

Ways to demonstrate good church stewardship

1. Know what you are trying to accomplish

The first important step to responsible stewardship is knowing why you exist and what you are trying to accomplish. This is determined when you create a Mission, Vision and Values statement that articulates the church's purpose and what it hopes to achieve as an organization.

An articulate MVV statement sets the direction and decision-making model for the ministry. For instance, every church has a slightly different vision for its purpose. Some focus on developing church leaders, others have a heart to serve the underprivileged, and some focus on international missions. Regardless of what your church is trying to do, make sure you can articulate it and put all of your focus on it.

2. Budget to support the mission and vision

Ministry costs money – which is why a church budget is so important. An annual church budget is a tool that funds the mission and vision. The budgeting process involves looking at those strategic objectives (mission/vision) that require financial support and allocating dollars to support strategic church goals. For example, if the vision results in a strategy that includes outreach to the poor, you might want to budget dollars to develop an outreach program. This may include funding for administrative oversight, supplies, and marketing materials.

Regardless, invest the time to develop a budget that ensures that ministry financial resources are used to support the church mission.

3. Wise spending decisions

Churches are only as effective as the decisions they make. Church leaders make countless decisions every day. Many of those decisions involve the management of its people – employees and volunteers. However, spending decisions are best made when using wisdom. Spending decisions are made as dollars are allocated to fund the church's different strategies. Using wisdom in that spending is critical to good stewardship.

Want, need, have-to-have

Use a systematic process to allocate resources by using a decision model.

A decision model that prioritizes spending asks whether this (proposed spending) is something we **want**, **need**, or **have-to-have**?

In other words, is this (proposed spending) something that we would like (**want**) for the strategy, is this something we (**need**) to purchase, or is this spending mission-critical (**have-to-have**) to implement the strategy.

For example, if your church has a strategy to develop an outreach program, that strategy may require purchasing equipment, and a decision may be made to purchase a new or used piece of equipment. The goal of that purchase would be to get the best value for the dollar without sacrificing quality. The church does not benefit from buying a used computer that only lasts a year when spending a few more dollars will ensure the computer is around for several years. Create a decision-making process that results in using wisdom for all purchasing decisions.

4. Accountability for managing funds

A church budget guides spending decisions. However, it is also important to ensure that those budgeted dollars are spent on those things that they were allocated for. Responsible stewardship of church funds requires a budget review process that ensures that monthly spending does not exceed the monthly allocated dollars. For instance, if your church has a monthly budget of \$38,000, a review process would analyze spending to ensure those funds were used according to allocations.

A budget review or finance committee would be an appropriate group to do this type of review. Life happens and budget variances will occur. When there are variances in the budget, those variances should be addressed and reconciled every month. This helps to ensure there are no surprises at the end of the year.

5. Conflicts of interest

Decision-making for spending ministry resources should always be made with the best interest of the organization in mind. This means ensuring that comparisons are made when making large purchases or securing vendor relationships.

A good rule of thumb is getting three bids and choosing the vendor with the best quality for the price. Cheapest isn't always better if the product or service is inferior. Allowing family, friends, and members to bid is ok, as long as vendor negotiations and decisions are made in the church's best interest – not the friend.

This is God's money

Every organization should be good stewards of resources. But the church needs to be held to an even higher standard since the resources they are given are from the sacrificial tithes of their members. We should never lose sight of the fact that this is God's money!