



Dear friend in Christ,

As I reflect on the turmoil and divisiveness of the present moment, I think of the apostle Paul's words about all creation groaning to birth something new. Our current challenges seem no different structurally from those of any other time in human history: how do people expand their focus from a narrow preoccupation with self (me) to something much broader (us—and then all of us)? Our collective consciousness and its resulting sensibilities continue to evolve toward greater inclusion, as our hope for progress brings with it agitation and fear of change.

The evolution in our thinking, not just as individuals but as collections of selves, is critical for understanding the world, God and stewardship. How a person is socialized matters. A tribal awareness of God as the source of rain and our next bite to eat is different from a scientific mindset in which knowledge of agriculture and genetics offers a more rational pathway for putting food on the table. Another way of saying this is that people with modern or postmodern instincts differ from their predecessors in how they rely on logic, objectivity and rationality. That, in turn, influences their relationship with God and their idea of giving to God.

This issue of *stewardNet* looks at the impact of evolving consciousness on faith and stewardship.

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

Faithfully,
Steve Oelschlager
Stewardship Program Coordinator
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

I'm interested in hearing your thoughts. [Let me know what you are thinking.](#)



THE EXPLANATORY POWER OF EVOLVING CONSCIOUSNESS

Waking Up to the Connectedness of Reality

As much as we might bristle at the prosperity gospel or theologies that see God as transactional, those ideas are not foreign to our sacred Scripture. What do we do when particular passages from the Bible suggest accepting things that we don't find acceptable?

An easy way to deal with this problem is to selectively read what we agree with while ignoring the rest. Unfortunately, this doesn't meet the underlying challenge of conflicting viewpoints. When Jesus taught, "You have heard it said ... but I say to you," he was honing in on this struggle and suggesting that his insights were wiser. Both understandings are part of the tradition, but we revere Jesus' consciousness as divine.

Just as individuals develop more complex ways of thinking and understanding as they mature from infants to toddlers, children, young adults and beyond, collections of people appear to do the same thing culturally. Just as there are recognizable patterns for individual development, there also seem to be identifiable stages as cultural thinking evolves. If our cultural consciousness is growing, there is enormous explanatory power in seeing how faith in God and calls to stewardship are affected. Review [this table](#) to see one framework for the stages of cultural development.

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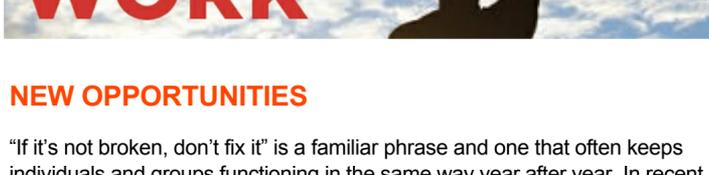
EVOLVING MODELS OF STEWARDSHIP

Traditional and Emerging Paradigms

What motivates a steward: worship, duty, gratitude, compassion, impact, connection, spiritual development? All of these are valid, and none of them is wrong. Whereas some people might be moved by institutional loyalty or duty, others might not be inspired by that at all, wanting instead to fix the world's problems. Still others will see stewardship as a spiritual journey. How might an awareness of evolving cultural consciousness help steward leaders achieve broader and deeper engagement?

See these two articles from Luther Seminary on the changing paradigms of stewardship, including [values and practices](#) and [how to lead](#) through this kind of environment. Both pieces rely on the work of the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving, part of the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University.

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NEW OPPORTUNITIES

"If it's not broken, don't fix it" is a familiar phrase and one that often keeps individuals and groups functioning in the same way year after year. In recent months COVID-19 has interrupted that pattern for many. Pastors began worshipping in the church building; quilting groups adapted their assembly process and/or switched to making masks. A ministry created to keep students off the streets now sends them into the streets to deliver meals. What new ministries have you and your partner congregations developed in recent months? Share these stories for affirmation and inspiration.

Mission interpreters or storytellers share such stories in their own congregations and others in a variety of ways. New opportunities are available for you to strengthen your skills through your synod mission interpreter coordinator or through Karen Kaufman, ELCA mission interpretation coordinator (330-929-9020 or kkaufman@neos-elca.org). Contact them for downloadable guides and training videos. Share those stories!

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

- Through the Resourceful Servants Congregational Financial Assessment, your congregation can help grow its beneficiaries' confidence by proactively engaging in a review of its financial systems relative to best practices and healthy behaviors. Carrying out these activities signals to donors that your congregation merits donations and inspires areas that accountability, transparency, professionalism and impact are areas of great concern. [Click here](#) to learn more. [Watch a demo here](#) of how the Congregational Financial Assessment site can benefit your congregation.
- The publication "Stories of Faith in Action" and the resources that go along with it are designed to share how important your weekly offering in your congregation is in sustaining and growing God's mission. The portion of your offerings that supports the ELCA's synodical and churchwide ministries is called Mission Support. The publication and [resources found here](#) help explain and answer questions about Mission Support and tell the story of those gifts in action. [Download the 2020 SOFIA here.](#)
- Almost all U.S. congregations ceased in-person religious services in mid-March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, yet for the vast majority of these faith communities, their work and religious services have continued online amid significant uncertainty. How have congregations responded in these unprecedented times? [See the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy website for more information.](#)
- We all have a money story, whether we recognize it or not. "Our Money Story: Creative Worship & Practical Resources for a Season of Stewardship" is a practical resource that invites us to discover and tell our money stories in light of God's money story of liberation and love. The series encourages us to transform our stewardship practices into fuller expressions of who we are and what we believe. More details can be found [here](#).
- In 2019, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly endorsed the Earth Charter. The charter is neither a theological nor an environmental document but a foundational ethical document calling for actions to build a more just, sustainable and peaceful society. The Earth Charter articulates the values and principles for achieving sustainable development and demonstrating a global interdependence mindset and shared responsibility while offering a vision of hope and a call to action. [See this document](#) for additional information.
- The ELCA is working to gather all stewardship-related videos in one central location. [Visit our Video Showcase here.](#)

Sayings, quotes, thoughts

"The most telling and profound way of describing the evolution of the universe would undoubtedly be to trace the evolution of love."
— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Biblical foundations

"Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."
— Romans 12:2

UPCOMING EVENTS (CALENDAR)

Generosity NEXT 2020: Forward /// Together

Nov. 19
Online
[Connect here](#)



You're receiving this email because you or your congregation indicated you are a stewardship leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

We'd love to hear from you! Have a link or idea you want to share in our next issue?
Email stewardnet@elca.org.

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