



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

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Dear friend in Christ,

Last November I heard about a blog post that was generating lots of buzz. The author stated the big lie being sold to churches in the 20th century was that money follows mission. He went on to write that we now know this is false, that money does not follow mission but instead money follows information flow. When I read all of this, I found it intriguing, not just for the simplicity of the idea that money follows mission, but also the claim that it is wrong.

After thinking about this more and how it relates to stewardship, what if – unlike what the author states – the idea is in fact true? It is pretty clear to me that in my life the money and resources I have at my disposal always follow the missions with which I am engaged. Isn't this true for everyone? If my mission is to take care of myself and my perceived needs (including an impulsive desire for a no- whip mocha from Starbucks), then the money will follow that mission. Likewise, when I'm engaged with God's mission for my life and the work of the church, money follows that different mission. All of this is to say that until we as the church help people to connect the purpose and mission of their lives to God's mission and the work of the church, then it is true that the money they manage probably will not follow the mission of the church. If we assume that people equate their personal mission with God's mission through the church, that is if we assume that people are disciples of Jesus, then I think as this author states the church will be frustrated and find that "people's money" does not follow the mission of the church.



So how do we take a step back from our collective mission in the church to talk to individuals about the mission God has in mind for their lives? How do we help people connect to a sense of meaning and purpose that is bigger than themselves? How do we share God's strategy for health and well-being (yes salvation), that a life of love, service and generosity is not just a way of life, but for many the best way to live?

This issue of stewardNet focuses on how the church can teach, inspire, challenge and affirm that there is meaning and purpose to life that comes from aligning our personal mission with the one God created us

for and calls us to.

We are a church that is energized by lively engagement in our faith and life. Thank you for **leading** in 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).

## Teaching people a way of living

Ideas from Adam Hamilton and Clayton Smith

Creating a culture of generosity, stewardship and discipleship is all about calling people to their higher selves and helping them connect the dots between their meaning, purpose and mission in life with God's mission to redeem the world. So how do we do that in the church? Adam Hamilton is the lead pastor at Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan., one of the largest congregations in the Methodist church. He was a recent speaker at an ecumenical stewardship conference where he shared many powerful insights. [Watch](#) his inspiring presentation as he talks about how all of us are part of God's strategic plan for addressing hurt and pain in the world. He regularly asks questions about "how we will measure our lives" and "what is our life's work" to help teach and inspire people about following Jesus as a way of living. His hope is that people can "take hold of the life that truly is life."



Clayton Smith is the executive pastor of generosity at the same congregation, and author of a new book on stewardship called ["Propel: Good Stewardship, Greater Generosity"](#). Smith frames his book by saying stewardship is really "what we want for people, not what we want from people." He offers lots of practical thoughts on topics from leadership, mission and vision, worship and preaching, to different kinds of giving and campaigns. He believes that everyone wants to be part of a compelling vision and purpose, but when talking to people "the hardest distance to traverse is from their head to their heart." That is why he thinks that "direct" preaching styles that rely too much on "presenting the discoveries of scripture" and "passing on information" will be less effective at changing lives than sermons that share personal stewardship stories of challenge, struggle and grace.

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## Meaning, purpose, mission and religion

Science, religion and the search for meaning

A few years ago Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote a wonderful [book](#) called the "Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning." In the book he claims that central to all religion is the search for God, meaning and purpose. It is what makes human beings unique as animals – our interest and ability to ask the question "why"? Sacks writes that while science and philosophy come to us from ancient Greek culture and are more left-brain disciplines of analysis, logic and pulling things apart, religion is an inheritance from our right-brained Hebrew ancestors who were focused on synthesis and experience – the big picture – and putting things back together.



Sacks points out questions about meaning are evident across Scripture including the book of Ecclesiastes:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless ... . Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless." (Ecclesiastes 1:2; 3:19)

Later Sacks includes a quote from holocaust survivor and author Viktor Frankl to tie together purpose, mission and God:

"In the last resort, man should not ask, 'What is the meaning of my life?' but should realize that he himself is being questioned. Life is putting its problems to him, and it is up to him to respond to these questions by being responsible; he can only answer to life by answering for his life. Life is a task. The religious man differs from the apparently irreligious man only by experiencing his existence not simply as a task, but as a mission. This means that he is also aware of the taskmaster, the source of his mission. For thousands of years that source has been called God."

As we try to grow stewards, think about helping to ground people's lives in meaning and purpose as a starting point simply because human beings are already interested in that conversation.

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### **The difference that mission makes**

A matter of life and death?

From the book ["Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Action"](#) by Simon Sinek:

Consider the story of two stonemasons. You walk up to the first stonemason and ask, "Do you like your job?" He looks up at you and replies, "I've been building this wall for as long as I can remember. The work is monotonous. I work in the scorching hot sun all day. The stones are heavy and lifting them day after day can be backbreaking. I'm not even sure if this project will be completed in my lifetime. But it's a job. It pays the bills." You thank him for his time and walk on.



About thirty feet away, you walk up to a second stonemason. You ask him the same question, "Do you like your job?" He looks up and replies, "I love my job. I'm building a cathedral. Sure, I've been working on this wall for as long as I can remember, and yes, the work is sometimes monotonous. I work in the scorching hot sun all day. The stones are heavy and lifting them day after day can be backbreaking. I'm not even sure if this project will be completed in my lifetime. But I'm building a cathedral."

WHAT these two stonemasons are doing is exactly the same; the difference is, one has a sense of purpose. He feels like he belongs. He comes to work to be a part of something bigger than the job he's doing. Simply having a sense of WHY changes his entire view of his job.

Did you know that social scientists have discovered that older adults have twice the risk of dying if their lives lack a sense of meaning and purpose? Perhaps we can say then that meaning, purpose and mission are more than just deep questions, but are really a matter of life and death.

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### **Calling and vocation**

Purpose that comes from God

In secular culture the words vocation and job are interchangeable. As Christians though we believe that there is more to our vocations because God calls us to have lives of purpose, to be the most we can be for the sake of the gospel. Martin Luther believed this was

true for clergy and lay people alike, across all walks of life, both inside and outside the church.

For a quick, insightful read on Lutheran theology on vocation and calling, and what the implications are today for the church, see Michael Bennethum's book "[Listen! God is Calling! Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith, and Work.](#)"



An excerpt from that book:

In its worship life, its educational ministry, its fellowship times, and in its very structure, a congregation ought to guide believers toward an affirmation of the following truths:

1. God calls me to express my baptismal identity through everything I do – including the time I spend at work.
2. I am never alone as I go about my work. God is with me and God's people are available to support me.
3. My normal, everyday actions serve God and others. They contribute to the good of God's world. Through them, God is at work.
4. Despite my best efforts, I sometimes fail. I make foolish and counterproductive decisions. Because of God's grace, there is forgiveness and the promise of a new beginning.

How might reclaiming the importance of calling inspire people to see that stewardship is about everything we do, not just a small financial slice off the top, or the tasks we volunteer for at church?

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### **Measuring gratitude and generosity**

Congregational survey tool available

As you work to create a culture of generosity, stewardship and discipleship in your congregation, an online survey tool might help your leadership measure levels and progress. Has your congregation discovered the spirit of gratitude and generosity present in the early Christians? Remember the Macedonians zeal for giving that existed generations ago, and their abundant joy and rich generosity as described in 2 Corinthians 8:1-7.

If you are interested in using the ELCA Congregational Survey Tool, please contact your synod office to see if they are offering the survey, or call Neil Bullock at 800-638-3522. View a sample of the survey questions [here](#).

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### **'Building Your Stewardship House'**

Tools for laying a strong foundation

Join the Southeastern and [Southwestern Minnesota synods](#) in [person](#) or via [live streaming](#) for an evening of provocative stewardship ideas, on Aug. 27, 6:30 - 8:45 p.m. CDT. Presenters Adam Copeland, David Anfinson, and Catherine Malotky will use a TED Talk-style format to cover topics including young adults and giving, crowdfunding the church, treasurers and their effect on stewardship, and the relationship between anxiety and generosity. A free-will offering – given “online” to model crowdfunding – is encouraged from participants with registration to help underwrite the cost of the event.

If you have stewardship events or videos that can be shared with our larger church, please [let us know](#) so we can help get the word out.

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### **Mission Interpreter Coordinator Conference**

New York City in August

Experienced and "newbie" mission interpreter coordinators from all over the United States will meet in New York City for four days, Aug. 27-30, for their annual training event and conference. This year's event includes spending a day at the United Nations with the Rev. Dennis Fredo and his staff, worship and conversation with several diverse congregations, learning opportunities, Bible study, and a teeny bit of free time to explore the city! So many stories to share! Contact [Denise Ballou](#) to learn more.



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### **Sayings, quotes, thoughts**

Friedrich Nietzsche

"He who has a why to live can bear almost any how."

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### **Biblical foundations**

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

"With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

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

**Aug. 27, 6:30-8:45 p.m. CDT**

**Online**

"Building Your Stewardship House" live stream (see details above)

**Aug. 27-30**

**New York City**

Mission Interpreter Coordinator Conference

**December 2015**

**New Orleans, LA.**

Ecumenical Stewardship Center Leadership Seminar

**Feb. 21-24, 2016**

**Chicago**

Association of Lutheran Development Executives Annual Conference

**Feb. 27, 2016**

Stewardship webcast with ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton

**April 27-29, 2016**

**London, Ontario**

North American Conference on Christian Philanthropy

**Get connected!** Find ELCA [stewardship resources](#) online



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