



Introduction for Stewardship Leaders

When we hear the word “stewardship” in church, we often brace ourselves for fundraising. But really stewardship is about how we hold all the things in our common life together – our common life as a congregation, as a community, as member of the human community, as a part of the global ecosystem. Stewardship – understanding all our gifts as ultimately belonging to God and thinking about how we share those in ways that benefit everyone – is a powerful antidote to the individualism and consumerism that pervades our culture.

The earliest church understood this in powerful ways. The description of the Jesus movement in the years immediately following Jesus’ resurrection (see Acts 4:32-37) highlighted that they held all things in common. For some communities this meant selling personal property and sharing those proceeds for the benefit of all. In part, perhaps, they were following Jesus’ command to some of the wealthy people he encountered to go sell what they have and give to the poor. Certainly some members without means were able to live more abundantly as a result. These models were difficult to sustain – after all there is evidence that early in the life of the church there were all the same divisions and inequities that we still face today. Yet the model of that early church is a powerful reminder that our faith in God makes a powerful claim on the way we share life together with those around us.

This is easily lost in an age of great division and distrust. We are encouraged to buy whatever we want (even if we can’t afford it). We are harmed daily by the many -isms that diminish the richness of our diverse communities. Our earth is in peril as a result of our failure to steward its resources with care. We exist in a time of an ultra-polarized political climate. For those using this resource in the fall of 2024, individuals and congregations may especially be feeling the tension surrounding the national presidential election. We need all the reminders we can get of the ways God calls us across division to think about the shared life we have together and what that means for the way we live our own lives and share our gifts. What one person does or doesn’t do, what one person shares or withholds has an impact on others.

As you invite people to estimate their giving to your congregation for the coming year, these resources encourage you to do that in the context of strengthening the bonds between one another and reflecting on your shared life together.

Start by introducing the concept to your congregation with the included letter and in your Sunday worship. The estimate of giving form can be included with the letter. Make sure you take a moment to customize them to your congregation. There is a brief Bible Study you could include in printed form with the letter or use as a template for conversation at coffee hour, adult forum, council or other settings. Consider one or more of the activities that are included on the following pages including a children’s sermon, a coffee hour activity, and invitations for people to set up one-on-one conversations. Lift it up each week in your worship, communications, and announcements using some of the prompts. Remember to plan a celebration of some kind in worship and perhaps with fellowship time after. Follow up with an acknowledgment letter of pledges received as well as with handwritten thank you notes to all who participate.



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Children's Sermon:

Say: It's good to worship with you today! In our church right now we're talking about how all of us have things to share with the people around us. God made us to be people who live in communities with other people. We can't do everything we need on our own. You can't buy food at the grocery store unless someone grew it, someone brought it to the store, and someone else keeps the store open so we can get it. We can't learn things in school without our friends, our teachers, and our families to help us. There are a lot of games we can't play on our own, like tag or even Candyland.

Ask: What are other things that we can't do without people to help us?

Ask: Who do you help to do things?

Say: I want to help us see with our eyes the way that we all are connected to each other, helping each other as we go. I brought this ball of yarn today. I'm going to hold the end and gently toss it to someone. That person is going to hold on to their part of the yarn and toss the ball to another person.

Do: Toss the ball and invite the kids to toss it among themselves but also out the adults. Once many people are each holding a piece of the yarn it should create a wild web, especially if there has been some crisscrossing of the room.

Ask: What happens when someone pulls on the yarn? (It should cause others to have to adjust or move.)

Say: Right now we're all connected by the yarn. But even when we can't see it like this, we're all still connected. What one person does affects everyone else.

Say: Sometimes we might wish we could do things on our own or by ourselves and there are some things we can. But God made us to help each other. And that's one of the ways that God helps us. I wonder if you can think about something you have or do that helps the church community. (Pause for sharing and offer some ideas if they seem stuck. Encourage any gift they feel they have to offer.)

Pray: Dear God, thank you for making friends and family and other church people to help us and help each other. Thank you for giving each of us ways to help others. In Jesus name, Amen.



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One-on-ones

One of the best ways to strengthen connections between people in a community is for people to take time getting to know others in a deeper way. We call these intentional conversations One-on-ones. At the heart, they're very simple. Two people set aside a time of 30-45 minutes to meet together and talk about important things. The key is to ask open questions and listen to the answers. Encourage people in the congregation to do one-on-ones with each other during this time. The goal is simply to strengthen connections in the community.

One way to encourage this is to have a stack of index cards and a basket at the entrance to worship. Invite anyone willing to participate to write their name and contact information on a card and drop it in the basket. On the way out anyone who put their name in takes a name out. That way everyone who participates gets 2 one-on-ones – with the person whose card they picked and the person who picked theirs. People can participate as many times as they like if you offer it for a few weeks, but it may take several weeks just to set up their first 2 conversations.

Encourage kids and youth to participate, too! Just keep safe church policies in mind and have parents give permission and hold one-on-ones with youth in a public space with another adult present.

It may help people to have prompts printed right on the index card. See the sample below – most printers can print directly onto index cards.

Name:
Email:
Phone:
Contact the person on this card and set up a time when you can focus on the conversation. You can talk about anything meaningful (skip small talk about the weather...). If you need some ideas to get started, try these:
-When have you experienced a sense of being deeply rooted in community? What was that like?
-In what part of our congregation's life do you most experience God and why?
-What's something you're passionate about that you wish you could share more about with others?



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Coffee Hour Activity

Purchase in advance a simple jigsaw puzzle of 50-100 pieces depending on how many people you have participating. As people come into coffee hour hand each person 1-2 puzzle pieces. Invite people to put the puzzle together. It may be more fun and challenging to give minimal direction and perhaps not even share with them the picture they are creating. This will hopefully encourage people to talk and wonder together and figure out how to work together to create something. Whether or not the whole puzzle comes together, you can invite people to reflect on the process:

- What was it like to work together when each person had just one part of the whole?
- What was challenging? What was fun?
- Did you discover anything new about others in the process?
- What would have happened if someone didn't add their piece in to the puzzle? (Or maybe this happened that a piece is missing or lost and you can invite people to reflect on what it feels like when the puzzle isn't completed.)
- How is this similar or different to the ways we share other gifts in our community?

Bonus: With enough advanced planning you can have a puzzle printed with a photo of your congregation or another meaningful image for your community. Search online for "print your own puzzle" and you will find a number of options.