

A Stewardship Devotion... Money as a Means of Serving God and Helping Others

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- In what way? – dishonestly if we can; honestly if we must.
- Who is God, the one and only true?
- Money is God. Gold and Greenbacks and Stock – father, son and ghosts of same, three persons in one; these are the true and only God, mighty and supreme.

The true test of our use of money as a resource entrusted to us is the lifestyle we live. In today's society it is often difficult to answer the question, how much is enough? There is a cultural drive to obtain and accumulate. We are blessed that in the United States and some other countries this accumulation is possible. Yet in many countries it is not. It seems that an abundance of things supports a desire to want and have more.

Perhaps this is reflected in a giving pattern that the higher the household income, the less a household is likely to return to God.

What is your vision of enough? Does it include serving God and help others? In this parable Jesus reminds us that God may come at any time and ask for an accounting of our time, talents and money. Will you be prepared? Being rich toward God is worth more than all the barns in the world.

Let us Pray: Dear Lord, help us to clearly see the monetary resources you have entrusted. May we discover through our faith how much is enough. May our gratitude be reflected in what we return to you. And, may we use these gifts as a tool to serve God and help others. Amen.

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Stewardship Beyond Money: Ten Sets of Hands

by Becky Brown, Chair Oregon Synod Stewardship Committee

After a year of dreaming and visioning, St. Luke Lutheran Church, a 518 household congregation, voted to make an even bolder statement about God's abundance in their lives than the approach that was used for over 30 years. Beginning in February 2004,

Jesus served. It's about sharing time AND money at St. Luke.

Beginning in 1967, St. Luke placed a major emphasis on a social concerns ministry that reaches out with help and love to the poor, abused, and neglected of our city and adjoining communities.

Today, twenty-five percent of the offerings go to those in need beyond the church doors.

Benevolence is the first deduction taken from St. Luke offerings – before payroll, facilities, operations or programs. This means that for a \$100 in the offering plate, \$25 becomes benevolence funds.

Fifty percent of the benevolence goes to the Oregon Synod and ELCA projects, and the other half is used for community distribution with three large projects representing thirty percent of this pool of funds.

Hands-on experience with the people who work for an agency or those who

How can St. Luke provide ten people to work for this need in the community?

St. Luke would require at least ten St. Luke members to volunteer for each project or program that St. Luke funds. In the past, St. Luke shared monetary gifts with over 25 organizations and time was spent by some members on a handful of projects. The vision statement helps members to get out and to serve as

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actually need the funding helps members to understand why there is a need. This practice also allows the St. Luke members who volunteer to develop fellowship and community while they are working together. Building a Habitat Home with the family who will live in this home working next to you is more powerful because you touch the wood, feel the damp air and see the children playing nearby. Money follows volunteerism because members give to projects they enjoy and feel passionate about supporting.

Dialogue and discussion about the need for hands-on service continue regularly. The first question is always: How

can St. Luke provide ten people to work for this need in the community? The stories told after the activity are what keep members signing-up for projects. Members watch the family carry the box



of food to their car or watch the children receive a jacket for school. When photos of these projects are shown and calls are made to ask members to help, it becomes very

clear that there is a huge value in being involved. For some projects special exceptions are needed.



When confidential

services such as physical and substance abuse agencies need help, either projects become creative or the Social Concerns Committee requests a special exception from the

St. Luke Council for the proposal for a given year. Creative ways to gain support are mailings prepared by members in the narthex or blankets tied by everyone who attends Easter Breakfast.

The new stewardship practice is a ministry of transformation. Lives of the members and of those being served are changed. By connecting service to their giving, these two aspects of the Christian church are brought together in new and sometimes challenging ways. Relationship and service are keys to transformation.



Resources

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Luke 12:13-21

One of the resources God has entrusted to each person is money. This parable clearly portrays the danger of self-delusion that can occur in the use and management of that money. The rich man in the parable was blessed with a farm that produced fine crops to the point the barns were overflowing. Yet the rich man was looking for more security so he built bigger barns for the yield of future harvests.

Was this rich man successful? By all accounts at that time yes. He had accomplished what most people of his time had only dreamed of. But through this parable Jesus challenges the hearer not to think of oneself, but to recognize that treasures stored in this world are “not rich toward God”. Reading the text, note how many times “I “ and “me” are used. How easy is it to become infatuated with oneself.

The example of wealth used in this parable has been live out in many ways in the centuries that followed. In 1871 Mark Twain wrote a piece entitled, “The Revised Catechism”. It talked about the hold money can have on a person’s life. As excerpt reads as follows:

- What is the chief end of man? – to get rich.

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