



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

*You're receiving this email because you or your congregation indicated you are a stewardship leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). If you'd prefer to unsubscribe from this newsletter, please [let us know](#).*

Dear friend in Christ,

Instead of growing time, talents, and treasure, let's say we were farmers and we were interested in raising the output of our farm. Here are some options: We could increase the number of plants. We could grow better quality, higher yielding plants. Or, we could get more efficient at harvesting at the end of the growing season. All other things being equal, increasing any or all of these would produce more. Realize though that the first two approaches actually grow more, while better harvesting does not.



Think about the people in your church using this graphic, from the non-givers on the left, to the extravagant givers on the right. Maybe you think about this more broadly than just giving, using a term like participation or commitment. Perhaps you talk about congregant growth the way ELCA Pastor Michael Peck does from observer to participant to partner to leader, and then to developer. In any case, inspiring change is what faith formation and discipleship are all about. Is it safe to say that all we do as a church is dependent on keeping the pipeline full of emerging disciples?

So how are we approaching stewardship, as growers or harvesters or both?

If your congregation is typical, 20 percent of members do 80 percent of the giving, so perhaps the best strategy is to focus on better harvesting from that 20 percent. That might be easier in the short run because growing disciples takes time, and it means change. What about the longer run – and by the way – what if the longer run is now? If our challenge is that our higher yielding plants are not getting replenished, it might be time to make the case that our stewardship challenges are really faith formation and discipleship challenges. The bigger opportunity will be moving people from no faith to a stronger faith that could be

reflected in growing giving from \$5, \$10, 10 percent or 100 percent. The question of course is how to make that happen. Hopefully this issue of stewardNet provides some food for thought for you and your ministry.

We are a church that is energized by lively engagement in our faith and life. Thank you for doing God's work with a generous heart!

In Christ's service,

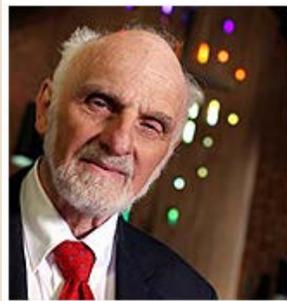
Steve Oelschlager  
Stewardship Program Coordinator  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

P.S. Help us grow our network! Be sure to encourage others who would benefit to subscribe to stewardNet by visiting [www.ELCA.org/growingstewards](http://www.ELCA.org/growingstewards).

### Doing more sowing

Walter Brueggemann on evangelism

For starters, why would anyone even want to begin a life of faith and what does the church have to offer as an invitation? What is our vision and our mission? Is it to find more people that can greet, usher, and help us pay the bills, or is it to change lives and make the world a better place? Are we passionate about that vision and can we articulate it with a sense of confidence, or do we need to have our pastor step in and do that for us? In this [short clip](#) from Walter Brueggemann, he suggests that evangelism is about lifting up a shared way of living that contradicts the prevailing values of our world, knowing that those worldly values will never give us what we want. [Read](#) the *Paradox of our Time* for a greater sense of where "conventional wisdom" has taken us.



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### Passing on faith to our kids

Anne Lammott on faith and her son, from "[Traveling Mercies](#)"

The main reason is that I want to give him what I found in the world, which is to say a path and a little light to see by. Most of the people I know who have what I want – which is to say purpose, heart, balance, gratitude, joy – are people with a deep sense of the spirit. They are people who pray, and practice their faith – banding together to work on themselves and for others. They follow a brighter light than the glimmer of their own candle; they are part of something beautiful. Our funky little church is filled with people who are working for peace and freedom, who are out there on the streets and inside praying, and they are home writing letters, and they are at the shelters with giant platters of food.



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### Growing in discipleship

The difficulties of change

If there is any circumstance that would inspire change, how about going through open heart surgery? Certainly that kind of reality would cause people to think about their lifestyles and make long lasting changes to their diet, exercise, stress levels, and behaviors around smoking and drinking. Surprisingly, author Alan Deutschman writes in his book "[Change or Die](#)," only about 10 percent of people who have heart surgery will make these changes. What is our hope then that people can change and grow as disciples? He suggests that the problem has to do with the approach we use to drive change: facts, fear, and force don't work. What does work is emotional inspiration that comes through the power of human connection. [Watch](#) Deutschman talk about why people ignore facts and rational arguments.



The antidote isn't a more "logical plan," Deutschman says, it's a compelling relationship. "What we need is someone who can give us the belief and the expectation that we can change. It's kind of a leap of faith. It comes from having a personal relationship and being inspired by their belief in us. That's something that gets communicated in an emotional way."

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### **What's it all about?**

Formation, reformation and transformation

In this [video](#) on what Christianity is all about, Marcus Borg suggests that our disposition to focus on beliefs can sometimes make Christianity much more complicated than it needs to be. "Being Christian is about becoming the kind of person who can love God and love what God loves." Our socialization teaches us to be concerned with ourselves first and foremost, leading to the outcomes mentioned above in the "Paradox of Our Time." What is required for transformation is practice, intentionality, and paying attention to our relationship with God. This emphasis on practice was what caused the first Christians to be called "followers of The Way," and it is through communities of faith today that practices like worship, prayer, and service are promoted. God doesn't need us to do these things, we do if we are truly interested in transformation and change.



See this [new brochure](#) from the ELCA that promotes building faith practices into our daily living.

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### **The importance of connection**

How religion makes a difference

Robert Putnam is one of the authors of the book "American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us." In that [book](#) he writes about how people of faith are statistically more kind, generous, and neighborly than their secular counterparts. He wanted to better understand, and went on to uncover that these three factors were the best predictors of generous behavior: how many close friends does a person have at church; how many small groups are they part of; and how many conversations do they have about the importance of faith in their life. [Watch](#) an overview of these findings in this 3-minute video where he suggests an unbeliever who is connected to a church community is more likely to display generosity than a believer who is disconnected.

So discipleship all starts with an invitation to a better way of life, is nurtured by hope and inspiration through relationships and community, and is reinforced through practice and intentionality. And in the end as Putnam points out, there is a statistically significant difference.

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### **New Stories of Faith in Action**

Showing up and making a difference

As followers of The Way, our discipleship is evident in our personal and collective lives, and can be told through statistics and narratives. Every year the ELCA publishes [Stories of Faith in Action](#) that features images and stories of people whose lives have been touched by ministries of the ELCA. This resource shows how your regular congregational offering, shared with your synod and the churchwide organization, is changing lives. For many Lutherans, the Lutheran church is the most important organization we belong to for making a difference in the world. Inspire your members by telling those stories through this resource and the related bulletin inserts.

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### **Mission Support**

Committing to the work of the larger church

Discipleship is the pathway to both personal and social transformation, and while we are on that journey, we are nurtured through faith practices and intentionality. Just as we confidently invite our members to embrace making a commitment to that journey through our congregations, we also invite each congregation – with joy – to participate in our collective mission.



Please prayerfully consider with your leadership how your congregation will make a difference through the ELCA through Mission Support. Check out this [video](#) from the Rev. Margaret Payne, ELCA director of Mission Support, this [letter from Bishop Eaton](#) and the [congregational statement of intent form](#), to learn more. (Watch for these items, or something similar, to come from your synod office to your congregation's leadership.) Then connect with your congregation's leadership about how your congregation will commit to work of the larger church in the year ahead.

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### Getting the most out of stewardNet

"Ideas that spread win"

If you like the ideas in stewardNet, please think about others that might be agitated in positive ways if they were subscribers. Could members of your stewardship ministry or church council use some inspiration or food for thought? If you have their permission, [send us](#) names and email addresses and we will add them to the list of subscribers. Looking for back issues of stewardNet? You can download them here: [Winter 2014](#), [Spring 2014](#), [Summer 2014](#).



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### Sayings, quotes, thoughts

Richard Rohr

Sooner or later, life is going to lead you (as it did Jesus) into the belly of the beast, into a place where you can't fix it, you can't control it, and you can't explain it or understand it. That's where transformation most easily happens. That's when you're uniquely in the hands of God.

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### Biblical foundations

Isaiah 43:18-19 (NLT)

"But forget all that—it is nothing compared to what I am going to do.  
For I am about to do something new.  
See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?  
I will make a pathway through the wilderness.  
I will create rivers in the dry wasteland."



Upcoming events for stewardship leaders (watch the [calendar file](#) for details)

Dec. 2-4, 2014

**Ecumenical Stewardship Center Leadership Seminar in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.**

Annual gathering of denominational and congregational stewardship leaders to discuss strategic perspectives on current stewardship topics.

April 27-29, 2015

**North American Conference on Christian Philanthropy**

Ecumenical gathering to equip rostered and lay leaders in a variety of stewardship topics/skills.

[Full calendar](#) | Subscribe to [Our Calendar File](#)

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