



Faith Practices

The **Lutheran**



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

10 ways to practice faith-sharing



SHUTTERSTOCK

By David Daubert

1. Provide questions each week related to the sermon theme for people to think about or discuss with others.
2. Meet in small groups after Lenten, Advent or other services to discuss questions.
3. Don't serve the food right away when you gather for a picnic, potluck or other meal. Have leaders facilitate mingling with a question that encourages all to share a faith story. Talk to people you don't know really well. Finally, ask a layperson to lead the mealtime prayer.
4. Match Sunday school or other group topics with preaching texts so people not only hear the message but also process it. People remember almost all of what they say—almost none of what they hear.
5. Ask people questions about times in their lives that relate to the theme of a text (healing, reconciliation, etc.). Consider providing crayons so people can draw pictures of the incidents before they share. This prep time can help many people share more easily. In groups of two, ask people to share their stories or their drawings. Together pray, thanking God.
6. Encourage people to turn to their neighbor during sermons and spend a few minutes sharing what they think about a topic.
7. Consider having some “team” sermons, where a preacher assembles a panel of members who sit up front in a talk-show format. By acting as an interviewer, the preacher can help others share in a safe, effective way.
8. Videotape interviews of members telling their stories in safe spaces. Edit them into clips of helpful things people said. Use these during worship, sermons or other aspects of church life.
9. Create accountability times where people check in weekly with partners. Have them share how they did this week at speaking about their faith. What can they celebrate? Did they miss any appropriate opportunities? Have them pray together and send them out again for the next week or month.
10. Start council, committee or other meetings with a check-in time that is faith-based conversation. Have the leader ask people to share significant events in their lives and what they think God was doing. Close this time with a prayer that gathers the stories and lifts them to God before moving on to business.

Author bio:

Daubert is an ELCA pastor who lives in Elgin, Ill., and is a managing partner of Day 8 Strategies.

Renew and renovate

The work of the church: 'It's not a numbers game, it's spiritual belief and passion'

Our denomination faces unprecedented challenges today. Social, technological and economic upheavals in the last 50 years have totally changed the religious landscape, and many of our congregations suffer from dwindling participation and shaky finances. But if we focus on growing people, we won't have to worry about growing our churches.

Exercise 1: Attendance dropping

From 2002 to 2012, attendance at ELCA churches declined by 28.9 percent.

- Does the ELCA need to change?
- What will happen if we don't?
- Has attendance at your congregation dropped in that same time period (consult your church trend report on the ELCA website at www.elca.org)?
- Does your congregation need to change?
- What will happen if your congregation doesn't change?
- Do the statistics serve as a wake-up call?
- What keeps us sleeping?

Exercise 2: Does church = building?

When some people think of church, they primarily think of the building where they gather, worship and fellowship. So belonging to a church is primarily belonging to the building.

- Have you observed this? Have you felt it yourself?
- Does that help explain why many people resist changes to the congregation's building, and why they leave money exclusively for building upkeep?
- Is the "church" a building?
- If "church" is not a building, what is it?
- If a tornado destroyed your building, would you still have a congregation?
- If your church burned down tomorrow, would your community notice anything different?
- Is love for the building a hindrance to spiritual growth in your congregation?
- How can your congregation be more than a building?
- How can your congregation help people see the "church" beyond the building?

Exercise 3: The Great Commission

Read the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, which are the final words that Jesus gives his disciples in that Gospel.

- What does he tell them to do?
- What are the specific tasks he outlines in order to make disciples?
- Do you consider yourself a disciple or a church member?
- What are the characteristics of a disciple?
- What are the characteristics of a church member?
- In a perfect world (and church!) would there be a difference?
- Is your congregation more interested in making church members or making disciples?
- If a church is more interested in making disciples, do you think its leaders have to worry about membership?

Exercise 4: Baptismal vows

In the rite of affirmation of baptism, Lutherans vow to continue in the covenant God made with them at baptism (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 236), promising specifically "to live among God's faithful people; to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper; to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; to serve all people, following the example of Jesus; and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth." Review each of these promises.

- If a church member takes these vows seriously, how would that change her life?
- Would he stay "just" a church member for long?
- Could these vows, reworded just a little bit, serve as a good definition of discipleship (a disciple lives among God's faithful people; hears the word of God ...)?
- Do congregations generally inspire, educate and equip people to live out these baptismal vows?
- Does your congregation do these things to help you live out those vows?
- How could your congregation do better?

Author bio:

Blezard is an assistant to the bishop of the Lower Susquehanna Synod. He has a master of divinity degree from Boston University and did subsequent study at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Pa.) and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

When Sue, wife and mother of two, was being treated for stage 4 sinus cancer at age 38, she was often plagued with overwhelming anxiety. Knowing that she had no control over cancer or the outcome of her treatment options, she would run upstairs to her bedroom and fall to her knees.

“I knew in my head I had no control over my circumstances, but prayer was the one way I could still do something whether or not my prayers were answered,” she said. “It was my way of getting everything off of my chest. It helped me to express my anger, my fear and my anxiety to God about what was going on. When I was finished, I felt like I was able to face my life and take on whatever was ahead of me. I felt more peaceful, more levelheaded and more brave. I pleaded my case before God and as a result was able to face whatever was going to happen ... good or bad.”

Through honest and sometimes desperate conversations with God, Sue discovered a mysterious paradox: though things rarely went the way she wanted, through prayer she was changed and made new.

“Through prayer, I found what I needed to go on,” she said. “I don’t know how anyone could go through a difficult circumstance without the privilege of talking to God.”

We all pray. We ask for help finding lost car keys. We beseech God to intervene with difficult people and impossible relationships. We ask for protection from tornadoes, earthquakes and other natural disasters that threaten to destroy homes and entire personal histories. We beg for healing from multiple sclerosis, addictions and other “incurables.” We plead for peace between parents, for peace in the Middle East, and for HIV orphans in Africa. We pray for simple blessings on our lives and homes, blessings on bread and wine, on babies, new beginnings and dreams.

Every day and in many ways (on our knees, in our cars, in bed at night) we pray for God’s active help and presence in our lives. But through all of our praying, pleading, beseeching and begging, it’s easy to miss that perhaps a greater miracle is taking place. Is it possible that through prayer, God is doing a creative work in us?

Mary’s miracle

Mary was eager to share a Mother’s Day walk with her family. It was her only request for the day: to share the beauty of her newly discovered running path with her husband and three kids. But when they woke up early that morning, ominous storm clouds hovered on the horizon.

“It was 8 a.m. and I ran around the house shouting for everyone to get dressed,” she said. “I figured if everyone

Prayer changes us

Cheri Mueller says ‘we are given far more than we came to get’ when we pray.

hurried, we could get our two-mile walk in before getting doused. But by the time we finally hit our walking path I was feeling bent out of shape, angry, frustrated. I prayed, ‘Please, God, hold back the rain. With my crazy work schedule we don’t get many special days together and I want to enjoy this.’”

As Mary prayed, she noticed her breathing relax, her jaw unclench and something in her “let go.”

“Prayer shifted my need to control everything, and I entered into the moment in a new way. I soaked up the laughter of my husband and kids as they spotted an otter, tracked deer through the woods, threw rocks in the pond and listened to woodpeckers tapping on trees. When the



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rain held off, splattering big drops on my face only moments before we returned to the driveway, I prayed again, “Thank you, God, for holding off the rain. But thank you even more for lifting my worries and allowing a miracle in me.”

The creative work of Christ

How beautiful it is that through prayer, God takes our expressions of worry, despair, anger and fear and, like a poem, crafts them so carefully and creatively, giving them meter and meaning. Ephesians 2:10 suggests we are God’s “workmanship” created in Christ Jesus. The Greek word for workmanship (*poiema*) translates somewhat awkwardly but beautifully as poem, from which we derive our

English word. “We are God’s poem, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

Jesus Christ, “The Word”—the same Word that was “in the beginning,” continues to hover over our lives today with boundless artistic possibility as a poet, sculptor, writer, painter, artist-friend. The text of 2 Corinthians 5:17 refers to anyone in Christ as a “new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” Isaiah 64:8 reminds us: “We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of [God’s] hand.”

These Scriptures (among many) point to the truth that through Christ God remains at work in us, creatively. We approach God with our frustrations, sticky situations fix-it-please requests, and legitimate anger about suffering, oppression and injustice—all the while our Creator is shaping, creating, writing, sculpting and painting more than just the people and circumstances we pray about. A person prays, said Augustine, “that he himself may be constructed, not that God may be instructed.”

Construct me please!

When the lame man (Mark 2:1-12) heard there was a miracle worker in town, perhaps his heart jumped with all the strength that had failed his paralyzed body for years. Maybe he dared to dream again that he could work in the fields, chase after his children, hold his wife. If only he could find opportunity to talk to this rabbi. Tell him exactly what had happened to him. Tell Jesus about his needs.

Knowing his desire to talk with Jesus face to face, his friends picked up his stretcher-mat and carried him to the home where Jesus was teaching. The crowds pressed in on all sides of the small building, forcing the man’s friends to get creative. They dug a hole in the roof and used ropes to lower his mat to the feet of Jesus.

Jesus looked at the bold man with compassion, seemingly aware of his exact need. Then he stooped down, touched his shoulder, and said, “My son, your sins are forgiven” (verse 5). Imagine the man’s awkward surprise. Forgiven?

Whenever we come to God with our list of needed “fixes,” we are given far more than we came to get. Sometimes we catch glimpses of greater spiritual realities, receiving words of healing we didn’t even know we needed. Sometimes our worries are lifted, or our vision cleared. As we approach the throne of grace, we can trust that Christ is always answering our divine conversations with brushstrokes of mercy, forgiveness, grace and love. And, as author Philip Yancey says, that in and of itself may be the most significant purpose of prayer: “To let our true selves be loved by God.”

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Elizabeth A. Eaton

Getting to what really matters

All our work flows from being a church first, foremost



When I served a parish in Ashtabula, Ohio, I had the opportunity to be part of a bond issue campaign for the school system. Those of you who have served in a similar capacity know the bruising intensity of local school politics. The French Revolution pales in comparison.

On our first try the bond issue failed by a narrow margin. On our second try we had our heads handed to us. We decided to hire a consultant. At a strategy meeting the consultant asked us what we thought was the one thing we needed to do in order to pass the bond issue. We had all kinds of ideas: better campaign literature, more radio ads, more coverage in the local paper, compelling photos of adorable but underserved children, puppies. The consultant listened until we ran out of ideas. “No,” he said. “The one thing you need to do to pass the bond issue is to have one more vote than the opposition.”

The main thing is the main thing.

All of the ideas we had come up with (well, maybe not the puppies) were means to pass the bond issue. If advertising or publicity became our primary focus we would be distracted from our goal. Stating the simple fact that all we needed to do was to get one more vote than the opposition brought clarity to the campaign.

We do many wonderful and important things together as the ELCA. We alleviate hunger, we’re stopping malaria, we give voice to the most vulnerable in our society, we shelter the homeless, we heal the sick, we rebuild communities after disaster strikes, we

work for justice. I am not suggesting that we stop doing any of this. But we must be clear that we are church first. We aren’t a nongovernmental organization. We aren’t the government. We aren’t the American Cancer Society.

Baptism makes a difference and makes us different. We are in Christ. Baptism means the death of our old self. This implies sacrifice. It should also mean that we as church do not fit in with the surrounding culture. There are many socially conscious, kindhearted, generous, morally upright, compassionate atheists in the world. How are we distinguishable from them? If our life together consists primarily of being affirmed by God’s unconditional love and doing works of justice and charity without understanding that God has brought about the transformation of justified sinners through the costly grace of the crucified Christ, then we are not church.

How are we to live as church first? This is how I see it. At the center of our life together is worship and at the center of our worship is the crucified and risen Christ. When we gather for worship we turn our gaze away from ourselves to the source of our life and hope and salvation. When we gather for worship we are encountered by the living God in Scripture, proclamation of the gospel and the sacraments. God meets us and transforms us. We taste, touch and see the love of God in Christ. Sinners are forgiven. Freed from the incessant human striving for self-justification we can be “lost in wonder, love and praise” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 631).

We are a community of spiritual discernment. Employing secular business strategies can be very helpful to the church so long as they are used in service to God. But as church it is important that we understand the difference between decision-making and discernment.

Decision-making is something we do. Discernment is something we receive from the Spirit. Paul takes an entire chapter (1 Corinthians 2) explaining this. We need to move beyond reliance on human thinking and strategizing to a place of deep listening—intentional, intense, disciplined attending to God.

We are a community of faith. Our members, congregations, synods and churchwide organization need to be intentional about incorporating prayer, worship, Scripture study, silence and giving into daily life. We are in the faith formation business; not to get more members, not to get more market share, but to know Christ and Christ crucified.

We are church first. All of our work flows from this. Let’s keep the main thing the main thing.

We are in the faith formation business; not to get more members, not to get more market share, but to know Christ and Christ crucified.

A monthly message from the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Her email address: bishop@elca.org.



Getting the *word* out

We give thanks to God for all of the individuals, congregations, synods, and churchwide ministries and institutions for their deep and abiding commitment to God's transforming word in Christ, in proclamation and in Scripture!

The Book of Faith initiative is a continuing priority of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, dedicated to encouraging all ministries and people of the church to continually renew and enrich our broad and deep engagement with Scripture for our own sakes and for the sake of the world.

The Book of Faith initiative has operated using a decentralized, grassroots approach centered on our common vision in which all are invited to *open Scripture* and *join the conversation*. We invite leaders to continue and boldly further this effort in their places of involvement.

From the beginning, the goal of the initiative has been twofold:

1. to meet the continuing challenge of widespread biblical illiteracy and
2. to renew the teaching of our rich theological heritage of scriptural understanding, interpretation and engagement.

To help realize the above goals and address the challenges listed below, we want to further encourage engagement of Scripture, especially using the “multiple lenses” approach. We seek your help and support as partners in this effort, in addressing the challenges that are currently serving to shape our calling. Some of the larger challenges are:

- The growing number of people in society claiming to be “spiritual but not religious.”
- The need to address and learn from the great variety of cultures that make up this church and world.
- The role of the Bible in mission outreach.
- The importance of family and home as centers of faith development.
- The need for creative use of social media.
- Continued biblical illiteracy.

Despite the challenges, Christ is present as we engage Scripture and this promise calls us forward together. Please join us in getting the word out and in encouraging all to *open Scripture* and *join the conversation*!

Learn more: www.bookoffaith.org



@bookoffaith



#bookoffaith

Four lenses for engaging Scripture.

Open Scripture. Join the conversation.

The initiative has emphasized that biblical engagement is greatly enriched by the use of multiple lenses in conversation with Scripture and other people. This suggested method is centered on four ways of reading the Bible and asking questions: devotional, historical, literary and theological reading.

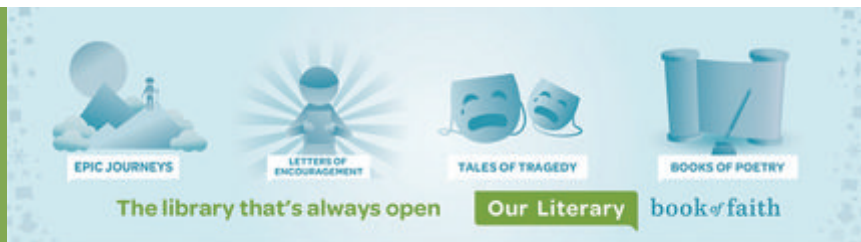
DEVOTIONAL



The banner features four icons: a church labeled 'AT CHURCH', a group of houses labeled 'IN THE COMMUNITY', a city skyline labeled 'AT THE OFFICE', and a family in a house labeled 'AT HOME WITH FAMILY'. Below these icons are the phrases 'Where are you today?', 'Our Devotional', and 'book of faith'.

We begin. We read, ask questions, reflect on the meaning of the Bible from wherever we are—in place, time or state of mind. No matter where we are, our Book of Faith meets us there.

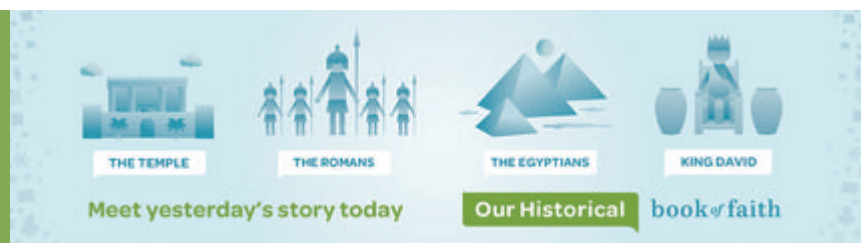
LITERARY



The banner features four icons: a landscape with a path labeled 'EPIC JOURNEYS', a person reading a letter labeled 'LETTERS OF ENCOURAGEMENT', two sad faces labeled 'TALES OF TRAGEDY', and a scroll labeled 'BOOKS OF POETRY'. Below these icons are the phrases 'The library that's always open', 'Our Literary', and 'book of faith'.

We pay close attention to how the passage is written. We notice what kind of literature it is. We notice all the details, themes, characters, story line, poetry and logic. We compare and contrast these with our understanding and experience of life. In this process we discover meaning.

HISTORICAL



The banner features four icons: a temple labeled 'THE TEMPLE', a group of people labeled 'THE ROMANS', pyramids labeled 'THE EGYPTIANS', and a king on a throne labeled 'KING DAVID'. Below these icons are the phrases 'Meet yesterday's story today', 'Our Historical', and 'book of faith'.

We seek to understand the world of the Bible. We explore the world of the writers and the original readers, the rulers, slaves, women, men and children. All the people in our Book of Faith. How do we understand their social and cultural contexts? How were their lives different from or the same as ours today?

THEOLOGICAL



The banner features four icons: a person looking up at a sun and clouds labeled 'HOW DO I FIND HOPE?', a question mark labeled 'WHO IS GOD?', a person under a rain cloud labeled 'WHY IS THERE SUFFERING?', and two hearts labeled 'WHAT IS LOVE?'. Below these icons are the phrases 'What are the God questions?', 'Our Theological', and 'book of faith'.

As we open Scripture and join the conversation, we ask our deepest questions and listen for God's voice. We hear God's demands as well as God's words of comfort and promise. We see Christ alive yesterday and today. We feel the movement of the Spirit and are moved to respond. God is present in the word.

Marty is a speaker, author and ELCA pastor who writes monthly for The Lutheran.

The offering experience

By Peter Marty

Offerings glorify God—you get to view your life as a blessing and gift

The offering moment in Christian worship is undergoing a rapid sea change. The advent of online giving, cash and credit card giving kiosks in some churches, less frequent worship attendance than a generation ago, and widespread ignorance about stewardship among newer Christians means some stark new realities. One can be sitting in the 10th row of a full church and see a nearly empty offering plate go by.

“I guess they don’t give very much in this church,” a surprised guest notes. “It looks like a few people leave small tips.”

Patry offerings in dinky offering plates are a far cry from the fresh eggs, live chickens, bead jewelry and sundry personal items that Christians in other parts of the world delight in bringing forward. I remember the 15-minute offering “moments” when I lived in Africa. Shocking to many Western believers, there still are Christians who take the offering admonitions in the book of Exodus seriously: “No one shall appear before me empty-handed” (23:15).

For an offering to be an offering, it deserves to represent our best foot forward. We are returning to the Lord what we believe we first received as remarkable blessing.

This blessing is why choirs diligently rehearse their offering anthems. It’s why organists and band leaders practice during the week. It’s even why a mother will whisper to her 12-year-old just before he or she steps into an acolyte robe, “You need to tie your sneakers.”

Some congregations and pastors are oddly squeamish about money. They don’t want to talk about it. The very sound of the word money must grate against their holy sensibilities. Never mind that money does so many wonderful things, or that giving it away is one of the most vivid expressions of faith we know. For reasons that aren’t entirely clear to me, the mere sight of cash and giving envelopes creates embarrassment for some church communities.

Otherwise faith-filled people can treat money as if it’s dirty, or too personal, to have a rightful place in the sanctuary.

Why else do they go to

Some congregations and pastors are oddly squeamish about money. They don’t want to talk about it. The very sound of the word money must grate against their holy sensibilities.



such great lengths to keep it out of view? A velvet bag gets passed along rows of worshippers. A sealed offering box is mounted near the exit door. A timid note in the bulletin reads, “For those who want to make an offering upon leaving today . . .”

The less we celebrate the offering experience,

the more passive we become as it unfolds. We speculate like fans watching a football game on TV. The offering moment almost feels like halftime—a break in the action. Disengaged or restless worshippers take it as the perfect opportunity to go to the restroom, listen to “filler” music, or catch the announcements that get shared in what is viewed as the lighter time of worship. It’s intermission in the minds of many. All that is missing is a popcorn machine in the lobby.

To speak of the offering as “the collection” does little to alter this halftime spirit bouncing around peoples’ psyches. We are giving gifts with generous hearts attached, not taking up a collection as a dutiful obligation. Charities collect donations. Shoppers collect coupons. Churches receive offerings. That’s what all of us do whenever someone places a carefully selected gift of any kind in our hands. We receive the gift. We don’t grab it. We don’t take it. We certainly don’t collect it as our gathered loot.

Ideally, the worship servants who receive the peoples’ offerings have a radiance to their faces. They’re well capable of smiling. It might be worth some behind-the-scenes attention in your congregation if dourness is more the standard.

Handling precious gifts that people are turning over to the Lord’s work is not exactly grim duty. It’s not morose work. It’s lovely joy. Some would label it a privilege.

In the end, the offering moment comes down to you, the worshiper. Regardless of whether the “plates” are large or small, whether the music is stirring or not, and whether the second usher on the left is having a bad hair day or a perfectly coiffured one, your offering is what glorifies God.

You get to view your life as blessing and a gift. Your offering becomes a witness to this extraordinary truth.

Changing the face of stewardship to live richly in faith toward God

Living generously

By Scott C. Schantzenbach

Editor's note: This article is part of "Deeper understandings," a series intended to be a public conversation among teaching theologians of the ELCA on various themes of our faith and the challenging issues of our day. It invites readers to engage in dialogue by posting comments online at the end of each article at www.the Lutheran.org. This article and series was edited by Phillip D. W. Krey, former president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, on behalf of the presidents of the eight ELCA seminaries.

In the ancient myths, Jason and the Argonauts joined in a search for the Golden Fleece. Their journey would lead to an encounter with the dreaded Sirens, and therefore Orpheus, the mythical father of music, joined the quest. Unlike Odysseus of old who filled the ears of his crew with wax to prevent them from hearing the Sirens' alluring call, Jason simply planned to have Orpheus sing a better song. Contrary to the melodies of our consumer culture that tempt us toward debt, at the heart of our stewardship quest in the 21st century is the desire to sing a better song. That temptation is seen in current-day vocabulary, preferring the phrase "giving back" when referring matters of sharing, giving, philanthropy and stewardship. What is implied in this expression is a restoration of something to its rightful owner. The giver is called upon to exercise a sense of fairness, not to demonstrate generosity. This propensity to giving back creates and supports a life dominated by market-

place transactions rather than one transformed by a faith-filled relationship with Jesus.

Recall the story Jesus told of the rich fool in Luke 12:16-20. After building bigger barns to store his abundant crops, God said to the foolish man, "This very night your life is being demanded of you." A closer reading of that story in the Greek text can be translated, "... you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry; But God said to him, 'Foolish man, in this night they demand your soul from you.'"

Recall John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." God didn't want the power of "perish" to claim us, so our creator was generous and shared the power of God's love. Generous stewardship characterized by God's relationship with us, sacrificial sharing and life-giving purpose spare one from the strangling hold of financial idolatry.

In a culture defined by the Sirens' songs of consumerism and transactional behavior, generosity is a far better life-giving song. The hard work of stewardship is turning from the transactional behaviors and embracing a life transformed and redeemed by Christ. For many annual tithes or church budget talks. Unfortunately, stewards are frequently viewed as a "resource" rather than as followers of Jesus. The counterpoint to this trend is captured in that most commonly memorized text, John 3:16. This is our song that we sing as

we steer through the lure of the consumer culture's sirens around us.

Generosity says it all

This song is all about that central Lutheran focus on grace. A steward leader might easily substitute the word generosity. Four points meld together in this one word to define stewardship and characterize the core value of every steward leader: generosity. • God gave the Son for the world and put us in a loving relationship with God. • God gave first. God loved us first so that we can love. In other words, God shared so that we share. • God forfeited God's only Son. God gave sacrificially so we are free to give sacrificially, not for our salvation but in joy and thanksgiving. Jesus is the only example the world needs. Now we have the freedom to give for the sake of the gospel.

• God's gift was purposeful. God's gift was life-giving and thus our giving can be intentional for the sake of the gospel and the church. Thus we can sing joyfully in four-part harmony. Generosity, the operative virtue in stewardship, is defined by life-giving relationships paired with sacrificial giving. The great narratives in Scripture record God's work of generously shaping our relationships and behaviors. We also know that God is concerned with how followers of Jesus invest generously, not only time, talent and treasure but also with how we relate to God, to creation and to the world. Maybe no other financial stewardship model anchors the individual in a life filled with generosity than the intentional "firstfruits," the idea of

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items at the holidays? Today, tomorrow and every day, your children will be exposed to more than 3,000 messages geared to get them to spend their money on themselves. Many of these messages try to convince your children they are worth what they possess. Who will send them the messages about the benefits of being generous people who share and save their money as well as spend it? Who will teach them they are valued by God just the way they are, regardless of what they own or wear? Who will help them be good stewards of the resources they will handle in their adult years? Who will teach them the joy of being generous? If you don't, who will?

and things they'd like to get some day. Without a purchasing plan we all tend to mindlessly shop and splurge, which does to our spiritual health what grazing on snack food all day does to our physical health.

Provide your children a method to set aside some of their money— for charity, for savings and then a way to track how they spend the rest. Use envelopes, jars or separate places to separate their allowance, cash gifts and earned income. Give them a notebook in which to record what they do with the money that passes through their hands.

Read or watch stories about generous people with your children. The holiday season offers a feast of such tales. Include family time to watch such TV specials or attend events. Then talk about the story together. Who will counterbalance the nonstop bombardment of pressure to have the latest gadgets and trend

ELCA Good Gifts catalog offers many different ways to honor friends and loved ones with gifts that will make a difference in the world. With more than 50 different giving options—from 10 little chicks to help a family escape poverty to a scholarship to help a young leader attend an ELCA seminar—there's something for everyone on your list. The catalog is also a great resource for your congregation. Sunday school classes, youth groups and adults can use the catalog for special fundraising events. Shop the catalog online at www.ELCA.org/goodgifts.



causes. Talk about why you support the organizations you do and why you help other people.

Take your children shopping for people they will probably never meet— other children, new mothers and infants, the elderly, people with special needs. Donate the items they select to local organizations that serve the specific group. Talk with your children about why these people may need additional support. Participate in your community's holiday gift-giving to charity programs.

When you buy groceries for your family, shop for your local pantry too. Let your children pick out favorite food items to share with others who are hungry. Explain why the items have to be canned or boxed and how the food will be distributed.

Give your children catalogs from nonprofit organizations or look on their websites. Let your children pick out a project they'd like to know more about and support. The ELCA Good Gifts catalog is a good resource (www.elca.org/goodgifts). Give a year-end gift to a nonprofit in a child's honor and ask the organization to send the acknowledgment to him or her. If you're on the mailing list, look for the child's name in the next list of donors.

Along with regular presents for birthdays, Christmas or other occasions, give a "share-check." You fill out the amount and endorse with your signature. Then the recipient selects a nonprofit and writes its name on the pay-to-the-order-of line of the check.

Teach your children how to write thank-you notes. Email and text messaging notes count.

Help your children learn the difference between a need and a want. Together do an inventory of what they have

Will our children be generous?

Here's how to help them 'get' giving

By Kathy Hauelsen Cashen

There are no guarantees that generous parents will raise generous children. Even parents who intentionally practice and teach faithful stewardship habits cannot be assured their children will be equally motivated to be good stewards in their adult years. But there are things parents can do to influence their children's attitudes and actions as co-stewards of the household. The annual "What do you want for

Christmas?" routine is a prime time. Parents need not become the Grinches who deny Christmas. Rather, they can aim for a better balance between their children's focus on what they'll get for Christmas with additional focus on what they have to give to others. The Christmas season provides wonderful opportunities to talk about how we give to others in response to God's gift of the Christ child. Encourage your children to think of ways they can give—using their own resources of time, talent and a portion of whatever financial assets pass through their hands. Of course generosity shouldn't be limited to the holiday season. These ideas can instill your values of generosity in your children at all times. **Model the behavior you want.** Let your children see you giving donations to church and other charitable



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Duty and delight

A Pentecostal pastor told me this story about giving. “When I was 8 years old, I lived in a small town and one day my mother sent me to the florist to buy flowers for the family table. I remember being embarrassed as I walked home with the flowers, worried that my friends might see me and make fun of me for carrying flowers. But I did it, because I was an obedient son—it was my duty.”

“Ten years later, I was in love with a young woman who lived in that town. I went to the same florist, bought her flowers and walked some of the same streets toward her house. But now I wasn’t thinking about what anyone might think if they saw me. I was only

thinking of two things: how happy she would be to get flowers, and how fortunate I was to be the one bringing them to her. “That is the difference between doing something out of duty—and doing it out of delight.” I think about this story every time the offering plates come around in church. It’s my duty to give money to support my congregation—and sometimes I do that just because it’s the right thing to do. But other times, I’m eager to give my offering: how pleased God is to receive whatever we offer, and how fortunate we are to be people who know God and love God and who can give to God out of sheer delight.

Mark Allan Powell

happy lives, but we all know that money doesn’t guarantee happiness. We need discernment to discover how much is enough. And though no one can ever make that decision for another, the counsel and example of other believers can be helpful, along with the teaching of Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit.

Giving

The New Testament commends giving of two types: support and sacrifice. It’s the duty of every believer to support the religious community or institution of which he or she is a part. Paul suggests that such giving be proportionate to income and circumstances (2 Corinthians 8:3, 11).

It is also the delight of every believer to give away a significant portion of his or her income as a sacrificial offering of love, gratitude and praise. In the New Testament, the magi bring gifts to celebrate Jesus’ birth (Matthew 2:1-12). One woman expresses her devotion to Jesus by pouring expensive ointment on him (Mark 14:3-9) and another gives her last penny to the temple treasury (Mark 12:41-44).

In the modern church, our Sunday offerings may be occasions for both types of giving: we are invited to make gifts that will support the congregation and its mission, and we are encouraged to make offerings of praise and thanksgiving from hearts filled with love for God.



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Good news of stewardship

New Testament has a lot to say about it, as well as generous giving

By Mark Allan Powell

Editor's note: This article is part of "Deeper understandings," a series intended to be a public conversation among teaching theologians of the ELCA on various themes of our faith and the challenging issues of our day. It invites readers to engage in dialogue by posting comments online at the end of each article at [www.theLutheran.org](http://www.the Lutheran.org). This article and series was edited by Phillip D.W. Krey, former president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, on behalf of the presidents of the eight ELCA seminaries.

We hear a lot about stewardship in the church, often with reference to generous giving

of our time, talents and treasures.

What does the New Testament have

to say?

There is nothing in the New

Testament about stewardship pro-

grams, offering envelopes, pledge

campaigns, commitment Sundays or

many other modern practices. But

it has a lot to say about stewardship

and generous giving.

What is a steward? Stewards are

caretakers who live in a place that is

not their own. They are allowed to

make full use of the owner's property

in exchange for taking good care of it.

In the New Testament, Jesus tells

many parables that liken human

beings to stewards (Matthew 21:33-43;

24:45-51; 25:14-30; cf. Luke 16:1-10).

Everything we are and everything we

have belongs to God. Jesus says we

should remember that we are stewards,

not owners, and we should take good

care of what God has entrusted to us:

our planet, our families, our physical

bodies, our time, our money. We practice "good stewardship" when we view all these things as gifts from God to be used responsibly.

That is the big picture: everything

we are and everything we have

belongs to God. Lutherans recognize

that this biblical message may be

received as both law and gospel. The

call to be faithful stewards judges our

idolatrous desire to be self-reliant and

condemns any mentality that views

anything as truly ours.

Still, the recognition that we

belong to the God who created us,

redeemed us, and continues to love

and protect us is fundamentally good

news, inspiring trust, gratitude and

devotion.

We not only belong to God, we are

precious to God. Paul writes: "... you

are not your own(.) For you were

bought with a price" (1 Corinthians

6:19-20). His point is that we belong

to God not only because God made

us (Psalm 100:3) but also because

God sent his Son to die on a cross for

us; therefore we are valuable to God.

We belong to God and we are pre-

cious to God. This is fundamentally

good news.

Stewardship has many facets and

can apply to almost any aspect of our

lives. Still, when many people hear

the word stewardship, they think of

money—financial stewardship.

Money

Why does money get more attention than anything else? Perhaps because

it's the area in which we need the

most help. When Jesus said, "No one

can serve two masters," he was talking

about money: you cannot serve God

and wealth (Matthew 6:24). And what

did Paul say was the root of all kinds of evil? The love of ... (you can fill in the blank—or see 1 Timothy 6:10).

The New Testament urges us to

acquire, regard, manage and spend

our money as people who belong to

God. We are encouraged to work for a

living, viewing our jobs not only as a

means of making money but as voca-

tions that enable us to do something

worthwhile with our lives (2 Thessa-

lonians 3:6-12). We reject greed (Luka

12:15; Colossians 3:5) and anxiety

(Matthew 6:24-34; Philippians 4:6) in

favor of gratitude (Colossians 3:15;

1 Thessalonians 5:18) and trust (John

14:1; 1 Peter 1:21). Instead of squan-

dering our money recklessly (Luka

15:11-16) or hoarding our possessions

needlessly (Luka 12:15-21), we put it

to good use.

In general, the Bible commends

the virtue of frugality, or what we

would call "living more with less"

(1 Timothy 6:8). An overarching

principle is that money is to be spent

in ways that exhibit love for God and

neighbor (along with an assumption

of responsible self-care). So Peter

urges "good stewards" to use what

God gives them in ways that serve

others (1 Peter 4:10-11).

Still, it's easy to fall into a judg-

mental trap of "dos and don'ts," to

develop a mindset that makes us

feel guilty about almost everything

we buy or (worse) to look down on

others who we think are more mate-

rialistic. This goes too far: the Bible

doesn't denounce the expenditure of

money on entertainment and things

that make life pleasant (e.g., Genesis

21:8; Judges 14:10; Luke 14:13 and

15:23-25). God wants us to have wonderful,

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Growing Stewards

