

## What Are Your Spiritual Gifts?

Lenten Greetings,

As a part of our spiritual discipline in Lent, the Stewardship Committee will be inviting us to participate in Stewardship Small Groups. The format will be similar to what we did in 2005, but the information will be different. You will want to take advantage of this opportunity, so plan to sign up.

We are always attempting to highlight that the word “stewardship” is really “stewardship of life,” everything we are and everything we have is a gift from God. God will hold us accountable for how we use the gifts we are given. In the small groups we will spend a little time talking about money and a lot of time talking about how to discern your spiritual gifts. You might be surprised to find out some ways that God has gifted you!

Of course, there are always some that would rather we not discuss money at all. Ever. However, our tithes and offerings are far easier to track than talents or even time. Especially in a money-based economy like ours, money becomes a spiritual bell-weather for Christians to determine if they are following Jesus’ commands or not.

The front of this newsletter carries the words of Jesus, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Notice that Jesus doesn’t say “follow your heart.” Our heart often tells us not to give, to look out for “Numero Uno.”

Instead, Jesus promises that your heart will follow your treasure. If you’ve ever bought a stock on the stock market, you suddenly become far more interested in the ups and down of the market. Likewise, if you want to love Jesus more, give him your treasure. You will find yourself much

more involved in his church and love of the helpless and hopeless.

The small groups will also get to look at Leon's updated pie graphs of our giving as a congregation. The data indicate that our previous stewardship efforts have been fruitful. From 2005 to 2006 Leon had to add another category of "People who are giving over \$100 per week." In 2004 only 45% of members (actually giving units - could be single person or family) were giving in excess of \$65 per week. In 2006, a healthier 52% were giving in excess of \$65 per week. That represents a 7% increase!

Just as exciting are the folks who were able to respond to the challenge to become intentional givers. Folks whose giving averages out to less than \$1 per week, or those in the \$1-\$10 range, are typically not intentional in their giving. Usually they are throwing a \$20 or a \$5 or even a \$50 in the offering envelope a few times a year. Some try hard not to examine their giving, because they know that it isn't where they would like it to be. I am so excited that “members who contribute less than \$1 a week” decreased from 27 in 2004 to 11 in 2006! That is less than half! As they moved up into the ranks of the intentional givers, we saw an increase in members with contributions in the \$1-\$10 range from 46 in 2004 to 51 in 2006, and those with contributions in the \$10-\$25 range increased from 24 to 29!

There is still much work to be done, of course. There are those who do not give at all. There are others who are not intentional in their giving. We owe it to them to encourage them to become passionate givers, because it allows them to experience that primary attribute of God - the chief giver – who gave his life for us on a cross.

We talked recently in Mutual Ministry Committee about the responsibility of the pastor in helping people to know the joy of giving. We read a very helpful article written by the ELCA that is excerpted below.

May you know God's Peace and Joy of Giving,  
Pastor Chris

### ***The Role of the Pastor in Stewardship Ministry***

**By Pastor Charles R. Lane**

#### **Director for ELCA Stewardship Key Leader**

Some congregations don't want their pastor to talk about money. Some pastors don't want to talk about money. Loren Mead talks about a "conspiracy of silence" in this matter. The "conspiracy of silence" is an often unspoken agreement that everyone will be more comfortable if money isn't talked about in the congregation, especially by the pastor. As long as this conspiracy of silence holds, then we can continue to imagine that the financial/spiritual distinction holds. As long as this distinction holds, then this part of our lives that the Bible sees as being very important in our relationship with Jesus is safely shielded from that relationship.

When the financial part of our lives is shielded from our relationship with Jesus, then finances will always be a problem for that relationship. As long as we imagine that finances and faith don't mix, then some of God's people will wrongly imagine that what they do with their

money has nothing to do with their relationship with Jesus. Some will want to keep it this way, and therefore will get angry if their pastor insists on talking about money and getting involved in the stewardship ministry of the congregation. Never mind. It is precisely for this reason that the pastor must talk about money and be involved in the stewardship ministry of the congregation.

As the spiritual leader of the congregation, the senior pastor must shatter the "conspiracy of silence" by talking about money. The pastor must do this for the spiritual health of the people in the congregation. As long as the pastor refuses to shatter the "conspiracy of silence", then the conspiracy will continue. Because of the unique position of the pastor, he or she alone is in the position to end the false spiritual/financial dichotomy.

...Here are some helpful suggestions about how pastors can be healthy stewardship leaders in the congregation:

- The pastor should preach on stewardship issues when the assigned text deal with these issues. Since the gospels talk so much about money and possessions it is inevitable that the assigned gospel will occasionally contain one of these passages. When this happens, the pastor should preach on the text forthrightly.

It is important to note that these texts will not lead the pastor to talk about the need of the church to receive. Rather, these texts will talk about the need of

each worshipper to consider their finances in the light of their relationship with Jesus, and the need of each worshipper to give generously of that which God has entrusted to them. This is an important distinction, and can blunt some of the criticism that the pastor is always asking for money.

- The pastor must be a part of the stewardship leadership team. When a pastor talks to me about the stewardship team by saying, “they do this,” I know that stewardship ministry in that congregation is not what it could be. Stewardship ministry is too important to the spiritual lives of the members of the congregation for the pastor to not be involved. Because of his or her Biblical and theological training, the pastor is uniquely positioned to keep the stewardship team on track understanding stewardship ministry to be about the need of the giver to give and not the need of the church to receive. The pastor simply must be a key stewardship leader.

- The pastor should model effective stewardship. Despite all the cultural taboos, the pastor needs to talk about money, and talk about his or her own personal financial stewardship. If the pastor is tithing or beyond, the congregation should know that. If the pastor has circumstances in his or her life that block this, the congregation should know about them. One of my great stewardship mentors was a colleague in my first call. Pastor Dan Sander talked so honestly and openly about money and about his personal

stewardship that I don’t think it ever occurred to anyone that he shouldn’t be doing this. His caring candor defused the taboos.

- The pastor should know what each person gives to the congregation. I am aware that in some congregations this is the final taboo. I have heard the common complaint, “If the pastor knows how much people give, the pastor will let this influence his or her ministry to people. He or she will cater to the big givers.” My standard answer to this is that if your pastor would structure pastoral care around giving levels, then you have much bigger problems than what the pastor does or doesn’t know.

Because wealth and what we do with the money and possessions God has entrusted to us is such a huge issue in our relationship with Jesus, the pastor has to know what people give. How is the pastor to help people grow in their relationship with Jesus if he or she is kept in the dark about how much people give? The pastor needs to have access to giving information, and the pastor needs to handle this information just as the pastor handles everything else the pastor knows about people’s lives – confidentially and pastorally.

- The pastor should learn who their allies are in talking about money and giving. In every congregation there are people who will object to talking about money. One first call pastor recalled mentioning money from the pulpit once during the first year of ministry. After

worship a member came up and gave him an earful. It was many years before this young pastor was comfortable talking about money again.

While talking about money may not be comfortable for some people, it is Scriptural. How often did Jesus talk about money and possessions? Most parables teach at least one lesson about these two topics. If Jesus felt teaching about money and possessions was important, then these topics should be part of preaching regularly in the congregation.

By listening and observing, a pastor can learn who the faithful stewards are in a congregation. The giving of these people may take different forms, but there is clearly a heart for giving. During the year take a few minutes to talk with these faithful stewards individually. What is their story? How has giving helped these people grow in faith? The answers to these questions can guide the pastors' approach to talking about money, possessions and healthy stewardship.

The role of the pastor in the stewardship ministry and the financial life of the congregation can be very tricky ground on which to walk. There will always be people who will want the pastor to stay as far away from these areas as possible... The pastor will need to proceed carefully here, but the pastor must proceed. Scripture makes it all too clear that there is an intimate relationship between one's faith in Jesus and how one deals with money and other material wealth. For the

pastor to abdicate his or her role in stewardship ministry is simply not an option.