

ELEMENTS AND PRACTICES FOR CONGREGATIONAL STEWARDSHIP

At the most basic level, doing something, anything regarding stewardship, will improve it. Regularizing stewardship in the congregation is what really makes a difference. These elements and practices for congregational stewardship are based on a survey of approximately 60 nation-wide stewardship staff and 25 mission interpreter coordinators of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This survey was taken in February 2004.

1. Congregations that have positioned themselves to have a vital role in the community, that have a **focus beyond themselves**, and that foster a healthy spirit in the congregation through strong relationships with the broader church, including synods and churchwide ministries, are poised for healthy stewardship.
2. **Leadership** is key for any congregation to be healthy. This is also true for healthy stewardship ministry. Recurring themes regarding leadership are:
 - A. Pastors are the key stewardship models and leaders.
 - B. Pastors and lay leaders are passionate about and committed to growing in giving, talking opening about their personal giving.
 - C. An active stewardship team is in place that works closely with the governing board.
 - D. Leaders are trained and educated in stewardship.
 - E. There is high expectation among the leadership and within the congregation.
3. **Education** is fundamental for growing stewards. These elements were recurring:
 - A. Teach and preach stewardship with strong biblical principles.
 - B. Teach the role of money in one's life.
 - C. Teach personal money management.
 - D. Preach and converse regularly about money as an expression of faith.
 - E. Teach proportionate, regular, first fruits and growth giving.
 - F. Children and youth education curriculum include stewardship themes.
 - G. Teach all-of-life stewardship.
4. **Interpretation and communication** of congregational, synod and churchwide ministries are extremely important to increase accountability build trust within the congregation.
 - A. Conduct a year round monthly emphasis on various ministries supported by member giving.
 - B. Celebrate what offerings are doing by using personal stories
 - C. Communicate connections, relationships and partnerships of the whole ELCA.
 - D. Tell the story of who we are as the ELCA, what we do in ministry together, and how we fund those ministries in a clear, compelling way
 - E. Share personal stories of joy of giving.

5. **18 most effective practices** used by congregations strong in stewardship:

- A. They hold a commitment that stewardship is important. Their vision planning includes stewardship. They are clear about their purpose and mission.
- B. They give away a growing percentage of congregational income for ministries of the whole church.
- C. They practice first fruits and proportionate giving for mission support (benevolence) for the whole church.
- D. They build relationships with their members through personal contacts.
- E. They provide multiple opportunities for giving and serving.
- F. They foster spirit-filled giving and prayer development, emphasizing the connection between faith and money.
- G. They identify, explore, and nurture spiritual gifts of members, helping them to fulfill their passions.
- H. They develop an “asset-based” climate, using members’ assets rather than meeting needs.
- I. They develop year round stewardship programs.
- J. They ask boldly.
- K. They thank profusely and often.
- L. They engage in annual every member response programs for financial commitments, estimates of giving or pledges.
- M. They provide programs for regular (undesignated) and over-and-above (designated) giving.
- N. They use a program budget in addition to a line item budget.
- O. They separate stewardship programs from budget preparation.
- P. They provide quarterly reports on member giving to the membership.
- Q. They establish mission endowment policies.
- R. They model first-fruits giving by sharing a percentage of their corporate income for ministry beyond the congregation.