

The Role of Faithful Stewards in Stewardship Ministry

*Adapted by Keith A. Mundy
from "The Role of Rostered Leaders in Stewardship Ministry"
by Pastor Charles R. Lane*

BECOMING A STEWARD LEADER IS OFTEN NOT THE FIRST ROLE an appointed, elected, or volunteer leader thinks about. Yet, other people begin looking to a leader almost immediately as an example of good stewardship in the life of the congregation. Good leaders recognize this and grasp a vision beyond themselves. Sometimes this vision centers on a specific project or area of responsibility. Sometimes it involves serving on a board, a council, or committee. But, most importantly, a steward leader recognizes that everything is a gift from God. Some of these gifts are more challenging to manage than others.

Within their understanding of the vision and mission of the congregation, leaders also grasp certain realities. There is a regular schedule for worship, Sunday school, confirmation, and meetings. There is a staff with responsibilities. There is a facility to maintain. There is a community to serve. There is a budget or spending plan to manage and live within. All of these realities are examined regularly through the faithful, hopeful, and loving eyes of the congregation and staff.

As a leader one often learns very quickly about “taboos” or subjects that are not openly discussed. First, there may be societal taboos that say sex, money, and politics are not suitable topics for public conversation. Second, there may be taboos within the life of the congregation. For example, one taboo may make a distinction between the spiritual matters of faith and the business matters of the church. Another may suggest it is not appropriate to talk about “money” or “tithing.”

Author Loren Mead talks about a “conspiracy of silence” that often exists within a congregation. This conspiracy is often an unspoken agreement that everyone will be more comfortable if certain words or topics are not talked about in the congregation, especially by the pastor. As long as this “conspiracy of silence” holds about money, the congregation can imagine that a financial and spiritual division exists. This division may be lived out in a simple statement—it is too easy to cross the line from preaching and teaching to meddling. Strong stewardship leaders recognize Jesus talked about money and material possessions more often than baptism, prayer, faith, and love combined. Money may be a difficult subject to discuss, but it cannot be faithfully avoided. For some this may be difficult because their own stewardship house may be so firmly established or in such disarray there is a strong reluctance to hold their situation up to the light of scriptures. As long as this division exists, there is a barrier in the important relationship with Jesus Christ.

Addressing taboos is one example of when a steward leader can demonstrate spiritual maturity. When a person shows both courage and kindness in addressing difficult issues, a sense of maturity is present. This may mean showing a non-anxious presence during a heated discussion rather than adding inflammatory comments or taking premature action. Prudent action often involves listening, prayer, conversation, and reflection.



Talking about stewardship is sometimes difficult because some people feel they do not have very much. Individuals, entire households, and even congregations can have feelings of inadequacy that influence their attitudes and actions. In some communities a perception of scarcity may exist. It may be true that some communities and families do not have today what they had in the past, or what their neighbors do. However, God has blessed each person, each family, and each community with gifts. An attitude or theology of abundance invites each person to look for these gifts. One might think of the glass filled to the midpoint with water. Is it half-full or half-empty? Good stewards are skilled at identifying the assets while recognizing that behind every need is a gift and an opportunity.

As one's leadership experience grows, one becomes aware of a broader conceptual knowledge of issues and situations. An important part of this conceptual knowledge is recognizing that stewardship is about money and possessions, but it is not only about money and possessions. How would you describe stewardship in your life or congregation? One description reads: *Stewardship is about how each person uses the time, talents, and resources that God has entrusted to them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ and to serve God.*

While we may talk about giving, saving, spending, debt management, and financial planning in connection with money leadership, being a good leader involves a deeper understanding of the role of steward. This would include recognizing skills and gifts of the Holy Spirit, earthkeeping, lifestyle choices, and life planning. Being called as a leader is based on individual gifts, life priorities, and a discernment process that resulted in an affirmative response to God's question of Isaiah—"Whom shall I send?"

Faithful stewards recognize that authenticity and integrity are important traits for effective leadership. This means focusing on keeping the commandments and living a life grounded in giving, praying, worshipping, serving, learning, inviting, and encouraging, where integrity is reflected in daily life. While no leader can be perfect in all of these areas, to be effective also means being authentic in striving to faithfully grow in each of these practices. Authenticity means living out these practices in real ways within the community of faith.

For example, some congregations expect leaders to give a tithe. The first question asked may be, "What is a tithe?" This term is from the Old Testament. God instructs Moses to tell the people to give a tithe or one tenth of what they have received to God (Numbers 18:24–28). Nehemiah reminded the people about giving a tithe to the house of the Lord (Nehemiah 10:35–39). Malachi wrote about bringing a full tithe to the storehouse so God can pour down "overflowing blessings" (Malachi 3:8–12). Jesus used the tithe as an example of how the Pharisees interpret the Law (Luke 11:42, Luke 18:12). Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 8:12) about giving in proportion to what one has received, and it will be acceptable.

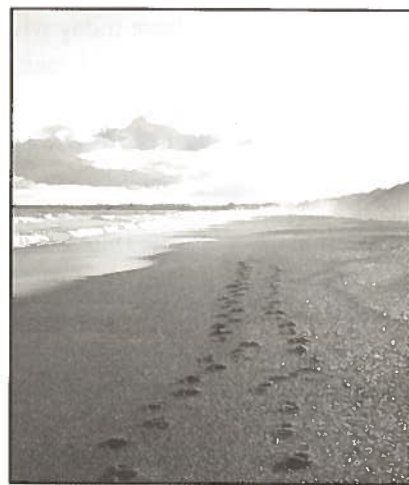
As a leader, are you growing toward a tithe, tithing, or moving beyond a tithe? Some people are blessed to be able to grow beyond a tithe. Others are faithful in their struggle to grow toward a tithe. For most households this is not a financial issue of "can it be done?" but a faith issue of "is it a priority?" You may recall the stories of the rich young ruler and the widow's mite. Is it easier to give all you have or a sacrificial portion? What is God asking of you?

How should a faithful steward talk about money? How should a faithful steward be involved in the stewardship ministry of the congregation? In some congregations, this occurs very carefully and very gradually. In other congregations, circumstances may invite a rapid ascent to a leadership role. An early step in this process should be to have an open and candid conversation about stewardship and leadership with the pastor(s).

Money Leadership for Thriving Congregations

HERE ARE SOME HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW FAITHFUL STEWARDS CAN BE HEALTHY STEWARDSHIP LEADERS IN THE CONGREGATION:

- ✧ Support the pastor(s) in their teaching and preaching on stewardship texts and issues. Since the Gospels talk so much about money and possessions it is inevitable that the assigned Gospel will occasionally contain one of these passages. When this happens, the pastor should preach on the text forthrightly. It is important to note that these texts will not lead anyone to talk about the need of the church to receive. Rather, these texts will talk about the need of each person to consider their blessings in the light of their relationship with Jesus, and the need of each person to respond generously from that which God has entrusted to them. This is an important distinction, and can blunt some of the criticism that the pastor is always asking for money.
- ✧ Become a part of the stewardship leadership team. When someone talks about the stewardship team by saying, “they do this,” it is evident stewardship ministry is not owned by the leaders and members. Stewardship ministry is too important to the spiritual lives of the members of the congregation for the pastor to be the only steward leader, and no lay person can lead stewardship on his/her own. Because of his or her biblical and theological training, the pastor is uniquely positioned to keep the stewardship team on track in their understanding of being God’s stewards. Faithful stewards can support the pastor(s) and engage in positive conversation about a holistic stewardship ministry.
- ✧ Faithful stewards should model effective stewardship. Despite all the cultural taboos, faithful stewards listen for opportunities to talk about money in appropriate ways, and to talk about their personal financial stewardship. If a person is a tither, the joy of this faithful experience should be shared with others. One stewardship mentor, Pastor Dan Sander, talked so honestly and openly about money and his personal stewardship that it never occurred to anyone that they should not be tithing also. His authentic and caring candor defused the taboos of the culture.
- ✧ Consider becoming a mentor to another person or household. There are many people new to the faith or who struggle in their practices. Your faith and experiences can be a guide and inspiration to others. This may begin as an informal relationship by simply answering some questions. Be open to a more formal relationship that could include Bible study, prayer, and specific topics.
- ✧ Respect the privacy and confidentiality of members’ giving. There may be occasions when faithful stewards become aware of or are provided specific data about contributions by households. This should be respected as confidential information and not shared freely with others. Faithful stewards encourage individuals to share their stories about faith experiences and giving, but only retell such stories with permission.
- ✧ Over time you will learn who is comfortable talking about their personal stewardship and who is not. Sometimes the most quiet people are also the most generous givers. Sometimes the ones who object the most to talk about money are the most reluctant givers. Listen and watch. At some point during the year, take a few minutes to talk with faithful stewards about their decisions and lifestyle. Perhaps this is an informal meal together or a more formal gathering of tithers within the congregation. The focus of these conversations is not how much is given, but how God has blessed us and how our giving supports God’s work.



The role of a faithful steward is very important to the life of the congregation. This role may be combined with other roles—usher, musician, teacher, choir member, janitor, or pastor. There will always be people who do not want to talk about stewardship because of the connection to money. Some of these people will be people of influence in the congregation. They may also be the business leaders of the community who have assumed prominent roles in the “business” life of the congregation. Scripture makes it clear there is an intimate relationship between one’s faith in Jesus and the use of money and possessions. Faithful stewards are faithful to scripture, the mission of the congregation, and pastoral leadership. At times it may be necessary to proceed with caution. But for faithful stewards, the abdication of the role as a leader in stewardship ministry is simply not an option.

