mouth.

In April 2025, the church was a venue for EXPO CHICAGO, and more than a thousand visitors came through the doors for curated openings, fashion shows, house music concerts and other events that breathed creative life into the building. Chicago's public radio station and local news outlets are excited to share First Church's story as an example of how churches and artists can create mutually beneficial partnerships.

The church's relationships with artists and local community groups have created an economy of reciprocity, expanding not just the church's missional reach but also the capacity of its partners. Artists are inherently collaborative and often trade their skills and connect their friends. One artist, who designs and creates clothing, helped repair one of the church's torn stage curtains. Chef Dozzy, who manages the kitchen, collaborated with church members and the local food distribution group to create a "Sunday Rice" community dinner once a month. Li and other artists create art for worship services and hold classes for church members. First Church is collaborating with some of its partners to write a grant that will help restore the community greenhouse on its lot.

“We just started planting a garden with the artists, and now we’re seeing what thrives in this community.”

–Rev. David Black

For Pastor Black, the contrast between the church now and when he first arrived is stark. He describes the church of 2020 as a “fallow field.” “Five percent of the building was used 5% of the week by 26 members who had been through a rough decade,” he says. “There were no policies, no manuals. The church had a name, but the institution had died. All this growth has been from that death.” He sees the death of the institution creating the possibility for new life, just as dying plants regenerate the soil. “We just started planting a garden with the artists, and now we’re seeing what thrives in this community.”

The artists and building are definitely thriving, and the congregation is being transformed, thanks to the church’s new life as an arts hub. As with the artists, First Church is becoming new by attracting less traditional members. “In Sunday worship, we get some visitors who are lifelong Presbyterians, but they often disappear. We also get people who have never been to church in their lives. ... They’re here to

be tourists, or they're here to be ironic. But they keep coming back, and they join the church." Like wildflower seeds being blown on the wind, folks of all backgrounds are finding a home in the building, and the church is blooming with a diversity of possibilities.



Volunteers with Market Box — a mutual aid food distribution program — package deliveries in First Presbyterian's fellowship hall. First Presbyterian partners with multiple food service and justice groups that use the building every week. Photo Credit: First Presbyterian Church

Max Li offers a different metaphor to describe his experience of First Presbyterian's transformation. "There's a proverb in which an emperor asks four blind sages to tell him what an elephant is — they can only describe it in parts." Li sees the artists, the congregation and the other building users bringing their specific visions to the church. "When we stay within our own disciplines, we can only understand what is in front of us. We need each other to see the bigger picture."

Li's part of that vision has made him an advocate for church–artist partnerships. He is now the “arts czar” of First Presbyterian and the primary cultivator of partnerships in the building. Though few of the building users, including Li, identify as Christian or attend Sunday service, they see themselves as part of larger church community and are inspired by their own piece of a larger vision.

As First Presbyterian's profile continues to grow in Chicago, Pastor Black and Max Li are often asked for advice from other congregations seeking new life and transformation for their old, empty buildings. Pastor Black tells them to release their grip on their past selves – to let go and let God. “God has a plan for churches right now,” Pastor Black says. “We're not really in control. The church isn't ours, and it never was.” Pastor Black hopes that more congregations will lean into their discomfort about sharing space and embrace the imagination of artists, just as First Presbyterian Church of Chicago has.

1

What parts of the story resonated with you? Why?

2

Where do you hear the Spirit moving in the story? Where was God at work?

3

What memories or stories of your church does this remind you of?

Biblical Foundations of Stewardship and Transformation

In this lesson, we are exploring the biblical foundations of stewardship and transformation, the importance of prayer and reflection, and the vital roles you play as a congregational leader. Together, we will explore how scripture shapes our understanding and grounds our actions in faith.

Scripture and Discussion (20–25)

Re-arrange the participants into groups of 4 or 5, then read the following story together. The leader or a volunteer may read for the whole group. Allow for a minute of silent reflection after reading.

The Parable of the Sower: Matthew 13:1–9

13That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.**2**Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach.**3**And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow.**4**And as he sowed, some seeds fell on a path, and the birds came and ate them up.**5**Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil.**6**But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away.**7**Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.**8**Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.**9**If you have ears, hear!”

In small groups, after silent reflection time, read and discuss the following.

Any farmer will tell you that soil grows tired after a number of planting seasons with the same crop. Good soil can become shallow or choked with weeds after years of use. Farmers will often rotate their fields, planting something different in the tired soil to regenerate its fertility and moving their crop-planting to a different field with more nutrient-dense soil. This ensures that the whole farm will be healthy and abundant for generations to come.

Churches also experience seasons – seasons of growth, seasons of decline, seasons of new beginnings, seasons of rest. This parable is often used to talk about church-planting, the start of new congregations in new places. But maybe we should see our ministry as being continually planted, continually rotated, all in service of a greater abundance.

What are some of the seasons of ministry our church has experienced in the last 20 – 30 years? How was our property utilized during those seasons?

In the story of the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago, Pastor Black describes the church as going from a “fallow field” to a “wildflower garden.” What made that church “good soil” for its next season of ministry?

How might thinking about seasons of ministry inform how we use our buildings? Our land?

In the story of The First Presbyterian Church of Chicago, the rejuvenation of property and ministry came from outside the membership of the church. How might we open ourselves to all the seeds that God may be sowing?

Summary and Next Steps

In this lesson, we explored the biblical foundations of stewardship and transformation, the importance of prayer and reflection, and the vital roles you play as a congregational leader. Carry these insights with you as you guide your congregation, fostering faithful stewardship and openness to God's renewing work in your community.

To continue your learning in the context of your space, you are invited to complete the "Listening to Our Property" activity before the sending.

Sending (5 minutes)

Reconvene as a large group to debrief and reflect.

What insights did you gain from the conversations? What are you walking away with?

Close in prayer, using your own words or the following:

O God, you have called your servants to do your work in the world. We don't always see the end of the journey, but we trust the path you have set us on. Give us the faith to venture forth with courage, not knowing where you are leading us but knowing that you are walking beside us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Gratitude for our Learning and Time Together

Thank you for making time to explore how scripture shapes our understanding of stewardship and transformation. As you move forward, carry these tools and insights with you—empowering your community to act boldly, adapt to new opportunities, and faithfully steward your church's resources for the future.

To continue your learning in the context of your space, you are invited to complete the "Listening to Our Property" activity.

Lesson 2 of 8

OPTIONAL: Listening to our Property



What might our property tell us if we just listen?

OPTIONAL: Listening to our Property (25 – 30 minutes)

Review the list of groups and activities that your church building has hosted over the past 6 months. The leader should be prepared to answer questions about who the groups are, how they use the property, and their programs/activities.

Assign each small group to a particular space in the church that has been used by one or more of these groups/programs to discuss the following (give a time limit to reconvene).

- Who uses this space? For what purpose?
- Who do these groups and programs benefit? Who participates?
- Discuss the impact that these groups and programs have. How do they contribute to community vitality?
- What is the “harvest” that your church building is making possible through these programs and activities?
- How might these groups and programs be indicators of your church’s current season of ministry?

Reconvene the groups for a short debrief of what they talked about. Stand/sit in a circle and ask each participant to give a one-sentence answer for each of the following questions (going once around the circle for each question):

- What did you hear in your conversations that is sticking with you?
- What did you hear that might be the Spirit talking?
- What is one question that you are leaving with?

Lesson 3 of 8

Session 2: What does it mean to be a faithful steward?

Grounding Our Journey in Prayer

Welcome to this foundational lesson on faithful stewardship. Together, we will explore how scripture shapes our understanding of stewardship and transformation, equipping you to lead reflective, collaborative discussions in your congregation. As we journey, know that your openness and leadership are vital to nurturing new possibilities for your church and community.

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 – 10 minutes)

Welcome each other to the study and introduce yourselves.

Leader: Christ taught us that generosity is central to discipleship. We are called to give, to offer, to utilize all of the assets and talents we have been blessed with to the work of God in this world. Christ invites us to experience his love through the offering of who we are and what we have, just as Christ did. The land and buildings that our congregation calls home are blessings bestowed on us by God and by generations past. In this moment in our lives, in the life of this congregation, and in the life of the wider church, we are asked to think about what that generosity looks like.

Invite participants to pray, using this or your own prayer.

Generous and faithful Creator, you invite us into your dreams, your plans, and your work. You teach us how to change this world to be a reflection of your justice and mercy and equip us with all that we need to co-create the Kingdom on Earth. Help us to take up this call with vigor, excited for the new thing we are doing together. We give thanks for all the people who have called this land home, who have stewarded it in honor of our shared Creator. May we also be good and faithful stewards. May our thoughts and words be honest, insightful, and faithful. We give thanks for each other as siblings in Christ, help us to strengthen each other in all that we say and do. Amen.

Inspiring Story of Property Transformation

Real-world stories of transformation can spark our imagination and offer practical guidance for our own congregations. By learning from others' experiences, we discover new possibilities and approaches to visioning and property use. As you engage in the following story, look for both inspiration and practical lessons that you can adapt for your unique context.

Inspiring Story (15 minutes)

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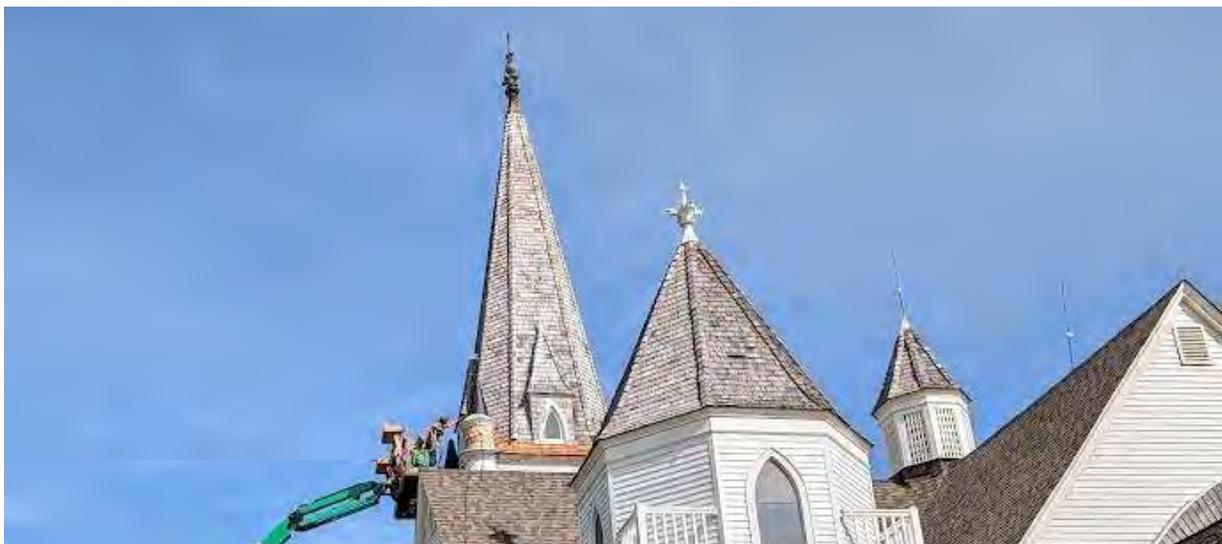


Vang's sanctuary includes a beautifully preserved organ. The church's commitment to preservation of its history and building is supported by its equally strong commitment to community service. Photo credit: Church Property Resource Hub

Preserving more than a Building – Vang Lutheran Church learns how wide its ministry reaches

It's hard to stumble across Vang Lutheran Church outside of Dennison, MN. The church building is located in the middle of farm fields, at least a mile from major roadways.

But if you do go looking for it, you'll be rewarded with the view of a pristine, white, clapboard church with a small lawn bordered by new saplings. Although Vang Lutheran's building is hard to find, its ministry is well known in the towns and communities located in at least a 15-mile radius of the church. Local food pantries stock the produce grown in the small garden -- up to a 1,000 lb a year. Residents connected to the church -- either as members or the friends and family of members -- are supported in times of need by Vang's Care Team, who visit folks who are sick, grieving, or are otherwise in need of some companionship. The Care Team often brings one of the many frozen, homemade meals that members make and stock in the church kitchen. Vang is a church that knows how to care for its people and community. "This is a farm church," says Steve Trolley, a dedicated member of the Garden Committee. "We know how to get through tough times together."



Vang Lutheran Church, Dennison, Minn., is restoring its iconic steeple as part of a larger renovation project to preserve the church's historic building. The church received a \$100,000 matching grant for its preservation project. Photo: Church Property Resource Hub.

In addition to being a farm church, Vang Lutheran also carries the heritage of its Norwegian immigrant founders. The standing church building was designed by Olaf Hanson in the late 19th Century and boasts many features that reflect the traditional stave churches of Norway, including the woodwork of the altar, the soaring ceilings, and the sanctuary's layout in the style of a Greek Cross. The congregation keeps their Norwegian heritage alive through the annual Lutefisk dinners, which bring hundreds of local residents through their doors every fall. When the congregation learned in 2020 that its steeple was in danger of collapsing, they rallied to find a way to not just patch the steeple, but to faithfully restore it as a treasured part of their ancestors' legacy.

"This is a farm church. We know how to get through tough times together." – Steve Trolley

The steeple restoration project was a huge undertaking for a small, aging, rural congregation. The church had always been able to find the funds necessary for immediate repairs, but the steeple would cost more than many of those smaller projects combined. One of the members, who also sits on the board of a local historical society, learned about a competitive capital grant for churches called the National Fund for Sacred Places. The grant would provide 1:1 matching funds up to \$100,000, which would provide half the amount needed for the project.

Vang Lutheran strengthened their application by including all the different ways the church was benefitting their surrounding communities. "It was eye-opening to think about all the ways we were ministering to people," said Pam. "We didn't realize all that we were doing." In addition to the Care Team's work and the garden's bounty, the Vang Lutheran realized that they were engaged in all sorts of ministry. The Lutefisk dinner helped educate and engage people in Norwegian tradition, the church had supported over 40 interns who became Lutheran pastors all over the United States, they had raised money for a local non-member family whose child was fighting cancer, and they were partnering with another local Lutheran church to support a full-time pastoral call. Vang's impact and reach impressed the National Fund for Sacred Places, and the church was accepted into the program in 2022.

Vang Lutheran met and exceeded its fundraising goals in just two years by reaching out to the same network of folks that they had impacted in their many decades of ministry. They found contact information for their former members and made phone calls, telling them about the project and why it was important. They talked to



Vang is surrounded by farmland, some of which the church uses for its community garden. The garden contributes up to 1,000 pounds of fresh produce to local food pantries annually.
Photo: Church Property Resource Hub

Vang Lutheran's success fundraising for its building's restoration has been an inspiration in its community and beyond. They've recently called a new pastor that they are sharing with Dennison Lutheran church and are collaborating with other rural parishes to sponsor an intern from Wartburg Seminary. Rev. Peter Coen Tuff, who was installed early in 2025, says he was inspired to take the call by seeing how the church was still serving and dreaming. "They had all these dying trees around their property, so they took them down and planted new ones. When you're planting trees, you're thinking about the future." This small congregation knows it can do big things!



What parts of the story resonated with you? Why?



Where do you hear the Spirit moving in the story? Where was God at work?



What memories or stories of your church does this remind you of?

Scripture and Discussion (20–25)

Re-arrange the participants into groups of 4 or 5, then read the following story together. The leader or a volunteer may read for the whole group. Allow for a minute of silent reflection after reading.

The Parable of the Talents

14 “For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; **15** to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. **16** At once the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made five more talents. **17** In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. **18** But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. **19** After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. **20** Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ **21** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ **22** And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ **23** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ **24** Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, **25** so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ **26** But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? **27** Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return, I would have received what was my own with interest. **28** So take the talent from him and give it to the one with the ten talents. **29** For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. **30** As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

In small groups, after silent reflection time, read and discuss the following.

In other Gospel stories, Jesus talks about the generosity of folks who have only a small amount of money or resources in comparison to the stinginess of folks who have much. Think of the widow's mite, in which a woman's two coins amounted to more than the great tithe of all the rich temple patrons. In this parable, that logic seems to be reversed – the servants that have been given more make trades with their master's wealth and the servant that was given less buries his gift in the ground for safekeeping. We empathize with this servant – after all, why take risks with someone else's money? Why isn't preserving and safekeeping a treasure, especially a small one, responsible stewardship?

The discrepancy between the servant's intent and the master's reaction only makes sense when we see the economy of ministry not as transactional, but as reciprocal. To participate is to give freely and generously, without expectation of specific reward, but having faith that our gifts will benefit us by benefiting the whole. In an economy based on reciprocity, the greatest risk, and the gravest error, is to safekeep. By not offering our assets, however small they are, we risk limiting the impact we can make on our communities and therefore ourselves. Conversely, giving generously to benefit those beyond our walls and congregations brings returns that then support our ministry and life.

What are the assets that we as a church are used to giving generously?
What are the assets that we tend to safekeep?

Many of our physical and financial assets were passed down to us from previous generations. How might that inheritance complicate and/or inform what we do with those assets?

Martin Luther famously said that "If the world ended tomorrow, I would still plant my apple tree." How does generosity intersect with hope?

In the story of Vang Lutheran Church, the congregation was surprised by the impact that they had had on their surrounding community and on folks now dispersed across the country. What are all the different ways our church offers its resources and what might be the impact of that generosity?

Summary and Next Steps

In this lesson, we explored the biblical foundations of stewardship and transformation, the importance of prayer and reflection, and the vital roles you play as a congregational leader. Carry these insights with you as you guide your congregation, fostering faithful stewardship and openness to God's renewing work in your community.

To continue your learning in the context of your space, you are invited to complete the "If These Walls Could Talk" activity before the sending.

Sending (5 minutes)

Reconvene as a large group to debrief and reflect. What insights did you gain from the conversations? What are you walking away with?

Close in prayer, using your own words or the following:

O God, you have invited us into an auspicious and audacious project. On any day we might feel too tired, too old, too cynical, or too poor for this call, but we know that you provide the wisdom, the resources, and the grace to see it through. Give us faith to take up the work with joy in our hearts, knowing that you are working beside and among us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

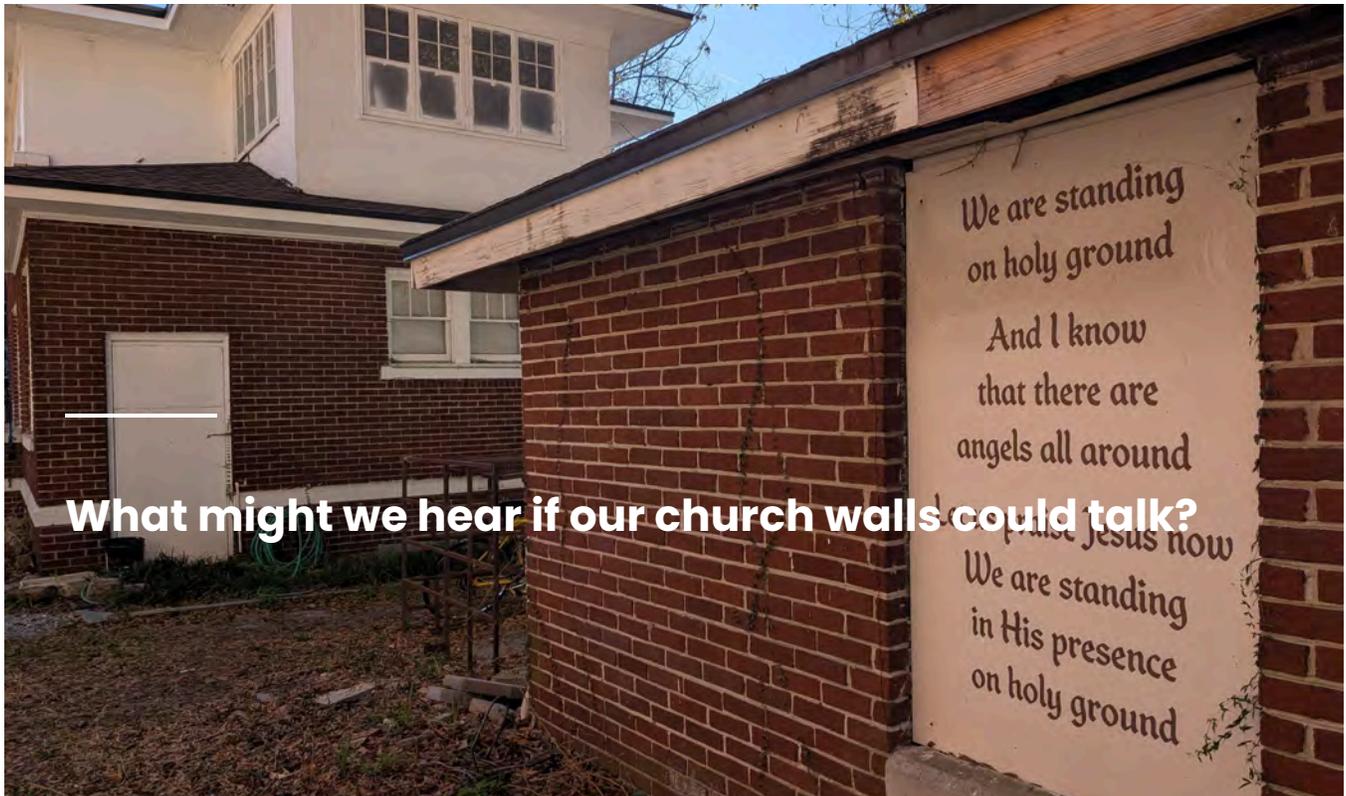
Gratitude for our Learning and Time Together

Thank you for making time to explore how scripture shapes our understanding of stewardship and transformation. As you move forward, carry these tools and insights with you—empowering your community to act boldly, adapt to new opportunities, and faithfully steward your church's resources for the future.

To continue your learning in the context of your space, you are invited to complete the optional "If These Walls Could Talk" activity.

Lesson 4 of 8

OPTIONAL: If These Walls Could Talk



OPTIONAL: If These Walls Could Talk (25 – 30 minutes)

Pick two or three spaces that are central to the congregation's life and heritage. This can be the sanctuary, the fellowship hall, Sunday School rooms, etc. The best spaces are ones that folks often comment on being "empty" as compared to the past. Assign each small group to a one of these spaces to discuss the following (give a time limit to reconvene):

- When was the last time this space was “bustling?” Who was using it and what was happening?
- What physical items or aspects of this space inspire memories and stories of a different time? Share a few memories and stories.
- Beyond the décor and physical items, what has your congregation inherited in this space? What is this space’s legacy?
- What are some new ways the property could be used to continue the legacy your congregation has inherited? What kinds of activities, groups, or programs could keep that inheritance alive?
- What kind of legacy do you hope to leave as a congregation in this place? How do you hope the next generation of stewards will use their inheritance?

Session 3: How can our property embody the Gospel?

Grounding Our Journey in Prayer

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Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 – 10 minutes)

Welcome each other to the study and introduce yourselves.

Leader: We serve a God who chose to take on human form – to embody grace, love, and justice. Jesus’ ministry on Earth was defined by physical, material, embodied changes in the lives of those he touched. The hungry had full bellies. The sick became strong. The outcasts found a warm embrace. God invites us to participate in an incarnational faith, always considering how we can make real, physical change in the lives of our neighbors. The land and buildings that our congregation stewards present real, physical opportunities for ministry. In this moment of our lives, in the life of this congregation, and in the life of the wider church, we are asked to think about how our property can become an embodiment of the Gospel.

Invite participants to pray, using this or your own prayer.

Welcoming and loving God, you call us to follow in your footsteps to minister to the needs and hopes of each other and our neighbors. You inspire us to build a community and a world in which everyone feels warm, safe, fed, comforted, and loved. We give thanks for all the ways this land and buildings have nourished our bodies, minds, and spirits. Help us to see everything you have blessed us with as an opportunity to do your work with our hands. We give thanks for all the people who have called this land home, who have stewarded it in honor of our shared Creator. May we also be good and faithful stewards. May our thoughts and words be honest, insightful, and faithful. We give thanks for each other as siblings in Christ, help us to strengthen each other in all that we say and do. Amen.

Inspiring Story of Property Transformation

Real-world stories of transformation can spark our imagination and offer practical guidance for our own congregations. By learning from others' experiences, we discover new possibilities and approaches to visioning and property use. As you engage in the following story, look for both inspiration and practical lessons that you can adapt for your unique context.

Inspiring Story (15 minutes)

Arrange the participants into groups of 2 or 3, where they will discuss the following story together. The leader or a volunteer may read for the whole group.



Trinity's sanctuary provides respite not just for members, but for the residents at Trinity Place. The church opens its whole building for shelter residents, creating a sense of home for the 18 months that they participate in the program. Photo credit: Trinity Lutheran Church

A Shelter of Hope – Trinity Lutheran Church of Manhattan embodies loving welcome for homeless LGBTQ youth

December of 2005 in New York City was cold and wet, and the members of Trinity Lutheran Church on the upper West Side of Manhattan were grateful for the warmth of the church's walls as winter began to set in. But this year, the congregation's hearts were heavy, knowing that a growing number of unhoused young people were out on the streets in the miserable weather. New York had seen a rapid rise in the number of LGBTQ youth living outside in the past few years, with many news outlets reporting on the phenomenon

migrating to New York in large numbers seeking acceptance, belonging, and the freedom to live life authentically. Trinity Lutheran was saddened to learn that these youth had had their dreams dashed by harsh reality.



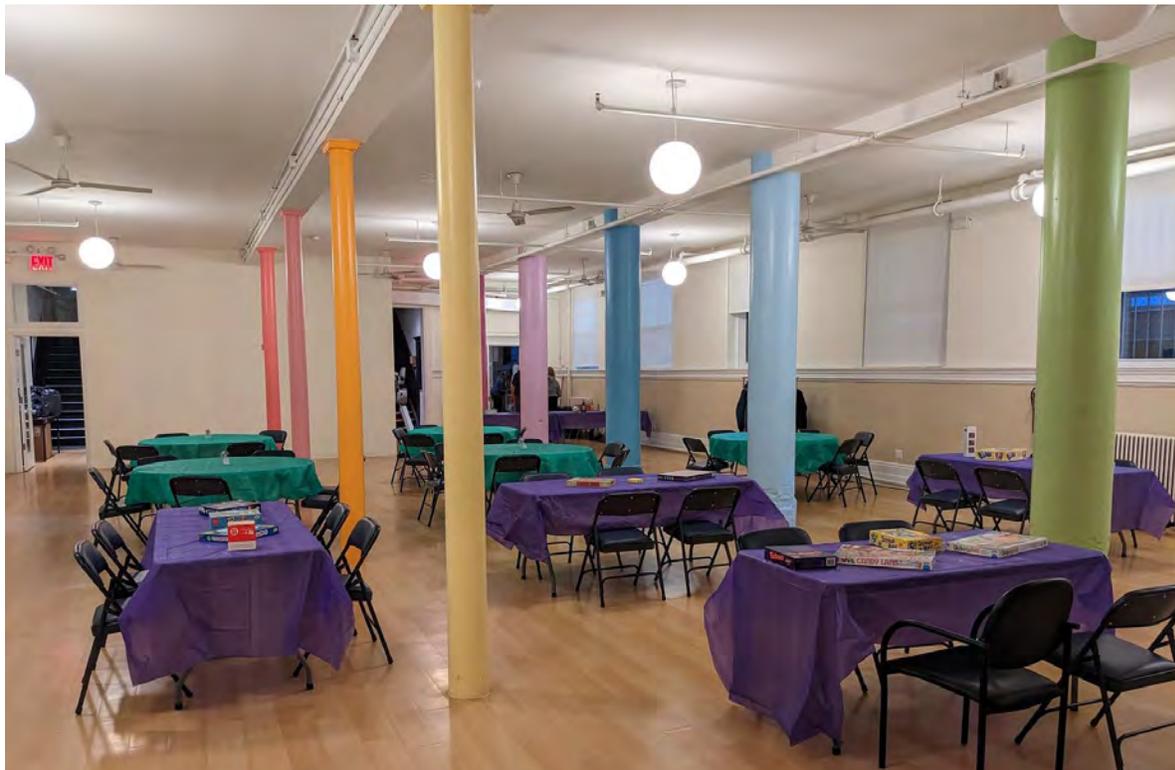
Residents prepare their beds every night and bring personal flair to their living space. It's important to Trinity Place that the residents feel at home in the church every evening. Photo Credit: Trinity Place Shelter.

The church had a history of advocating with LGBTQ folks and organizations over the past few decades, which was the most recent evolution of the church's long legacy serving their neighbors' needs. During the height of the AIDS crisis in New York, the church took the bold step of hosting programs for their neighbors living with HIV, which evolved into a scattered-site housing system in East Harlem. The news stories about LGBTQ homeless youth called to the church's deepest sense of mission – they knew they had to do something. But by 2005, the church's membership had declined significantly, and it was operating on a shoestring budget. But what the church did have was space – and a good amount of courage.

Pastor Heidi Neumark and Vicar Chris Wogaman led the housing effort, determining that the state would provide bedding and cots while Trinity would offer overnight supervision, dinner, and breakfast. The trial program ran for three weeks and was so successful that two Pride members offered to keep the shelter going full time. With seed funding for a year, the congregation began exploring ways to enhance the program.

“This was a huge leap of faith for them,” says the Rev. Alyssa Kaplan, Trinity’s current pastor. The congregation was often operating at a deficit and had faced serious challenges before calling Pastor Heidi. Trinity took this leap not waiting for stability or an excess of funds -- they acted at a time of scarcity.

“They knew that churches had hurt the LGBTQ+ community, that churches were one of the reasons why these youth were on the streets,” says Pastor Alyssa. “They saw that it was incumbent on their church to be part of the healing process.” In June of 2006, the congregation unanimously voted to establish Trinity Place as a permanent shelter program. The shelter has been open every night since.



Trinity’s undercroft was renovated in 2024, funded by both church donations and a grant received by Trinity Place. The space serves as fellowship hall, shelter, general hang-out space, and a classroom. Photo credit: Trinity Lutheran Church.

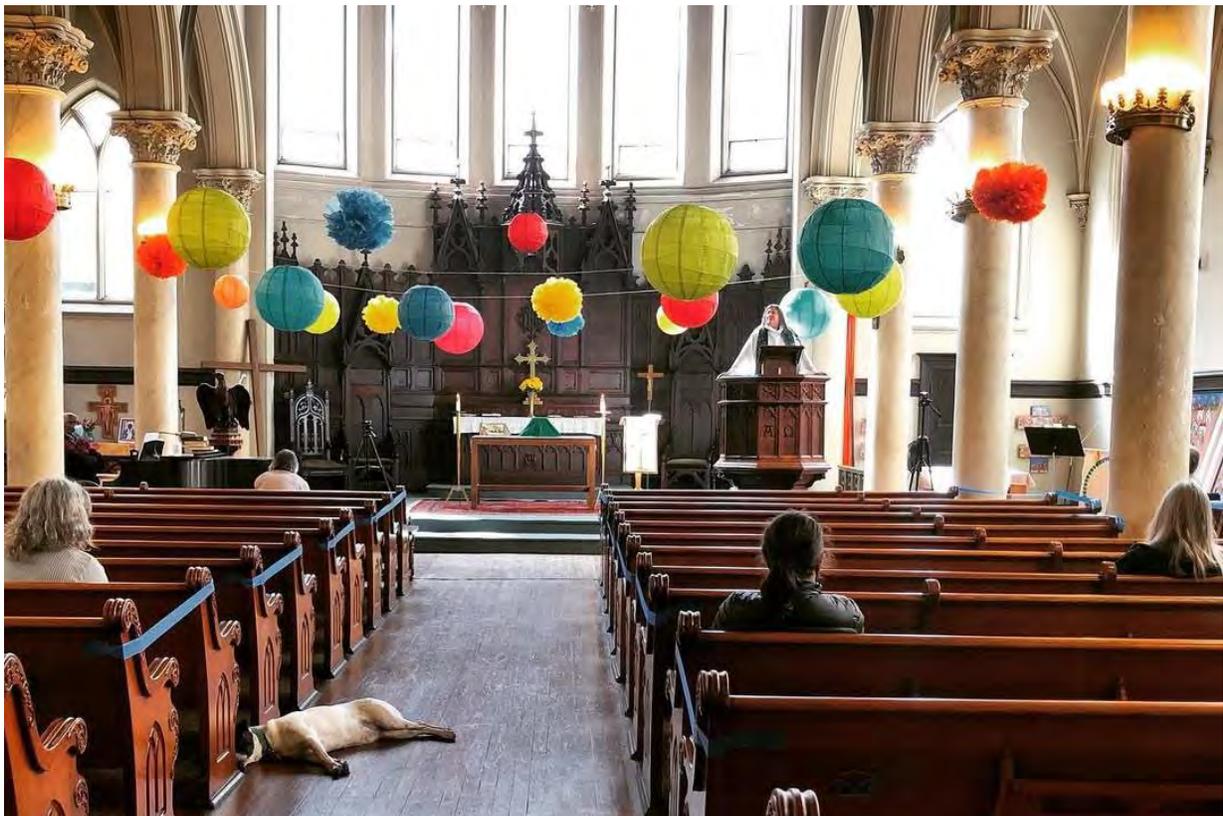
The church is not large – a modest sanctuary sits atop a basement fellowship hall, two offices, a kitchen, and two small restrooms. Shelter guests arrive in the late afternoon and help transform the fellowship hall, often used for daytime programming, into a shared sleeping area with cots and a central dining table. The guests are young adults ages 18 – 24 and may stay at Trinity Place for up to 18 months.

Having a reliable and safe place to sleep, cook, unwind and store belongings is critical. It helps residents maintain employment, pursue education, engage in needed services and take necessary steps toward more permanent housing. The shelter accommodates about 10 guests – the maximum the space allows – creating a sense of community.

Like the building, Trinity Place’s organizational infrastructure has stayed small but mighty. In 2006, its board was made up of all congregation members, and staff were volunteers. Grant funding was available but only for proven programs. Trinity used the seed funding to build a program structure, and Wogaman declined a salary for two years while serving as director. Slowly, but surely, Trinity Place secured grant funding, hired (paid!) staff, and transitioned from a crisis shelter to a longer-term model.

“They knew that churches had hurt the LGBTQ+ community, that churches were one of the reasons why these youth were on the streets. They saw that it was incumbent on their church to be part of the healing process.” – Rev. Alyssa Kaplan

Today the church still supports the program through funding (including ELCA World Hunger grants) and volunteering. The pastor remains the executive director of the shelter, but it is now a self-sustaining and independent partner. Trinity Place provides a monthly contribution for the use of space and splits many occupancy costs with the congregation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the shelter accessed capital funding to renovate the fellowship hall, making it more welcoming and functional. In 2026, the church and shelter plan to embark on a collaborative capital campaign, leveraging public and private funding to restore and upgrade the facilities. The big goal is to achieve total accessibility for the property.



Trinity's sanctuary provides respite not just for members, but for the residents at Trinity Place. The church opens its whole building for shelter residents, creating a sense of home for the 18 months that they participate in the program. Photo: Trinity Lutheran Church.

Trinity Place was born from a congregation that proclaims “a wild belief that with God and one another we can make a difference.” For hundreds of LGBTQ+ youth, they have. The church building has become more than a house of worship, it is a place of shelter, healing, safety and love. The bold step that Trinity took 20 years ago has sustained not only the congregation’s mission in Manhattan but their physical presence – which may, in fact, be one and the same.

- 1 What parts of the story resonated with you? Why?
- 2 Where do you hear the Spirit moving in the story?
Where was God at work?
- 3 What memories or stories of your church does this remind you of?

Scripture and Discussion (20–25)

Re-arrange the participants into groups of 4 or 5, then read the following story together. The leader or a volunteer may read for the whole group. Allow for a minute of silent reflection after reading.

James 2:14-26

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith apart from works, and I by my works will show you faith. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. 20 Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is worthless? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and by works faith was brought to completion. 23 Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead."

In small groups, after silent reflection time, read and discuss the following.

We believe that Jesus is God incarnate, the Living Word, the embodiment of God's love. Jesus is flesh and bone, God that you can touch, see, hear, smell, and taste. Jesus's ministry on earth was visceral. The miracles he performed were not parlor tricks meant to inspire awe, they were primarily acts of healing, of feeding, of restoration. When people encountered Jesus, the material conditions of their everyday lives changed. They stopped hemorrhaging, they could see again, they could think clearly, they woke up from the dead. Some were restored to their larger communities, lifted out of poverty caused by their affliction or the social taboos surrounding their circumstances.

This passage in James preaches itself; James articulates what it means to be a follower of the incarnate Jesus. Our faith is embodied, it does something, it has a real impact on the people we encounter. If our faith has no positive and felt effect on another person, then it is quite literally "immaterial." Our land and buildings are important to consider in light of our incarnational faith because they represent physical, material opportunities for ministry – they are greatest asset we have besides our people. A church is a "sacred place," and James challenges us to think about all the different kinds of things that make it sacred. More than just being a house of worship, what do our land and buildings do? How do they facilitate the Gospel so that the people that come through the doors feel a material change in their lives?

Beyond worship service, what are the activities and experiences that make our church building "sacred?"

Read your church's mission statement – what would it be like to experience the fulfillment of that mission in your body? Think about your five senses – what would you taste, feel, smell, see, and hear?

Trinity Lutheran saw a material need that they could meet by using their property differently. What are some of the material needs that our church is meeting through the use of our land and buildings?

How would you describe the experience that you hope a visitor would have in our church? Think about your five senses, what would you want them to taste, feel, smell, see, and hear? How might they experience that outside of worship service or Bible study?

Summary and Next Steps

In this lesson, we explored the biblical foundations of stewardship and transformation, the importance of prayer and reflection, and the vital roles you play as a congregational leader. Carry these insights with you as you guide your congregation, fostering faithful stewardship and openness to God's renewing work in your community.

To continue your learning in the context of your space, you are invited to complete the optional "More than Bricks and Mortar" activity.

Sending (5 minutes)

Reconvene as a large group to debrief and reflect.

What insights did you gain from the conversations? What are you walking away with?

Close in prayer, using your own words or the following:

Loving Creator, you have blessed us with bone and blood and breath. You have blessed us with bricks and mortar and soil. Help us to see these blessings with new eyes so that we might imagine a bright and vibrant future in this small corner of the Earth. Open our imaginations to all the ways we can use what we have been given to live out your grace, love, and justice. Thank you for inviting us to create and dream with you, for trusting us as partners in your work. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

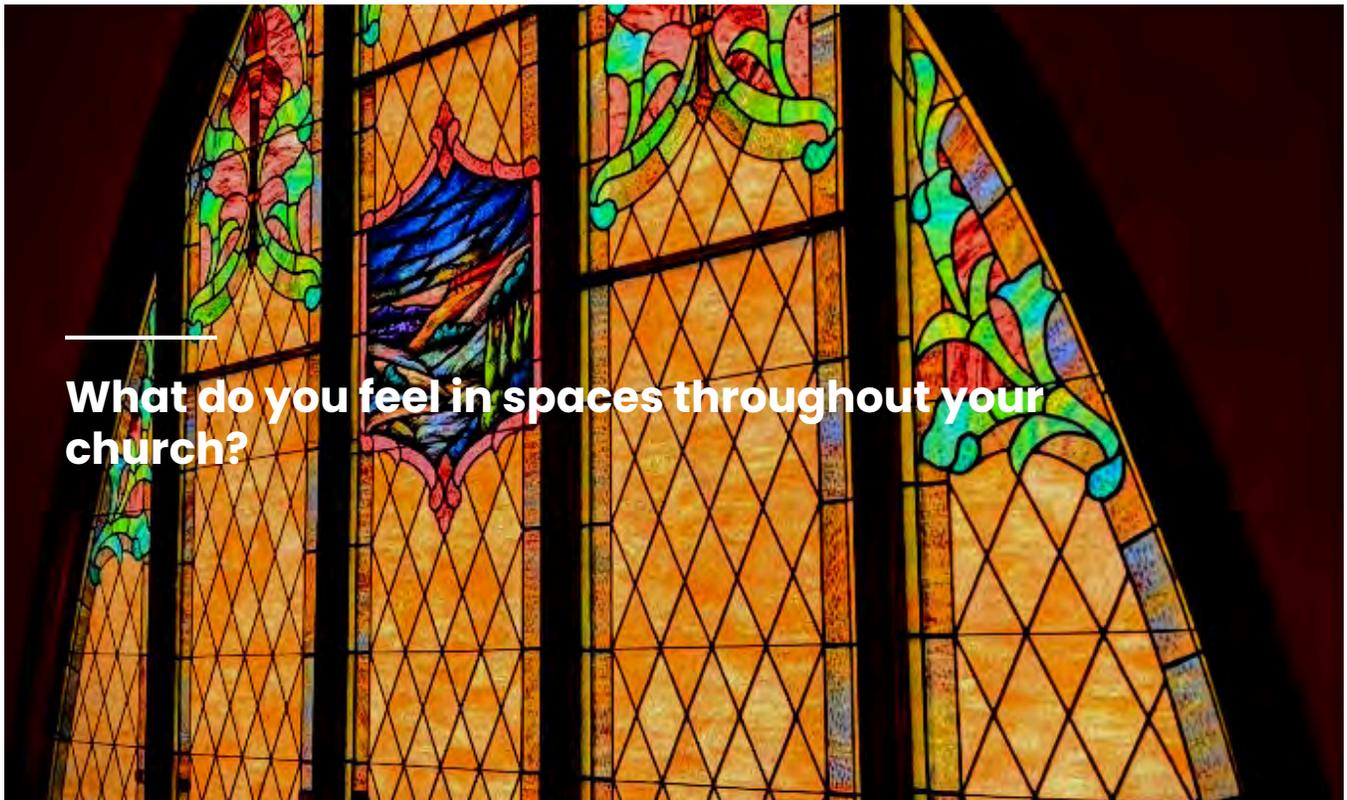
Gratitude for our Learning and Time Together

Thank you for making time to explore how scripture shapes our understanding of stewardship and transformation. As you move forward, carry these tools and insights with you—empowering your community to act boldly, adapt to new opportunities, and faithfully steward your church's resources for the future.

To continue your learning in the context of your space, you are invited to complete the optional "More than Bricks and Mortar" activity.

Lesson 6 of 8

OPTIONAL: More Than Bricks and Mortar



OPTIONAL: More Than Bricks and Mortar (25 – 30 minutes)

Send the small groups to different rooms in the building that are under-utilized – spaces that are used by less than two groups (including the congregation) and for less than 3 hours a week. Each

small group can visit one room or multiple rooms that are in proximity (e.g., the second floor classrooms).

- Take a good look around the room(s). What do you see? Hear? Taste? Smell? Feel?
- What are the physical aspects of this space? Look for amenities as well as problems.
- How does your heart feel being in this space? What emotions are you noticing?
- What do you hope a visitor to the church feels in their bodies when they are in the building? What do you hope they feel in their hearts?
- What are some ways that this space could be used to help visitors feel how you hope they feel – in their bodies and in their hearts? Use your imaginations and name as many ideas as you can (even the wild, out-of-the box ones)!

Session 4: What is God dreaming for this place?

A Note for the Leader

If your group met virtually for Sessions 1 – 3, or met in person but did not engage in the optional activities, this will be the first time you are moving through the space as you reflect on “good stewardship.” These groups would benefit from deeper and longer discussions in the spaces they visit, and so each group may only move through one or two spaces.

If your group did engage in the optional activities for Sessions 1 – 3, participants have had opportunities for deep conversation in several of the spaces in your building. Your group may want to shorten the amount of time spent in each space in an effort to move through as much of the facilities as possible and have more time for the large-group reflections.

If your group has engaged with the optional activities for Sessions 1 – 3, we recommend you work through Part 3 of the Mission: Re-Discovery activity as your optional activity for this session. This will

set your church up to start doing community outreach and gather local stakeholder input for what could happen in your facilities.

Supplies:

- Participant Guide (one per person)
- ["Mission: Re-Discovery" worksheet](#)
- Pens and highlighters
- Floor plan of the facilities (optional)

Grounding Our Journey in Prayer

This session should be done in person and on site. Most of the group's time will be spent moving through the facilities and acreage that your church stewards and having discussion along the way. This may be a longer session than the previous ones, so make sure to schedule an extra 10 – 15 minutes to complete all the components.

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 – 10 minutes)

Welcome each other to the study and introduce yourselves.

Leader: Over the past few weeks, we have explored new ways to think about our land and buildings – how we can use them for our mission and for God’s vision. How we can be good soil for the seeds that God is planting in this season of our church. How God calls us to use and offer our resources, rather than safekeep them. How we have the opportunity to embody the Gospel in this physical place. Today, we will listen for the ways the Holy Spirit is moving through us and our property. God is doing a New Thing in our corner of the world – how are we being invited to participate?

Invite participants to pray, using this or your own prayer.

Unknowable, Inconceivable, Mysterious God, you are always at work. You call us to follow, even when we do not know the destination. You call us to dream, even when we think we have seen it all. You call us to try, even when success seems impossible. We give thanks for your faithfulness, for we can be a fickle people. Help us to take leaps of imagination and faith in our stewardship of this land and these buildings, knowing that you call us always towards transformation. We give thanks for all the people who have called this land home, who have stewarded it in honor of our shared Creator. May we also be good and faithful stewards. May our thoughts and words be honest, insightful, and faithful. We give thanks for each other as siblings in Christ, help us to strengthen each other in all that we say and do. Amen.

Final In-Person Activity

Now that you have completed the first three sessions together, it is time to take what you have learned and put it into action!

Listening to our Property (25 minutes)

Divide the participants into small groups of 3 – 4 individuals and assign them specific spaces in the building/on the property to visit.

*Give each participant a copy of the **“Mission: Rediscovery”***

***worksheet.** Each group should move through the facilities and grounds and spend about 4 – 5 minutes in each space; they might visit 3 or 4 spaces total.*



It may have been a while since you have gone through your whole space; what will God show you this time?

Discussion (10 minutes)

Regroup the participants and have each individual share what they noticed on their walk. Ask participants to respond to one or two of the following questions:

- 1 What memories came up for you?
- 2 Which space do you think is the most under-utilized?
- 3 What spaces are you most excited to see new uses for?
- 4 What is the most exciting idea you had? What parts of the story resonated with you? Why? Where do you hear the Spirit moving in the story? Where was God at work? What memories or stories of your church does this remind you of?

Scripture Reflections (10 minutes)

Staying in the large group, read the following Scripture together. The leader or a volunteer may read for the whole group. Allow for a minute of silent reflection after reading.

Isaiah 55:1-13

1 Hear, everyone who thirsts; come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your earnings for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

3 Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

4 See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

5 Now you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

6 Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake their way and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

12 For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle, and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

As a large group, reflect on the following questions together.

- Which line or verse in this Scripture landed on your heart today? Why?
- What are you hearing in the Scripture that relates to how we've been thinking about property stewardship?
- If we took these promises and invitations of God seriously, what would that mean for how we use our property?
- How has participating in this Bible Study changed how you think about our buildings and land?

Summary and Next Steps

In this lesson, we explored the biblical foundations of stewardship and transformation, the importance of prayer and reflection, and the vital roles you play as a congregational leader. Carry these insights with you as you guide your congregation, fostering faithful stewardship and openness to God's renewing work in your community.

To continue your learning in the context of your space, you are invited to complete Part Three the "Mission: Re-Discovery" activity before the sending.

Sending (5 minutes)

As a group, think about what some next steps might be for your church in how you steward your property. What is the next step each person feels called to take? Review the following ideas for next steps and, as a group, pick one to take on. Make sure you have volunteers to lead this effort and a date for their next meeting!

1. Complete Part 3 of the “Mission: Re-Discovery” worksheet and schedule one-to-one conversations with stakeholder/group.
2. Schedule a congregational tour of the property so everyone has the chance to re-discover the assets our church has to offer.
(Refer to “Campus Tours” in the Church Property Resource Hub)
3. Plan a property conversation and tour with neighbors and community stakeholders. (Refer to the “Community/Building Conversations” in the Church Property Resource Hub)
4. Organize a church clean-out effort to consolidate storage and donate/remove unused supplies, furniture, and other clutter.

Gracious, merciful, everlasting God, you have called us to journey with you. We are one small gathering of but one generation of your Church, and yet you still have dreams for us. Give us the grace to honor our past, courage to move into the future, and wisdom to guide our steps. Help us to not see this place as a relic, but as an opportunity for mission. Thank you for your steadfast vision and companionship on this journey, for with you new things are always possible. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

Gratitude for our Learning and Time Together

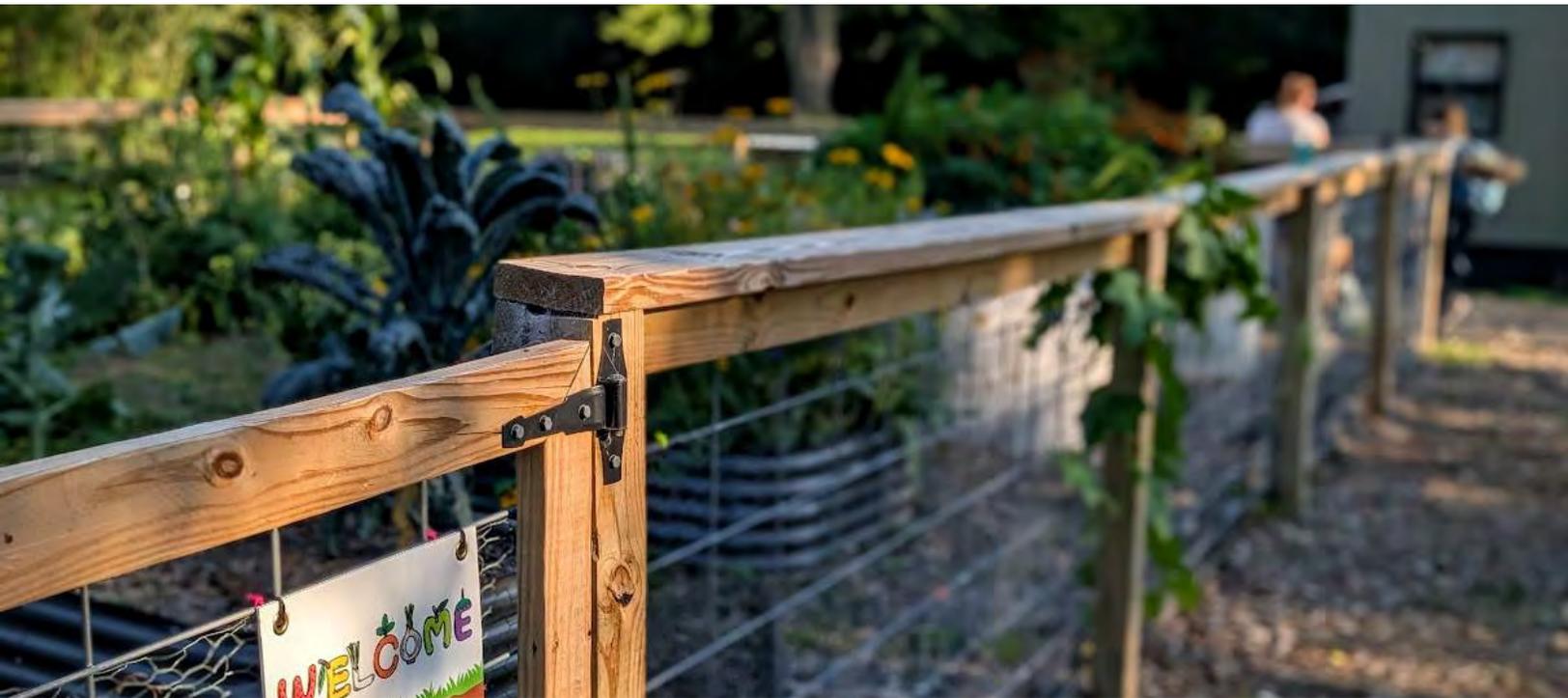
Thank you for making time to explore how scripture shapes our understanding of stewardship and transformation. As you move forward, carry these tools and insights with you—empowering your community to act boldly, adapt to new opportunities, and faithfully steward your church’s resources for the future.

Lesson 8 of 8

APPENDIX: Alternate Story and Discussion Questions

Inspiring Story (15 minutes)

Arrange the participants into groups of 2 or 3, where they will discuss the following story together. The leader or a volunteer may read for the whole group.



The flourishing community garden serves as a gathering place and provides an abundance of produce for the community and flowers to add beauty and joy to shared spaces. Photo: Church Property Resource Hub

An Extension of Home – Prince of Peace in Roseville, MN provides community as well as housing

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Roseville, Minnesota is no ordinary church campus. Beyond the sanctuary and classrooms, nestled in green space once considered “unused,” stand tiny homes – warm, welcoming dwellings that are part of a growing vision

called the [Sacred Settlement](#). What makes this settlement remarkable is not just the presence of homes, but the spirit of community that breathes through them. As Minister of Family Fun, Faith Formation, and Community Engagement Alyssa Herrig puts it, “This isn’t just housing. This is home – and our congregation is part



Candle making and other workshops are a space for neighbors to learn new skills to earn income. Prince of Peace offers opportunities for residents to earn rent credits for meaningful work. Photo: Church Property Resource Hub.

The story began long before the first tiny home was set on the land. In the 1950s, Prince of Peace acquired farmland, some of which was given away to build city parks and roads. By the late 1990s, the congregation had purchased additional acreage, betting on growth that never quite materialized. For years, the land sat dormant, occasionally used for outdoor worship or childcare. In 2019, as members studied homelessness in their district, they were confronted with the sobering reality: more than 300 children in their local schools were unstably housed. When a longtime member left a bequest of \$750,000, the church formed a committee to discern how their land and resources might truly serve their neighbors. Conversations deepened. Ideas for shelters and affordable housing were sketched, debated, and prayed over.

Even before plans solidified, the church's parking lot had already become a refuge for folks experiencing housing instability. Valerie, who lived in a converted bus, was referred by the local police department's social worker to safely Prince of Peace's property, where she could park her bus/home safely. She became part of the Prince of Peace community — attending worship sometimes, but more often building relationships through conversation and companionship. When the non-profit [Settled](#) learned about Valerie and her need for an insulated home for the winter, they offered a tiny home to replace her bus. "We didn't have a master plan," recalled Mike Stetzler, who was then council president. "We were just trying to care for Valerie, one day at a time." That single act of hospitality — trading a bus for a tiny home — planted the first seeds of their Sacred Settlement.

Sacred Settlements are communal housing arrangements, in which churches offer permanent, supportive housing through placing Tiny Homes on excess land. Residents enter into covenant with the congregation to cultivate a community through shared meals, work, and property management. As part of the model, Prince of Peace invited another neighbor in need of housing to live on their land, as well as a family that committed to living in community with the other residents as accompaniers. For the residents, the tiny homes offer stability, dignity, and safety. But the real gift, as Office Administrator Kristin Bloxham describes, is community. The homes are intentionally not plumbed, so neighbors come into the church for daily needs, preventing isolation and creating natural connections. This creates daily opportunities for connection and relationship between the Sacred Settlement residents and the church.

Residents contribute to community life — from brewing coffee for Sunday mornings to cooking at monthly dinners. “This is not a program,” Alyssa emphasizes. “This is relationship. They’re not apart from us — they’re with us. And that changes all of us.” At the heart of it all is grace. Rent agreements exist, but they are undergirded by a deeper commitment: no one loses their home because of a mistake or a missed payment. “We’re pushing against a narrative many of our neighbors carry — that if they mess up, they’ll be cast out,” Kristin reflected. “Here, grace holds the story together.”



Community rooms at Prince of Peace are homey, welcoming, and great spaces for kids and adults to spend time together.

Photo: Church Property Resource Hub.

The work has not been easy, and there have been many bumps along the road for both residents and the church. Trust takes time, volunteers are

stretched, and not everyone in the congregation fully understands the model. But leaders like Andrew Hannesh, who now serves on council, see the settlement as part of the church's call to be faithful in the world. "We're not just sending resources out of the building," Mike said. "We're doing the ministry here – with and alongside our neighbors. That changes what it means to be church."

Although Prince of Peace felt called to Sacred Settlement work, not all of their neighbors were excited with the new ministry. A cease-and-desist letter from the City arrived in 2023, and the congregation found itself at a crossroads. Instead of retreating, they stepped forward. Members spoke at city council meetings, hosted open houses, and invited neighbors to a pop-up carnival where people could see and hear what was happening. Nearly all feedback was positive. "Grace allowed us to be ignorant for a while," Mike admitted. "But then grace helped us learn how to do this faithfully." Through hearings, zoning challenges, and long hours of discernment, the church clarified its vision: this was not a shelter, not transitional housing, but permanent homes with lasting community.

On any given day at Prince of Peace, you might find a resident tending the church garden, a candle-making workshop filling the hall with fragrance, or neighbors gathered for dinner where laughter is as present as the food. The settlement has reshaped assumptions within the congregation. One resident is pursuing a second bachelor's degree. Another found employment while still contributing meals and hospitality at church events. Their gifts are not only welcomed but celebrated. "People used to worry, 'What if something

gets stolen?” Kristin said. “But now our building is safer because people are here around the clock. More than that, it’s alive with community.” At Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, housing has become more than shelter. It has become an extension of home — for everyone.

“We’re pushing against a narrative many of our neighbors carry — that if they mess up, they’ll be cast out. Here, grace holds the story together.”— Kristin Bloxham

1

Beyond worship service, what are the activities and experiences that make our church building “sacred?”

2

Read your church’s mission statement – what would it be like to experience the fulfillment of that mission in your body? Think about your five senses – what would you taste, feel, smell, see, and hear?

3

Prince of Peace saw a material need that they could meet by using their property differently. What are some of the material needs that our church is meeting through the use of our land and buildings?

4

How would you describe the experience that you hope a visitor would have in our church? Think about your five senses, what would you want them to taste, feel, smell, see, and hear? How might they experience that outside of worship service or Bible study?