

Overcoming Fear of the “S” Word

By Rev. Dan Schomer, General Presbyter

Having served as a pastor of two congregations over a 29 year period prior to becoming General Presbyter of Eastminster Presbytery, I can attest to the fear of the “S” word. It strikes fear in the hearts of pastors and parishioners alike. The fear grows as the calendar flips from September to October to November. The “S” word, as you have surely guessed, is *Stewardship*.

Our problem with the “S” word is that it requires us to talk about money ... my money...your money. Even when I hear, “but stewardship is about sharing of time and talents,” it hints at an avoidance of talking about money. The fact is, we have to talk about money. Money is not an evil but a good gift. It enables congregations and the presbytery to fulfill the mission to which we are called by Jesus Christ. Speaking of Jesus, he had no phobias related to talking about money. In fact, it was one of his favorite subjects!

The problem may be that we mix up the concepts of “stewardship” and “fund raising.” Fund raising is about raising money. The cause may be noble or mundane,

but the goal is to raise funds by appealing to people’s minds and hearts. Although the raising of funds is one of the results of stewardship, stewardship is not primarily about raising funds. Stewardship is about discipleship. In our baptism, Jesus has said to all of us, “Follow me.” Discipleship is about following Jesus and bringing all our resources along. We bring our gifts, our talents, our voices, our hearts, and our wallets. Discipleship is about servanthood. We serve because our Lord came to serve. Disciples are redeemed people. We were bought at a price—the cross of Jesus Christ. Stewardship is not fund-raising. Stewardship is an expression of our identity as a redeemed people. Stewardship is about how we live because of who we are. Stewardship is about following Jesus. Be bold. Talk about money and lifestyle and mission and the difference we can make and talk about it often. Talk about stewardship because it is an integral part of Christian discipleship.

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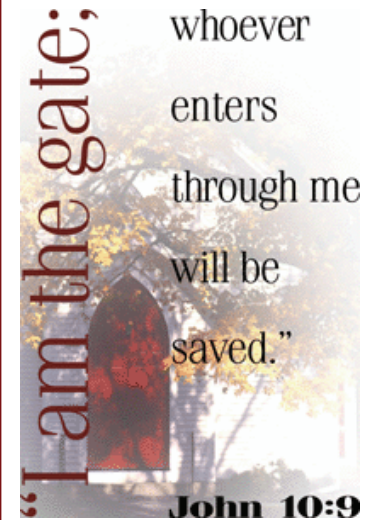
EASTMINSTER EVANGEL

What is Stewardship?

Stewardship is about making choices, as individuals and in the community. It is more than giving money to the church.

Stewardship is about being faithful disciples, caring for and managing all that God has given us. Stewardship is not just one part of Christian discipleship; it involves every aspect of life in all the stages of life.

Stewardship is the grateful response to God’s grace and goodness. It requires a consideration of how our choices affect us and others, of how we can be good caretakers of the created world, and of how we can best serve God as disciples of Christ.



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STEWARDSHIP

Be an Evangel! Send articles!
Winter: Evangelism
Articles Due by: December 17, 2007
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On Steward\$hip

by Rev. Ross Jackson, Chaplain at Salem Community Hospital

Not too many years ago, one of the sadder ‘jokes’ around the Presbyterian church referred to the ‘E’ word. The ‘E’ word was “Evangelism.” The feeling was that any current uses of / understandings of ‘evangelism’ were just not appropriate to we Presbyterians. Not knowing what else to do, we seemed to decide ‘to just not talk about it.’ Gee, what a lot of good *that* did for us!

Perhaps just as bad now within our denomination is the ‘S’ word. At a really excellent conference that I attended on ‘stewardship’ (put on by The Alban Institute), our leader said, “The worst problem for the ‘historic churches’ is that nearly every one of their members believes that ‘stewardship’ is spelled ‘Steward\$hip,’ and they just tune out ...” I suspect most pastors and most Sessions could say ‘Amen!’ to that statement.

From a biblical point of view, what *are* we really talking about when we say ‘stewardship’? Listen to our thoughtful and energetic Synod Executive, Marie Cross, as she summarizes the biblical mean-

ings of stewardship: “*Stewardship, when fully understood, is living faithfully. It is a perspective on life that sets priorities according to God’s ways. It sets the parameters of our choices. Stewardship guides our lives as individuals and as communities, even the world and all creation. It offers a new meaning, new purpose, and joyful fulfillment as we seek to become the persons God created us to be.*” (from her book The Price of Faith, © 2002 by the author, published by Geneva Press)

If that sounds to you like an all-encompassing statement ... you’re right! ‘Stewardship’ isn’t just what you and I do with our *money*; it’s what we do with our *whole lives*, and how our use of money either strengthens or weakens what we say

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we believe. There’s no question that the financial aspects of ‘stewardship’ are important to the church and in the church – but the *financial aspects* of ‘stewardship’ are only one part of the whole picture. If the ‘whole picture’ of our faith does not define and direct what we do with our financial resources, then the truth is that we are ‘out of balance

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(On Steward\$hip-continued)

in terms of our faith, and we are failing in the living of our life in the light and love of God’s presence.

It’s that last sentence in the paragraph above that may hold the key for us. Our whole culture teaches us to ‘compartmentalize’ our lives (work, play, church, leisure, family, retirement, etc., etc., etc.). Our whole culture also teaches us that ‘no one looks out for you as well as you can look out for you’ – thus emphasizing ‘I-focused individualism’ over ‘we-focused discipleship-in-community.’ It’s hard for us to even *hear* the biblical message of stewardship: living faithfully as disciples of God in Jesus Christ.

What a difference it will make in every aspect of our living, if we, together, will hear and respond to this very different, and wonderfully creative understanding of ‘stewardship’! Will I dare to do so? Will you? Will we?

EVANGEL



One-Day Synod Stewardship Event

Thursday, October 4, 1-8 p.m.,
First Presbyterian Church
Maumee, Oh

- Bring **NEW LIFE** to old ideas about stewardship
- Create **NEW LIFE** for the same old campaigns
- Share **NEW LIFE** in your congregation and your faith

Registration deadline is Sept. 21. For more information see www.synodofthecovenant.org.

Save this date!

National Stewardship Conference will be held in Little Rock, Arkansas on March 12-14, 2008. Cynthia Campbell, President of McCormick Seminary is the Keynote speaker and James Noel, from San Francisco Seminary, the Worship Leader.