COUNTING BLESSINGS:
Assessing Fund-Raising Ministry
StewardShop 106

Description
In this 55-minute workshop, participants learn how to use portions of the resource, "Assessment Tools for Stewardship Ministry," that are focused on financial stewardship. They make preliminary decisions about assessing the ways they approach mission-funding in their own congregations.

Audience
"Counting Blessings" helps pastors and other stewardship leaders who want to engage in a thorough assessment of the character of the fund-raising efforts of their congregation.

Skills
Participants in this workshop will practice using one or more assessment tools for congregational mission funding.

Materials
Handout, "Counting Blessings," one per participant
Handout, "Preparing for Assessment," one per participant
Handout, "Assessment Tools Packet," one per participant:

- Communicating Stewardship
- Giving as a Way of Life
- Giving Potential
- Looking at Demographic Data A
- Looking at Demographic Data B
- Looking at Our Response
- Looking Back and Looking Forward
- Our Identity and Our Mission
- Stewardship in Our Congregation

Schedule

Presentation, "Using Assessment Tools"	(20 minutes)
Trying Out One Tool	(15 minutes)
Possibilities Planning	(10 minutes)
Peer Review and Wrap-up	(10 minutes)

WORKSHOP DESIGN

Presentation, "Using Assessment Tools" (20 minutes)
Begin the workshop with a five-minute presentation about the process of assessing fund-raising in participants' congregations. Distribute the handout, "Counting Blessings," one per participant, as the basis for the presentation. Remind participants who wish to use these handouts at home to write notes on a separate piece of paper. You might emphasize the following matters:

- The aim of assessment is to find useful assets for doing what you most want to do. In this case, that means funding God's mission through your congregation.
- Because it is positive in nature, assessment uncovers what you may have overlooked and substantiates what you hoped might be true.
- Assessment is like looking at a map; evaluation and planning are like deciding which direction to go.
- Without knowing "what is," you can't decide "what is good." Assessment helps with both questions.
- The process of assessment shouldn't take all that long. Evaluation and decision-making processes are made efficient by assessment.

After five minutes, distribute the packet of assessment tools, one copy per participant. Characterize these items as a set of tools that can help participants determine what is true about their congregation's mission-funding. In the next fifteen minutes, you will characterize each of the items, while participants browse the tools and take notes. This will help participants prepare for the next activity, a practice use of one of the tools.

The following notes will help you describe each of the tools. You might prepare for this presentation by a thorough reading of the entire packet, and by noting the useful features of each tool as you discover or imagine them.

Communicating Stewardship
A tool for examining the language and style of your stewardship messages. This tool helps leaders assess what actually occurs as members encounter the words used in asking for contributions. A good first-use tool.

Giving as a Way of Life
A congregational survey that probes members' feelings about their own generosity. This tool starts back at the beginning, and expands the notion of "generosity" beyond the sometimes-narrow confines of contributing to this congregation's part of God's mission. The survey leads to appreciation of members and gratitude for their lives.

Giving Potential
Helps you determine the potential for congregational giving in your locale. A standard activity used in new mission congregations, this formula will yield some surprises about the funding potential that exists. Some congregations give beyond their potential; others have not yet reached their potential. An interesting variation on the exercise: Change the "average giving" percentages up or down ½ of a percentage point and see what a large difference that makes.

Looking at Demographic Data A
Assists you in analyzing various facts about your surrounding area. This analysis requires some prework, perhaps beyond the ELCA web site. Chambers of commerce, county extension agents, planning departments in city and county government, or real estate agents should also be able to share this kind of information.

Looking at Demographic Data B
Helps in interpreting your congregational trend report. This report is generated from the annual report sent to the ELCA offices by your congregation's pastor or leaders. Because the information is presented concisely, it is fairly easy to see how statistics inter-relate, and how trends continue or change over time.

Looking at Our Response
A more complete evaluation tool for assessing the strengths of your congregation's methods for financial response. This tool, the subject of a separate workshop (StewardShop 108, "A Closer Look"), both measures and attaches value to each of the six response methods.

Looking Back and Looking Forward
A congregational survey that evaluates your most recent congregational response program. This tool is useful immediately after an annual funding appeal. Because it asks about more than the amount of money pledged or contributed, the tool gets at deeper matters that are the foundation for members' willingness to participate in funding God's mission through your congregation.

Our Identity and Our Mission
A congregational survey tool that collects members' thoughts about the identity and purpose of your church. Because donors give towards identifiable purposes, measuring the sense of identity and mission in your congregation is a good yardstick for understanding motivation for giving. A good accompaniment for "building the case for giving."

Stewardship in Our Congregation

A congregational survey tool that focuses on members' view of your total stewardship ministry. This is a good first-use tool, because it asks a little bit about a range of ideas, beliefs and behaviors in stewardship.

As you familiarize yourself with the tools, you should be able to complete the presentation of each item in less than a minute, leaving about two minutes per item for comments and questions. Or you may elect to save the last seven to eight minutes for this purpose.

Trying Out One Tool (15 minutes)

The task for participants in the next fifteen minutes is to choose one of the tools, and to imagine themselves using the tool as though back in their congregation. (Note that the tool, "Looking at Our Response," is the subject of another StewardShop, and might be better explored during that time.)

The "imagined use" can include completing surveys, noting possible new directions the tools might take members, choosing from among suggested "next steps," or actually engaging in conversation with another stewardship leader from your congregation who is attending this workshop.

Circulate among participants as they work, answering questions and listening for the conversations that occur.

At the ten-minute mark, suggest that participants take just a little time to share with one other person what they have chosen and tried out.

Possibilities Planning (10 minutes)

Distribute copies of the handout, "Preparing for Assessment," one per participant. The directions are included at the top of the worksheet, and participants can begin work as soon as they receive their copy. Remind participants who wish to use the workshop materials as photocopy originals to record their answers on the reverse side of the sheet or on a separate sheet of paper.

The first item may not seem to be needed, but it has an interesting possibility embedded in its possible answers. Participants may believe that they already know everything they need to know about mission-funding assets in their congregation, but when asked "how do you know?" they may come to realize the shortcomings of their methods.

Encourage participants to work alone and quietly during this time segment, so that they can concentrate on their answers. Their work here will help them in the next activity, and will help them prepare for eventual use of assessment processes when they return to their congregations.

Give participants a time-check when about three minutes remain for this activity.

Peer Review and Wrap-up (10 minutes)

Ask participants to find one other person and share what they have learned or decided to do about assessment in their congregation upon their return. (For planning purposes, participants from the same congregation can form larger groups to share their thoughts.)

Participants may want to use as reference the notes they have taken, the assessment tool they have tried out, or the planning preparation worksheet they have completed.

At the end of the time period, offer a few observations about what you have noticed about participants (such as especially noteworthy ideas or insights from participants). Close the workshop with a short prayer, and dismiss participants with your thanks.

COUNTING BLESSINGS
Assessing Fund-Raising Ministry

The fund-raising ministry of your congregation – how you fund God's mission through your congregation – may be more complete and effective than you might realize. One way to increase your skill at mission-funding is to assess – quantify, measure, stack up – what you do together. These principles and guidelines may help you start the discussion!

1. **Count before you evaluate.** One common error that many leaders make is to prematurely evaluate what they have not first assessed. To evaluate – literally, "to name value" – you have to know *what it is that you're evaluating*! And if you don't assess or otherwise quantify your behaviors or assets, you may evaluate too small or too narrow a portion of the total ministry in which you're engaged.

2. **Assess what you can see or otherwise sense.** You are looking for measurement of observable phenomena related to fund-raising. Behaviors, attitudes and knowledge – anything you can sense to be true – these are the "stuff" of assessment.

3. **The important is contained in the "unimportant."** Don't overlook small elements; sometimes the smallest evidence indicates a much larger reality. The artifacts of a congregation – for example, the upkeep and repair of buildings and equipment, or meeting notes – might indicate the attitudes and beliefs that engendered those artifacts.

4. **Assess assets.** Assessment is *not* "needs analysis." Instead, it is a way of counting the assets of a congregation for funding God's mission. ("Assets" are gifts, abilities, or attitudes that are useful for accomplishing a goal. A "gift" isn't an asset until it's put to use.)

5. **The best place to start: the right questions.** Choosing the right questions -- how and what you determine what really is true – is the most difficult and most necessary element of assessment. The "right" questions are characterized by:

   - Straightforward, unambiguous language
   - Unbiased intent

- Measurement of what is positive and good about the congregation
- Open-endedness
- Applicability to most congregation members
- Curiosity and delight
- Respect
- Measurable quantities

6. **Assessment doesn't eliminate "best hunches."** When you count your assets for mission-funding, they complement your best guesses about the congregation. One note: You should also be ready to be surprised *and* to change your mind about what you think is true.

7. **Trust the congregation to tell the truth.** Perhaps the best way to assess what is true is to ask. Surveys, interviews, focus groups – these all give you direct evidence of what may be true about the congregation. People are honored – and honest -- when you ask them about their God-given attitudes about living their lives to God's glory.

8. **The numbers need interpreting.** Once quantified, the congregation's assets for mission-funding still need a careful, appreciative interpretation. What do percentages really reveal? What changes can you see? How might you explain the data? How can you cross-check what you believe to be true?

9. **After assessment: decisions and actions.** "That's interesting!" is not the end result of an assessment process. "Because this is true, what shall we do together?" is a better direction.

10. **Assessment requires thanksgiving.** You begin assessing your congregation's funding ministry with the assumption that God gives all gifts to God's people. You end the process with the same attitude, only now graced with some genuine amazement and new, specific reasons to thank God for the people of your congregation.

11. **Assessment can be fun.** You may be surprised and delighted. You may turn up unexpected results. You may see new ways to describe the congregation. You may learn to admire people for new reasons. You may be motivated away from despair, boredom or presumed neediness.

PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT
Worksheet

Assessment isn't necessarily an easy task, especially if you don't prepare yourself for what lies ahead. Use this worksheet as a way of shaping assessment in your congregation. Complete these items as fully as possible as one way to start your planning.

1. **What we already know to be true about our congregation's funding of God's mission (and how we know):** _______________
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   ______
2. **What we probably don't know very much about (and why we don't know):**____
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   ______
3. **One element of our funding ministry that would be interesting or enjoyable to assess (and why):** ___________________________
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4. **One assessment tool we might use (and why):** _______________
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