Faith Practices
1. Provide questions each week related to the sermon theme for people to think about or discuss with others.

2. Meet in small groups after Lenten, Advent or other services to discuss questions.

3. Don’t serve the food right away when you gather for a picnic, potluck or other meal. Have leaders facilitate mingling with a question that encourages all to share a faith story. Talk to people you don’t know really well. Finally, ask a layperson to lead the mealtime prayer.

4. Match Sunday school or other group topics with preaching texts so people not only hear the message but also process it. People remember almost all of what they say—almost none of what they hear.

5. Ask people questions about times in their lives that relate to the theme of a text (healing, reconciliation, etc.). Consider providing crayons so people can draw pictures of the incidents before they share. This prep time can help many people share more easily. In groups of two, ask people to share their stories or their drawings. Together pray, thanking God.

6. Encourage people to turn to their neighbor during sermons and spend a few minutes sharing what they think about a topic.

7. Consider having some “team” sermons, where a preacher assembles a panel of members who sit up front in a talk-show format. By acting as an interviewer, the preacher can help others share in a safe, effective way.

8. Videotape interviews of members telling their stories in safe spaces. Edit them into clips of helpful things people said. Use these during worship, sermons or other aspects of church life.

9. Create accountability times where people check in weekly with partners. Have them share how they did this week at speaking about their faith. What can they celebrate? Did they miss any appropriate opportunities? Have them pray together and send them out again for the next week or month.

10. Start council, committee or other meetings with a check-in time that is faith-based conversation. Have the leader ask people to share significant events in their lives and what they think God was doing. Close this time with a prayer that gathers the stories and lifts them to God before moving on to business.

Author bio:
Daubert is an ELCA pastor who lives in Elgin, Ill., and is a managing partner of Day 8 Strategies.
our denomination faces unprecedented challenges today. Social, technological and economic upheavals in the last 50 years have totally changed the religious landscape, and many of our congregations suffer from dwindling participation and shaky finances. But if we focus on growing people, we won’t have to worry about growing our churches.

Exercise 1: Attendance dropping
From 2002 to 2012, attendance at ELCA churches declined by 28.9 percent.
• Does the ELCA need to change?
• What will happen if we don’t?
• Has attendance at your congregation dropped in that same time period (consult your church trend report on the ELCA website at www.elca.org)?
• Does your congregation need to change?
• What will happen if your congregation doesn’t change?
• Do the statistics serve as a wake-up call?
• What keeps us sleeping?

Exercise 2: Does church = building?
When some people think of church, they primarily think of the building where they gather, worship and fellowship. So belonging to a church is primarily belonging to the building.
• Have you observed this? Have you felt it yourself?
• Does that help explain why many people resist changes to the congregation’s building, and why they leave money exclusively for building upkeep?
• Is the “church” a building?
• If “church” is not a building, what is it?
• If a tornado destroyed your building, would you still have a congregation?
• If your church burned down tomorrow, would your community notice anything different?
• Is love for the building a hindrance to spiritual growth in your congregation?
• How can your congregation be more than a building?
• How can your congregation help people see the “church” beyond the building?

Exercise 3: The Great Commission
Read the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, which are the final words that Jesus gives his disciples in that Gospel.
• What does he tell them to do?
• What are the specific tasks he outlines in order to make disciples?
• Do you consider yourself a disciple or a church member?
• What are the characteristics of a disciple?
• What are the characteristics of a church member?
• In a perfect world (and church!) would there be a difference?
• Is your congregation more interested in making church members or making disciples?
• If a church is more interested in making disciples, do you think its leaders have to worry about membership?

Exercise 4: Baptismal vows
In the rite of affirmation of baptism, Lutherans vow to continue in the covenant God made with them at baptism (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 236), promising specifically “to live among God’s faithful people; to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper; to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; to serve all people, following the example of Jesus; and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.” Review each of these promises.
• If a church member takes these vows seriously, how would that change her life?
• Would he stay “just” a church member for long?
• Could these vows, reworded just a little bit, serve as a good definition of discipleship (a disciple lives among God’s faithful people; hears the word of God …)?
• Do congregations generally inspire, educate and equip people to live out these baptismal vows?
• Does your congregation do these things to help you live out those vows?
• How could your congregation do better?

Author bio:
Blezard is an assistant to the bishop of the Lower Susquehanna Synod. He has a master of divinity degree from Boston University and did subsequent study at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Pa.) and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.
When Sue, wife and mother of two, was being treated for stage 4 sinus cancer at age 38, she was often plagued with overwhelming anxiety. Knowing that she had no control over cancer or the outcome of her treatment options, she would run upstairs to her bedroom and fall to her knees.

“I knew in my head I had no control over my circumstances, but prayer was the one way I could still do something whether or not my prayers were answered,” she said. “It was my way of getting everything off of my chest. It helped me to express my anger, my fear and my anxiety to God about what was going on. When I was finished, I felt like I was able to face my life and take on whatever was ahead of me. I felt more peaceful, more levelheaded and more brave. I pleaded my case before God and as a result was able to face whatever was going to happen ... good or bad.”

Through honest and sometimes desperate conversations with God, Sue discovered a mysterious paradox: though things rarely went the way she wanted, through prayer she was changed and made new.

“Through prayer, I found what I needed to go on,” she said. “I don’t know how anyone could go through a difficult circumstance without the privilege of talking to God.”

We all pray. We ask for help finding lost car keys. We beseech God to intervene with difficult people and impossible relationships. We ask for protection from tornadoes, earthquakes and other natural disasters that threaten to destroy homes and entire personal histories. We beg for healing from multiple sclerosis, addictions and other “incurables.” We plead for peace between parents, for peace in the Middle East, and for HIV orphans in Africa. We pray for simple blessings on our lives and homes, blessings on bread and wine, on babies, new beginnings and dreams.

Every day and in many ways (on our knees, in our cars, in bed at night) we pray for God’s active help and presence in our lives. But through all of our praying, pleading, beseeching and begging, it’s easy to miss that perhaps a greater miracle is taking place. Is it possible that through prayer, God is doing a creative work in us?

Mary’s miracle
Mary was eager to share a Mother’s Day walk with her family. It was her only request for the day: to share the beauty of her newly discovered running path with her husband and three kids. But when they woke up early that morning, ominous storm clouds hovered on the horizon.

“It was 8 a.m. and I ran around the house shouting for everyone to get dressed,” she said. “I figured if everyone hurried, we could get our two-mile walk in before getting doused. But by the time we finally hit our walking path I was feeling bent out of shape, angry, frustrated. I prayed, ‘Please, God, hold back the rain. With my crazy work schedule we don’t get many special days together and I want to enjoy this.’”

As Mary prayed, she noticed her breathing relax, her jaw unclench and something in her “let go.”

“Prayer shifted my need to control everything, and I entered into the moment in a new way. I soaked up the laughter of my husband and kids as they spotted an otter, tracked deer through the woods, threw rocks in the pond and listened to woodpeckers tapping on trees. When the
rain held off, splattering big drops on my face only moments before we returned to the driveway, I prayed again, “Thank you, God, for holding off the rain. But thank you even more for lifting my worries and allowing a miracle in me.”

The creative work of Christ
How beautiful it is that through prayer, God takes our expressions of worry, despair, anger and fear and, like a poem, crafts them so carefully and creatively, giving them meter and meaning. Ephesians 2:10 suggests we are God’s “workmanship” created in Christ Jesus. The Greek word for workmanship (poiema) translates somewhat awkwardly but beautifully as poem, from which we derive our English word. “We are God’s poem, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

Jesus Christ, “The Word”—the same Word that was “in the beginning,” continues to hover over our lives today with boundless artistic possibility as a poet, sculptor, writer, painter, artist-friend. The text of 2 Corinthians 5:17 refers to anyone in Christ as a “new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” Isaiah 64:8 reminds us: “We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of God’s hand.”

These Scriptures (among many) point to the truth that through Christ God remains at work in us, creatively. We approach God with our frustrations, sticky situations fix-it-please requests, and legitimate anger about suffering, oppression and injustice—all the while our Creator is shaping, creating, writing, sculpting and painting more than just the people and circumstances we pray about. A person prays, said Augustine, “that he himself may be constructed, not that God may be instructed.”

Construct me please!
When the lame man (Mark 2:1-12) heard there was a miracle worker in town, perhaps his heart jumped with all the strength that had failed his paralyzed body for years. Maybe he dared to dream again that he could work in the fields, chase after his children, hold his wife. If only he could find opportunity to talk to this rabbi. Tell him exactly what had happened to him. Tell Jesus about his needs.

Knowing his desire to talk with Jesus face to face, his friends picked up his stretcher-mat and carried him to the home where Jesus was teaching. The crowds pressed in on all sides of the small building, forcing the man’s friends to get creative. They dug a hole in the roof and used ropes to lower his mat to the feet of Jesus.

Jesus looked at the bold man with compassion, seemingly aware of his exact need. Then he stooped down, touched his shoulder, and said, “My son, your sins are forgiven” (verse 5). Imagine the man’s awkward surprise. Forgiven?

Whenever we come to God with our list of needed “fixes,” we are given far more than we came to get. Sometimes we catch glimpses of greater spiritual realities, receiving words of healing we didn’t even know we needed. Sometimes our worries are lifted, or our vision cleared. As we approach the throne of grace, we can trust that Christ is always answering our divine conversations with brushstrokes of mercy, forgiveness, grace and love.

And, as author Philip Yancey says, that in and of itself may be the most significant purpose of prayer: “To let our true selves be loved by God.”

Author bio:
Mueller is a member of Family of Christ Lutheran Church, Chanhassen, Minn. (www.thewordgirls.com).
Getting to what really matters

All our work flows from being a church first, foremost

When I served a parish in Ashtabula, Ohio, I had the opportunity to be part of a bond issue campaign for the school system. Those of you who have served in a similar capacity know the bruising intensity of local school politics. The French Revolution pales in comparison.

On our first try the bond issue failed by a narrow margin. On our second try we had our heads handed to us. We decided to hire a consultant. At a strategy meeting the consultant asked us what we thought was the one thing we needed to do in order to pass the bond issue. We had all kinds of ideas: better campaign literature, more radio ads, more coverage in the local paper, compelling photos of adorable but underserved children, puppies. The consultant listened until we ran out of ideas. “No,” he said. “The one thing you need to do to pass the bond issue is to have one more vote than the opposition.”

The main thing is the main thing.

All of the ideas we had come up with (well, maybe not the puppies) were means to pass the bond issue. If advertising or publicity became our primary focus we would be distracted from our goal. Stating the simple fact that all we needed to do was to get one more vote than the opposition brought clarity to the campaign.

We do many wonderful and important things together as the ELCA. We alleviate hunger, we’re stopping malaria, we give voice to the most vulnerable in our society, we shelter the homeless, we heal the sick, we rebuild communities after disaster strikes, we work for justice. I am not suggesting that we stop doing any of this. But we must be clear that we are church first. We aren’t a nongovernmental organization. We aren’t the government. We aren’t the American Cancer Society.

Baptism makes a difference and makes us different. We are in Christ. Baptism means the death of our old self. This implies sacrifice. It should also mean that we as church do not fit in with the surrounding culture. There are many socially conscious, kindhearted, generous, morally upright, compassionate atheists in the world. How are we distinguishable from them? If our life together consists primarily of being affirmed by God’s unconditional love and doing works of justice and charity without understanding that God has brought about the transformation of justified sinners through the costly grace of the crucified Christ, then we are not church.

How are we to live as church first? This is how I see it. At the center of our life together is worship and at the center of our worship is the crucified and risen Christ. When we gather for worship we turn our gaze away from ourselves to the source of our life and hope and salvation. When we gather for worship we are encountered by the living God in Scripture, proclamation of the gospel and the sacraments. God meets us and transforms us. We taste, touch and see the love of God in Christ. Sinners are forgiven. Freed from the incessant human striving for self-justification we can be “lost in wonder, love and praise” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 631).

We are a community of spiritual discernment. Employing secular business strategies can be very helpful to the church so long as they are used in service to God. But as church it is important that we understand the difference between decision-making and discernment.

Decision-making is something we do. Discernment is something we receive from the Spirit. Paul takes an entire chapter (1 Corinthians 2) explaining this. We need to move beyond reliance on human thinking and strategizing to a place of deep listening—intentional, intense, disciplined attending to God.

We are a community of faith. Our members, congregations, synods and churchwide organization need to be intentional about incorporating prayer, worship, Scripture study, silence and giving into daily life. We are in the faith formation business; not to get more members, not to get more market share, but to know Christ and Christ crucified.

We are church first. All of our work flows from this. Let’s keep the main thing the main thing.
Getting the *word* out

We give thanks to God for all of the individuals, congregations, synods, and churchwide ministries and institutions for their deep and abiding commitment to God’s transforming word in Christ, in proclamation and in Scripture!

The Book of Faith initiative is a continuing priority of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, dedicated to encouraging all ministries and people of the church to continually renew and enrich our broad and deep engagement with Scripture for our own sakes and for the sake of the world.

The Book of Faith initiative has operated using a decentralized, grassroots approach centered on our common vision in which all are invited to *open Scripture* and *join the conversation*. We invite leaders to continue and boldly further this effort in their places of involvement.

From the beginning, the goal of the initiative has been twofold:

1. to meet the continuing challenge of widespread biblical illiteracy and
2. to renew the teaching of our rich theological heritage of scriptural understanding, interpretation and engagement.

To help realize the above goals and address the challenges listed below, we want to further encourage engagement of Scripture, especially using the “multiple lenses” approach. We seek your help and support as partners in this effort, in addressing the challenges that are currently serving to shape our calling. Some of the larger challenges are:

- The growing number of people in society claiming to be “spiritual but not religious.”
- The need to address and learn from the great variety of cultures that make up this church and world.
- The role of the Bible in mission outreach.
- The importance of family and home as centers of faith development.
- The need for creative use of social media.
- Continued biblical illiteracy.

Despite the challenges, Christ is present as we engage Scripture and this promise calls us forward together. Please join us in getting the word out and in encouraging all to *open Scripture* and *join the conversation*!

**Learn more:** [www.bookoffaith.org](http://www.bookoffaith.org)  [@bookoffaith](http://twitter.com/bookoffaith)  [#bookoffaith](http://twitter.com/bookoffaith)
Four lenses for engaging Scripture.
Open Scripture. Join the conversation.

The initiative has emphasized that biblical engagement is greatly enriched by the use of multiple lenses in conversation with Scripture and other people. This suggested method is centered on four ways of reading the Bible and asking questions: devotional, historical, literary and theological reading.

**DEVOTIONAL**
We begin. We read, ask questions, reflect on the meaning of the Bible from wherever we are—in place, time or state of mind. No matter where we are, our Book of Faith meets us there.

**LITERARY**
We pay close attention to how the passage is written. We notice what kind of literature it is. We notice all the details, themes, characters, story line, poetry and logic. We compare and contrast these with our understanding and experience of life. In this process we discover meaning.

**HISTORICAL**
We seek to understand the world of the Bible. We explore the world of the writers and the original readers, the rulers, slaves, women, men and children. All the people in our Book of Faith. How do we understand their social and cultural contexts? How were their lives different from or the same as ours today?

**THEOLOGICAL**
As we open Scripture and join the conversation, we ask our deepest questions and listen for God’s voice. We hear God’s demands as well as God’s words of comfort and promise. We see Christ alive yesterday and today. We feel the movement of the Spirit and are moved to respond. God is present in the word.
The offering moment in Christian worship is undergoing a rapid sea change. The advent of online giving, cash and credit card giving kiosks in some churches, less frequent worship attendance than a generation ago, and widespread ignorance about stewardship among newer Christians means some stark new realities. One can be sitting in the 10th row of a full church and see a nearly empty offering plate go by.

“I guess they don’t give very much in this church,” a surprised guest notes. “It looks like a few people leave small tips.”

Paltry offerings in dinky offering plates are a far cry from the fresh eggs, live chickens, bead jewelry and sundry personal items that Christians in other parts of the world delight in bringing forward. I remember the 15-minute offering “moments” when I lived in Africa. Shocking to many Western believers, there still are Christians who take the offering admonitions in the book of Exodus seriously: “No one shall appear before me empty-handed” (23:15).

For an offering to be an offering, it deserves to represent our best foot forward. We are returning to the Lord what we believe we first received as remarkable blessing. This blessing is why choirs diligently rehearse their offering anthem. It’s why organists and band leaders practice during the week. It’s even why a mother will whisper to her 12-year-old just before he or she steps into an acolyte robe, “You need to tie your sneakers.”

Some congregations and pastors are oddly squeamish about money. They don’t want to talk about it. The very sound of the word money must grate against their holy sensibilities. Never mind that money does so many wonderful things, or that giving it away is one of the most vivid expressions of faith we know. For reasons that aren’t entirely clear to me, the mere sight of cash and giving envelopes creates embarrassment for some church communities. Otherwise faith-filled people can treat money as if it’s dirty, or too personal, to have a rightful place in the sanctuary.

“We need to make our offerings a bit more special. We need to speak of the offering as a joyful, grateful act of gratitude. Let’s make our offerings a little bit more exciting.”

When we believe we first received so remarkable a blessing, we want to make sure our offering reflects that. It’s important that we remember our offering is not just money, but an act of faith. It’s a way of giving thanks for all we have been given. It’s a way of saying, “I will do this in memory of him.”

Offerings glorify God—you get to view your life as a blessing and gift. Your offering is what glorifies God. It’s a way of saying, “I will do this in memory of him.”

The offering moment in Christian worship is undeveloped.
moving toward a balance of sharing 10 percent of income, saving 10 percent and spending 80 percent (10-10-80). The firstfruits practice calls us to adjust our financial behaviors by 1 percent of our income each year until reaching the overall goal of 10-10-80.

Firstfruits giving (sharing) creates a culture of humility by moving ourselves out of the center and making God the focal point in our life (relational). Because of the size of such a gift, we will need to budget for adjustments (sacrifice) in some areas of our life and in our core values so others might discover a changed and redeemed life, hope and hospitality (life-giving). This model encourages every follower of Jesus joyously to rest in a loving relationship with God, recognize and generously use all gifts in a loving relationship with God.

Common Themes

Congregations living generously reflect common themes in their giving-education methods. They:

• Establish generosity as an act of worship. Rooting our giving in our relationship with God and the faith community assures that our relationship with God and the faith community is connected with sacrificial sharing and life-giving purpose. Even people who share financial gifts electronically will find creative ways to participate in the offering by using check boxes on properly marked offering envelopes and other means.

• Concentrate on generosity. People give to congregations for different reasons than they do for secular causes. The cultivation of a generous heart is essential to good stewardship and leads away from the fundraising model. Setting a budget and asking people to make a gift to support it is a transactional model that will support people to make a gift to support it instead of growing a budget and asking God to work on our behalf. We need an accountability for our stewardship and an account of our stewardship that people can understand. Religious generosity is foundational to discipleship.

• Write the joy-filled vision that sings. Stewards in all generations care that where they give is a strong, focused, future-oriented ministry. A clearly articulated and internalized sense of God's mission is key to the creation of a generous culture. The accountability for God's preferred future strengthens relationships and paves the way for sacrificial giving.

• Host a financial stewardship venture four times each year. Provide multiple venues through which Jesus’ followers reflect on their relationship with God and the faith community. Financial stewardship ventures are opportunities for changing the face of every follower of Jesus to reflect and act on the connection between living generously and living richly in faith toward God.

Author Bio:

Schantzenbach, an ELCA pastor, is an assistant to the bishop in the New Jersey Synod and a stewardship specialist. He is committed to the practice of biblical generosity. When generosity is front and center, our communities can more easily be known for their generosity and not for their money. Our congregations will become the church, not for God but with God and the faith community.
Changing the Face of Stewardship to Live Rightly in Faith Toward God

Generosity says it all.

Growing Stewards

Generosity, the operative virtue in consumer culture's sirens around us. We steer through the lure of the consumer culture's greed. We know that God's gift was purposeful. God's gift was life-giving and thus our giving can only be life-giving and thus our giving can only be life-giving. God's gift was life-giving and thus our giving can only be life-giving. God's gift was purposeful. God's gift was the world.

The hard work of stewardship is characterized by God's relational with us, sacrificial sharing the term stewardship means the power of God's love. Generous stewardship is a restoration of something to its rightful owner. The giver is called upon to exercise a sense of fairness, a propensity to giving back creates and empowers a relationship with Jesus Christ, and transforms the individual to share. Jesus Christ, and transforms the individual to share. Jesus Christ, and transforms the individual to share.

Recall John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” God didn't want the fool. God's only Son. God's forfeited God's only Son. God's only Son for the world and redeemed by Christ. For many Christ's love is being demanded of you. A closer reading of that story in the Greek text supports a life dominated by market research. The giver is called upon to exercise a sense of fairness, a propensity to giving back creates and empowers a sense of sharing, a sense of giving.

God gave sacrificially so we are free to give generously. The great narratives in stewardship are the ample goods. The ample goods are the “ample goods.” They are our “ample goods.”

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Help your children learn more about the difference between a need and a want. Together, do an inventory of what they have and what they want. Talk about why you support causes. Talk about why you support a nonprofit organization. Often, children will try to help others who are struggling. Help them find the right organizations to support and why those organizations are important. Help them understand how their donations make a difference in people’s lives.

When you shop for your children, why not shop for a gift that will make a difference in someone else’s life? The ELCA Good Gifts catalog offers many different ways to honor friends and loved ones with gifts that will make a difference in the world. With more than 50 different giving options—from $10 to help a family escape poverty to a scholarship to help a young leader attend an ELCA seminary—there’s something for everyone on your list. The catalog is also a great resource for youth groups and adults who use the catalog during Sunday school classes. Your congregation Sunday school class or youth group might also want to support the work of ELCA Scholastic Key Leaders. Visit www.elca.org/goodgifts to shop in the catalog online.

**Author Bio:**

Cashen, an ELCA pastor, lives in Houston where she works as an ELCA Stewardship Key Leader and an ELCA Stewardship Key Leader and an ELCA Stewardship Key Leader and an ELCA Stewardship Key Leader and an ELCA Stewardship Key Leader.
There are no guarantees that generous parents will raise generous children.

Even parents who intentionally practice and teach faithful stewardship habits cannot be assured their children will be equally motivated to be good stewards in their adult years.

But there are things parents can do to influence their children’s attitudes and actions as co-stewards of the household. The annual “What do you want for Christmas?” routine is a prime time.

Parents need not become the Grinches who deny Christmas. Rather, they can aim for a better balance between their children’s focus on what they get for Christmas with what they’ll give. Encourage your children to think of ways they can give—using their own resources of time, labor or things of value they can give. How about you give a gift to others in response to God’s gift of the Christ child?

The Christmas season provides wonderful opportunities to talk about how we give to others in response to God’s gift of the Christ child. But remember, generosity should be expressed throughout the year, not just during the holiday season. For example, during the winter season, you can talk about giving to others who are less fortunate. This can be done through gifts, time, or talents.

By Kathy Haugen Cashen
Author bio:

Powell is professor of New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio.

happy lives, but we all know that money doesn't guarantee happiness. We need discernment to discover how much is enough. And though no one can ever make that decision for another, the counsel and example of other believers can be helpful, along with the teaching of Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit.

Giving

The New Testament commends giving of two types: support and sacrifice. It's the duty of every believer to support the religious community or institution of which he or she is a part. Paul suggests that such giving be proportionate to income and circumstances (2 Corinthians 8:3, 11). It is also the duty of every believer to give away a significant portion of their income as a sacrifice of love, gratitude, and praise. In the New Testament, the magi bring gifts to celebrate Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:1-12), and one woman expresses her devotion to Jesus by pouring expensive ointment on him (Mark 14:3-9) and another gives her last penny to the temple treasury (Mark 12:41-44).

In the modern church, our Sunday offerings may be occasions for both types of giving: we are invited to make gifts that will support the congregation and its mission, and we are encouraged to make offerings of praise and thanksgiving from hearts filled with love for God and our fellow believers.

Mark Allan Powell

A Pentecostal pastor told me this story about giving.

“When I was 8 years old, I lived in a small town and one day, my mother sent me to the florist to buy flowers for the family table. I remember being embarrassed as I walked home with the flowers, worried that my friends might see me and make fun of me for carrying flowers. But I did it, because it was my duty.

Ten years later, I was in love with a young woman who lived in that town. I went to the same florist, bought her flowers and walked some of the same streets. Though I knew that she was someone I loved, I did it because I was an obedient son—because I wanted to honor my mother, and I wanted to make my own offerings to the family. I was determined to prove to my friends that I was more than just a child.

When I was 8 years old, I thought about the difference between my duty and my delight. I wanted to make my offerings to the family, but I wanted to make my offerings to the woman I loved. The difference was clear: my duty was to be obedient, and my delight was to be in love.

I think about this story every time the offering plates come around in church. It's my duty to give money to support my congregation—and sometimes I do that. But other times, I'm eager to give my offering: how pleased God is to receive whatever we offer, and how fortunate we are to be people who have the opportunity to make sacrifices of love, gratitude, and praise.
Good news of stewardship

By Mark Allan Powell

New Testament has a lot to say about it, as well as generous giving

By Mark Allan Powell

Growing Stewards Growing Stewards

and generous giving.

What does the New Testament have to say about stewardship? Stewards are not their own. They are allowed to make full use of the owner's property. It is cost God a great deal to obtain us. God did not only create us, but also bought us (Colossians 3:18). He is our Father who loves us. We are not only beloved to God, we are also sons and daughters to God. We are dead to sin and alive in Christ Jesus. The promises of God are yes and amen, living in the New Testament.

There is no shortage of teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching about the New Testament. Lutherans are no different. They are encouraged to read and study the New Testament as a way to become better stewards. The New Testament teaches us that we are not only stewards of our own time, talents and treasures, but also stewards of the good news, inspiring trust, gratitude and generosity. The New Testament encourages us to use our money, time and talents in a way that reflects our faith and values. It invites us to live a life that is more with less, putting others first and putting God first. The New Testament teaches us that we are not only stewards of our own lives, but also stewards of the lives of others. It invites us to be good stewards of all that we have been given, including our time, talents and treasures.

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