



# STEWARDSHIP SPARKLERS



**Renewing Hope, Strengthening Congregations,  
Exploring Ministry Pathways in a Changing World**

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## A SECOND CHANCE SUNDAY IN THE SPRING?

People understate their income. The Census Bureau runs a study once a year on a sample of 50,000 households, and they found that people report a higher family income to the IRS than they do to the Census Bureau. It is not because they enjoy paying taxes, it is because for the IRS they sit down and figure it all out. We do this in the spring. Most congregations, operate by the calendar year. So, in October or November we ask people to make a financial commitment for the coming year, and people do it based on their recollection of what their income was last year. We build in a two-year lag.

Consider giving the disciples in your congregation a “second chance” to look at their giving. Now that spring has arrived and we have figured out incomes for the past year, give them a second chance. Ask folks to re-visit their giving behaviors and make appropriate adjustments in expressing their generosity. This may be the perfect time to adjust pledges, or launch that small capital campaign for that special evangelism program, choir robe replacement, youth gathering scholarship fund, and collect it all in two weeks. Give people a second chance.

## WATCHING THE TRENDS

Spirited conversations about “viability” is, in a growing circle of congregations, THE RECURRING THEME. Congregations are investigating and experimenting with an array of models for congregational life, finances, staff, facilities, organizational structure, and missional definition. I have fielded a growing number of questions about how we might structure and streamline the local parish, how we maintain or divest of facilities, how we change the staffing (pastoral and mission) configuration in order to capture a viable position. In this decade, I encourage every healthy congregation to have the conversation about viability. To start that dialogue, do some simple research.

- What percentage of your annual budget is supported by congregational giving?
- How much of your congregational giving comes from people who are 70 years of age or older?
- How much of your giving comes from persons younger than 35?
- What percentage of your congregational giving is shared by the top 5 givers in your parish?

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NJ Synod Stewardship

If your congregation is typical, you will discover that the top 10% of your givers account for 50% of your financial resources. Your ministry resources are likely to be heavily dependent upon a small group of givers who are primarily senior adults. By the end of this decade, many congregations will face daunting financial challenges and, demographic pressures will challenge institutional viability. We have entered a time when growing budgets and rising attendance no longer define congregational vitality; and claiming institutional viability in this era will be the challenge of the decade.

Give consideration to four matters:

1. Acknowledge that the era of people giving out of a sense of loyalty, duty, and obligation to the institution is declining. People now give primarily out of a sense of passion, love of Jesus, and a desire to make a difference in the world. *(Many stewardship programs are still designed for the past rather than the future, even though Jesus linked giving to purpose.)*
2. Learn to live and talk about the creation of a congregational culture of generosity in the midst of a consumer culture that is focused on self-adsorption. *(Generosity is created when giving is paired with sacrifice.)*
3. Teach, as Jesus did, the way we handle money, possessions, influence, relationships, vocation, time, education are all part of living out a unique mission as steward of a great treasure that we have been given.
4. Ask and answer the following questions around the council table and the kitchen table.

<b>CONGREGATION (Council Table)</b>	<b>HOUSEHOLD (Kitchen Table)</b>
<b>MISSION CLARITY</b> Whose lives do we mean to change?	<b>RE-FASHION PRIORITIES</b> What is revealed about God and us, when, “God took the man and put him in the garden to till and keep it”? (Gen 2:15 NRSV)
<b>VISIONARY LEADERSHIP</b> In what new and different ways will we change lives in the coming years?	<b>ALIGN CORE VALUES</b> What are the guiding principles in our household that are essential, enduring, and guide all aspects of our life and relationships?
<b>FAITH PRACTICE</b> What venues for spiritual and faith formation will we create to support our mission, vision, and ministry?	<b>DEVELOP FAITH PRACTICES</b> What faith practices need to be developed to claim and maintain a life as a follower of Jesus?
<b>PLANS FOR MINISTRY</b> What big choices have we made to achieve continuous generous re-engagement with a broken world?	<b>CHANGE BEHAVIORS</b> What first steps, however small, will turn into lasting journeys of generous re-engagement with our family, church, and world?

Steward leaders know that while viability is the question of the decade, financial metrics are only a symptom that something foundational is off balance. The base issues are matters of faith, and the redefinition of VITALITY and missional trajectory.

## **LOOKING FOR STEWARDSHIP RESOURCES**

Contact Pastor Scott Schantzenbach, the New Jersey Synod Stewardship Specialist, for a stewardship consultation, resources, or a personalized conversation about stewardship in your context.

### **STOP BY THE ASSEMBLY DISPLAY AREA...**

Find a copy of the “**GENEROUS CONGREGATIONS RESOURCE BOOK**” which includes a 3-year outline for stewardship work, a 90 Stewardship option, a tool to calculate congregational giving capacity, a narrative budget guideline, and Scott’s online stewardship picks.

Don’t miss the EMU Display as well where you will find a 4-week stewardship program rooted in Luther’s theology of vocation, entitled: “**THE POWER OF SACRED STORY**”.