

IDEAS FOR A YEAR-ROUND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

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GRATITUDE

1. Say Thanks: You are competing with other philanthropic institutions which are saying thanks. Challenge a sub-committee to come up with creative ideas to say thank you in your congregation.

LEADERSHIP

2. Stewardship Team: Form a creative group to rethink your approach to stewardship. The team should be diverse in its makeup—young and old, male and female, long-time members and new members, etc. Have them read selected books on the stewardship bibliography and share what they found encouraging and possible for your situation.

3. Find A Stewardship Model: Find a congregation that has developed and is maintaining an effective year-round stewardship program. Visit with the [priest or pastor], the staff member responsible for the stewardship program if it is not the pastor, the team responsible for the program, and other strategic lay persons in the congregation about what they are doing, how they have developed their program, and where they are going with it. Request samples of materials, and review them for ideas that can be transferred or revised for use in your congregations.

4. Train Congregational Leadership: Have everyone on the Finance Committee, [Vestry or Bishop's Committee], and other leaders read at least one book on stewardship and giving during the course of each year of service.

5. Consider the Importance of Giving Among Leaders: If it is true that leaders can never lead others beyond their own level of practice, then regular generous giving to the church might be among the criteria set for nomination to positions of leadership in the church.

SHARING

6. List What Excites You: Begin a list of responses to the question: "What are you excited about in our Church?" Start with your Stewardship Team, because they need to be the nucleus of energy and excitement about what is going on in the congregation. Expand to include others, such as the Administrative Board or Church Council. Then involve the whole congregation with a strategically placed bulletin board where passersby can both see what others have said and inscribe their own exciting thoughts.

7. Personal Stories of Support: Individuals and families often prayerfully discern God's direction and support in deciding how they use the financial resources God has provided them in support of the ministries of the church. Solicit these stories and share them in worship services, meetings, newsletters and other public forums. Stories from books and other resources can also be helpful and inspirational, but the familiarity with a member of the congregation adds power to the story.

8. Photos Personalize: Help your congregation remember the events in which they have participated or visualize other ministries or programs through photographs. They are easy to arrange in displays. How about recognizing in a letter to the congregation that the youth program occurs because of the giving of the congregation, and enclose a photo from a recent youth event? Express appreciation for those regular gifts from the church family, and invite them to put the picture on their refrigerator and to be in prayer for the youth leaders of the program for the next month. Maybe the youth themselves will undertake this special expression of thanks.

IDEAS FOR A YEAR-ROUND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

9. Speak by Generations: Recognize the diversity of your congregation. A 20-year old has different interests, responds to different challenges, seeks different opportunities, listens with a different intent, and honors different values than a 65-year old. Leaders are moved by challenges; followers are moved by assurances. Vary the stories you tell, the ways in which they are told, and the storyteller. Experiment. Listen for feedback. Make mid-course corrections.

10. Conduct A Stewardship Survey: A Well planned, confidential survey of the members of your congregation could provide helpful information about the congregation, such as demographic data, attitudinal perspectives, levels of familiarity with various ministries, and awareness of biblical and theological understandings of stewardship. A precisely crafted survey instrument can be used to collect accurate information otherwise unavailable, such as average income, age, and diverse attitudes associated with individuals in various income and age ranges. It can also provide an opportunity to ask whether members have included the church in their estate plans. Information retrieved from the survey can be helpful to leaders in their planning, and summaries of the information can be interpreted to the congregation at large for their feedback.

11. Home Visits: Organize visits in the homes of church members not to secure commitments but to interpret the ministries of the congregation, to describe the importance of every gift, and to thank members and friends for their investment in the work of the church of Jesus Christ. This can be done very effectively at a time other than during the annual stewardship campaign.

12. Invite People to Write a Money Autobiography: Write the story of your personal pilgrimage with regard to money. Include your earliest memories and both spoken and unspoken teachings of your family of origin. What have been your experiences with wealth and abundance as well as austerity and poverty? What differences have economic shifts made in your life? How have your attitudes developed, changed, and influenced others? How did you learn about giving, and what are your joys and fears about it? These are bits of history that impact us regularly, yet we seldom assemble them into this type of story. Have others write their money autobiographies, share them, and discuss them. Is the place where you are now where you want to be? How can you grow in the next chapter(s) of your autobiography?

MINISTRY

13. Collect and Share Ministry Stories: Articulate your vision. Illustrate, don't simply explain. Collect stories from diverse sources about the difference that giving in your congregation is making both within the church and beyond. Get stories from your [diocese] ("How is [diocesan] fund[ing] transforming lives?") and [The Episcopal Church's Commissions, Comities, Agencies and Board's (CCAB's)]. Interview others who lead various congregational ministries, such as a day care program, a youth program, or a senior ministries program, in order to learn stories of how the ministries of the church are meeting the needs of others. These are not simply "facts and figures" stories, but transformational stories. They describe how lives are being changed through your gifts!

14. Minutes for Mission. Once a month, have a two to three minute presentation in your worship service about a ministry or outreach of your congregation where lives are being changed. By planning and scheduling these appropriately, the presentations may include descriptions of how worshipers can assist with a project, make a special gift, or provide other assistance to make a difference through their investment in the program.

15. Hold a Ministry or Mission Fair: Annually have every ministry represented with displays in a single place to interpret their focus, service, and stories. This is a means of explaining and interpreting the diverse involvements of members of the congregation, of enlisting additional personnel, and of clearly demonstrating how the giving of the congregation is making a difference in the world. This type of event works effectively when scheduled during the intensive phase of an annual campaign just prior to Commitment Sunday.

16. Conduct A Time and Talent Survey: Annually promote and carry out a broad-based survey which allows members and friends to indicate ways in which they want to invest their time, talent and energy in the coming

IDEAS FOR A YEAR-ROUND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

months. Such a survey can best be conducted two to three months following the annual campaign for financial stewardship.

17. Conduct A Spiritual Gifts Seminar: This experience can bring biblical terminology and traditional concepts of Christian theology into a new relevance and applicability. Spiritual gifts are divine gifts just as financial resources are divine gifts, and learning to manage these gifts is the life-long challenge of deepening one's understanding of discipleship and Christian living. The personal discoveries in such a seminar could have value in assessing options for volunteer services. For individuals with the spiritual gift of giving, pastoral guidance, counsel, and encouragement are particularly appropriate.

18. Start A Christian Financial Counseling Ministry: Have a layperson in your congregation begin a Christian financial counseling ministry to help individuals and families in trouble. As families begin to get their finances in order, they will begin to give more faithfully and gratefully. If your congregation alone cannot undertake this endeavor, develop it ecumenically with other congregations.

19. Develop A Career Guidance Ministry: Develop a program with trained counselors who can support and assist individuals in career transitions or who want to learn about other possible career options. If such services cannot be provided directly through the programs of the church, secure the assistance of referral personnel so that these services are available to individuals and families particularly during intervals of crisis associated with job loss or career transition.

WORSHIP

20. Plan Thought and Heart Provoking Offering Times in Worship: Have someone read an appropriate passage of scripture immediately prior to the offering, make a few personal comments about why it is personally meaningful, and then pray for the morning giving. Involve children in preparatory readings or prayers. Share a brief stewardship story. Enlist a team whose sole responsibility it is to plan and implement a different experience of worship through congregational offerings each Sunday. Consider periodic congregational movement, such as a processional into the chancel for the presentation of individual and family gifts. Reclaim the offertory as a high, celebrative point in the worship experience each week.

21. Would You Bring Us a Short Devotion? Leading a devotional period with a focus on Christian stewardship and giving may catch a few people by surprise, but it is a unique opportunity to move beyond clichés to clarion words calling for faithful response to Biblical teachings. Short. Concise. Always timely. Powerful. Memorable.

22. Get Specific in Congregational Prayers of [the People]: Most congregational prayers of [the people] are quite general. Even though they may be accurate, they seldom elicit a heartfelt, emotional response. Remember to include stewardship of time, talent, and money in the corporate prayers of [the people] shared by your congregation. The value we place on time given to us by God, our attitudes about the talents God gave to us, and our relationship with the resource of money God provides for us are spiritual issues!

24. Pray. Develop the spiritual life of members and friends of the congregation in the process and experience of giving. Invite stewardship leaders to pray for specific church members and their growth in discipleship, including their giving. Regularly pray for the church and its management of the resources that are given to it. Pray for new and expanding programs that are the outcome of new giving and that are conveying the love to God into new missional fields.

EDUCATION

25. New Members: Stewardship education should be a requirement for all who seek membership, either at the confirmation level or at the adult membership level. Be focused on what you expect. Have an intentional strategy for assimilating new members, including the provision of current information about the finances of the church. Encourage new members to become regular givers from the very beginning, and

IDEAS FOR A YEAR-ROUND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

explicitly explain how and why giving is a significant contributor to growth in Christian discipleship. Research shows that typically after six months only 17% of new members give.

26. Bulletin Inserts: Develop a series of monthly inserts in worship bulletins. Creatively use a recurring preface such as, "Because of Your Gifts...." Then the various pieces can focus on particular themes that pick up that introductory invitation, such as "...the hungry have food" or "...the Gospel is being preached today in Ethiopia."

27. Newsletters: Every issue of your congregational newsletter, whether it is published monthly, semi-monthly, or weekly, can carry a ministry story, personal reflective story, and/or financial update in story form. Share your stories about how the giving of members is making a difference. Consider a separate periodic newsletter (perhaps quarterly) that solely addresses stewardship issues in your congregation.

28. Make Stewardship Fun: Create an inviting, accessible kiosk or display where cartoons can be displayed that focus on stewardship and giving, the reticence some members may have about generosity, Christian stewardship, and financial challenges in the church.

29. Drama and Skits: Dramas are available and skits can be written which focus on human fears and foibles around giving.

30. Bulletin Boards. Develop displays and provide information which can be taken from a "people friendly" bulletin board located strategically in the church facility. Change the material frequently. Make it visually appealing and diverse. Provide informational pieces that can be taken by a reader for review at a later time.

31. Stress Growth in Giving: Growth in giving is a normal expectancy. In the church we emphasize growth in discipleship. One of the fundamental expressions of that growth is through our giving. Growth is not demonstrated necessarily in the giving of more dollars. Rather, growth has to do with the impact of our giving in the living our Christian faith. Have we grown in our willingness to trust God's provision for us? Have we grown in our readiness to sacrifice in order to make our offerings that are worth to God and not just convenient to us? Have we grown past reluctance in giving and past just feeling good about our giving to the point where we are truly joyful in our giving?

32. Sermons and Sermon Illustrations: Sermons do not have to be "about stewardship" in order to have reflective stewardship illustrations. Consider the stewardship ramifications of scriptural texts that ordinarily are not interpreted as having a theme of stewardship. Laypersons as well as pastors can effectively address stewardship issues in sermons. Use real-life illustrations. "When you teach from the head, it goes to the head; when you teach from a life, it goes to a life."

33. Schedule an Outside Stewardship Speaker or Preacher: Bring in an experienced stewardship speaker or preacher to your congregation. An outside speaker can clearly teach God's Word on Christian giving without fear or timidity.

34. Regularly Hold Planned Giving Seminars: Seminars on planned giving should be held at least annually to assist individuals and families in the congregation to make critical decisions about the management of their estates. Gifts through estates or other planned giving vehicles are the ultimate expression of a life of faithfulness. Members of your congregation deserve information and support in identifying which procedures might be most appropriate to their situation.

35. Use Quotations: Provocative quotations from scripture, great literature and contemporary writers and speakers may be effectively used in newsletters, bulletins, sermons, and other vehicles of communication to stimulate thought and emotions around stewardship, giving, and changing lives.

36. Sunday School Lessons on Stewardship: Include children, youth and adults in regular and systematic teaching and learning about Christian stewardship which is biblically grounded and consistent with your church's heritage. Christian stewardship can be considered in single sessions or multiple session series, and it can be considered in association with many other educational topics such as discipleship, family life, and money management.

IDEAS FOR A YEAR-ROUND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

GIVING

37. Plan Your Designated Giving: Some congregations include all “specials” in “unified” budget, so that the only special offerings are for endeavors such as recovery from catastrophic events. Other congregations provide many opportunities for special, over-and-above gifts. Some individuals and families who do not ordinarily support the church’s operations will respond to these special, focused, designated giving opportunities. Usually these specials do not negatively impact regular giving. If your congregation has them, announce them well in advance and promote them generously. Soon afterward, report back to the entire congregation the response of the church family to the endeavor and how those special gifts will impact and change people’s lives.

38. Decide If You Are a “Tithing Congregation”: Decide if tithing will be the standard of giving to be taught in the congregation. If so, teach tithing. If not, teach proportional giving.

26. Provide A Money Back Guarantee. Have your church’s [Vestry or Bishop’s Committee] approve a money back guarantee for first-time tithers. After a month-long stewardship preaching series, ask regular givers to turn in a covenant agreement indicating that they will begin to tithe. The church offers a full money back guarantee to anyone who tithes for 90 days and then regrets the decision.

39. All Church Tithing Sunday: Challenge everyone in advance to bring a full ten percent of their income as an offering on a designated Sunday. A second option is to have people write on a card (without indicating their name) how much their tithe would be if they gave ten percent of their annual household income to the church. People will be amazed to discover that if they faithfully gave ten percent of their income to the Lord’s work in their local church that they could expand the church budget two to four times for missions, staff, new ministries and programs, and regular operations.

40. Establish A Permanent Endowment: Every congregation has areas in which proceeds earned by permanent funds can assist—such as building maintenance, specific program areas, or specific missional thrusts or projects. When such funds are established appropriately, they will not diminish contributions from the congregation to its regular operations, but they may stimulate that giving.

41. Find Options for Designated Gifts: Maintain a current list of places where ministries could be expanded, where services could be enhanced, where missions could be expanded, where buildings could be improved, and so forth if additional (unbudgeted) funds were available. Investigate the interests of persons or families that are not regular contributors to the church. Challenge and invite them to support one of these special emphases. Immediately acknowledge any support provided in this fashion.

42. Develop Your Capital Plans: If possible, plan three to five years ahead for physical needs, such as additional educational space, a family life center, a new or additional parsonage, and worship or fellowship space. With careful planning, the congregation may be engaged and prepared to respond when it comes time to secure the funding to proceed with the endeavor.

43. Offering Envelopes: Provide envelopes to members and friends of the congregation to encourage regularity of giving. Envelopes may also enhance accuracy of the recording of gifts. Think big. Tiny envelopes are suitable for young children as they learn the discipline of regular giving, but they are inappropriate for youth and adults.

44. Catch-up Envelopes: When records of giving are mailed to the congregation, whether on a monthly or quarterly schedule, include a pre-addressed return envelope with the cover letter and individualized record of giving. Although there is no request for giving in this mailing, an opportunity to respond is welcome. Have special envelopes that say Special Giving Opportunity Envelope prepared at a local print shop.

45. Transform Your Fund-Raising Events: Often, special events by a congregation, such as dinners, bazaars, garage sales and talent shows, are fundamentally substitutes for the congregation’s willingness to move up in personal and family giving as effective Christian stewards. It is usually the reticence of the

IDEAS FOR A YEAR-ROUND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

congregation in its giving that has become evident in financial shortages that arouses the need for these fund-raising events. The success of these events is often calculated (or perhaps miscalculated) by the amount of money raised. Alternatively, interpret their success by criteria such as service to the community, the fellowship that was shared, the mission that will be strengthened, or the value of the event in the life of the congregation or community. Further, the next year, if financial profit is lower, the event is still a total success in terms of ministry and its importance to ongoing or special ministries of the church.

46. Tangible Gifts: Many needs in ministry can be met through gifts other than financial contributions. Office equipment, materials for projects with children, building materials, and many other objects are available through members and friends of the congregation. Alert your congregation to these needs through a list that is constantly evolving. When the needs are met, quickly acknowledge those gifts both to the contributor and to the congregation in terms of the ministry which is strengthened through it.

FINANCE

47. Use Visuals to Interpret Congregational Finances: Pie charts, graphs, and similar visuals can interpret facts and figures in inviting ways. They may be far more inviting than a weekly newsletter report about the "amount needed each week," "amount needed to date," and "over/under to date," which seldom communicates a positive perspective on giving.

48. Fund Stewardship Education: Designate a significant amount of the congregation's annual operating budget (perhaps 3%) for Stewardship Education. With that resource you can purchase and use fliers, join and gather stewardship resources through [The Episcopal Network for Stewardship], buy books and other resources to train congregational leaders, and subscribe to services that interpret stewardship.

49. Send Crucial Letters:

- A. January** Say Thank You for previous year
Forecast programs for the new year
Explain how your continuing support makes a difference
- B. May** Send after Mother's Day and before Memorial Day
Update on programs and financial support year-to-date
Forecast summer programs
Express the need for continuing support of summer ministries
- C. December** First week after last Sunday in November
Eleventh month record of personal contributions
Forecast Advent activities
Encourage members and friends to end their annual contributions in a manner acceptable to God.

50. Enhance Records of Giving: Print biblical reasons why-to-give to the Lord on the bottom or back of records of giving before they are mailed. Not only are you reporting on the giving of an individual or family, you are using the sheet as a teaching instrument.

51. Have A Brokerage Account: It is relatively easy for a church to open an account with a stockbroker for the purpose of receiving gifts of stock. Gifts of appreciated stock are not only valuable to the congregation, but also have significant positive tax advantage for the contributor. Clear policy guidelines should be in place by the congregation regarding the processing, holding or sale of each stock. Professional counsel regarding these transfers is essential.