



GRACE
UPON
GRACE



*Cultivating your
Congregation's
Stewardship Story*





INTRODUCTION

A colleague shared with me an important learning about North Dakota when she moved here from the East Coast: “People don’t ask where you are from, they ask who your people are.” To understand each other (and because we likely have people in common!), we seek out connections and shared stories. Rootedness and connection are part of our Eastern North Dakota ethos. And so I would add another question: “What are your stories?” We are a people with deep and rich stories across generations, with new stories emerging as we grow and change.

As a synod, we will be focusing on understanding, cultivating, and sharing our individual and communal stories as God’s people and Christ’s Church. This story guide is one way to explore your stories—specifically your stories of stewardship and generosity. Our prayer is that the questions and conversations will be a gift to your congregation, strengthening your mission and shared story.

This document provides an introduction and story prompts. There is an individual story guide that you will want to provide to each person. The congregational story guide is to curate your shared story. We give thanks to Rev. Tim Brown, Director for Stewardship in the ELCA, for his partnership in this project.

As you cultivate your ministry’s stewardship story, we hope that you will share your story with us, as we create a shared story of stewardship and generosity across the Eastern North Dakota Synod.

Bishop Tessa



USING THIS DOCUMENT

What's Included:

- Scripture Connection
- Introduction
- Individual Reflection/Activity
- All Ages Activity
- Congregational Story Guide

How to Use:

- Use for the opening devotions for council or other teams that gather monthly. After the individual reflection, fill in the congregational reflection to build your story as you go.

OR

- Use for weekly Bible Study or Adult Education

OR

- Once a month, or for a season, use during the sermon/word portion of worship. A scripture connection is included for each session. Read the scripture and spend time doing the individual reflection. Invite responses to curate the congregational story.

CULTIVATING OUR STORY

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Putting the Story Together

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Story 1: What is Stewardship?

Scripture Connection

Read Genesis 1: 1-31 or 1:26-31

Invite responses: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What connections do you see to stewardship?

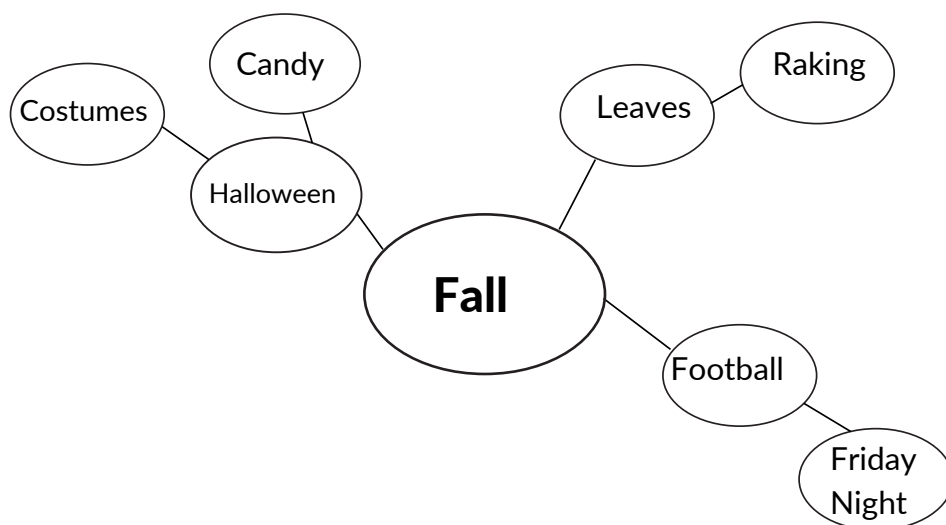
Introduction

Our call to stewardship begins in the first chapter of Genesis, when creation is complete and humankind is given dominion over- or stewardship for- all creation. Stewardship has been at the core of what it means to be human since the beginning of time.

Rev. Tim Brown, Director for Congregational Stewardship says that for followers of Jesus, stewardship is everything that happens after you say “I believe”.

Individual Reflection: Stewardship Mind Map

A mind map is a brainstorming tool to explore ideas, themes, and connections around a specific topic. Using the example below and the blank mind map, brainstorm about what stewardship is. You are also welcome to brainstorm in list form if you prefer.



Congregational Story

Together, invite responses based on individual mind maps. If possible, write them on a large sheet of paper. For your congregation story, share these responses alongside any noticings or patterns.

Story 2: Offering Memories

Scripture Connection

Read Mark 12: 41-44

Invite responses: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What connections do you see to stewardship

Introduction

A small urban congregation was a neighborhood collection site for the local food pantry. Each week, the food was carried to the front of the congregation. At the end of the children's message, the kids gathered around the food and extended their hands while the whole congregation sang a prayer to bless the food as part of the offering. The kids knew they had a specific role in worship and offering each week.

What are your memories of the offering from when you were younger? Spend time remembering and writing about your own offering memories.

Individual Reflection: Offering Memories

Jot down any memories you have about the offering when you were younger. Share the story with a partner or the whole group.

Congregational Story

Brainstorm together how you are or could be creating memories around the offering for those who are younger than you now.

Add the memories and practices or ideas to the Congregational Story.

Story 3: Learning Generosity

Scripture Connection

Read Ruth 2

Invite responses: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What connections do you see to stewardship?

Introduction

Like most things, generosity is taught and learned from other people. When asked how she learned generosity, a woman responded that she often remembers things going missing from the house and asking her mom about it. “Oh, this person needed it” or “So and so really liked it so I gave it to them” was a common refrain. This was how she was taught generosity.

Who taught you to be generous? Who are you teaching to be generous?

Spend time remembering and writing about who taught you generosity

Individual Reflection: Learning Generosity

Reflect and write about who taught you to be generous. What do you remember about this person and how they were generous? Share the story with a partner or the whole group.

Who are you teaching to be generous? How?

Congregational Story

For your congregational story, write down how folks were taught to be generous, and how the congregation hopes to teach others. It could also be interesting to ask younger members or newer members or even members of the community how they see the congregation being generous!

Story 4: Scripture Stories

Scripture Connection

Read Exodus 18:13-27

Invite responses: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What connections do you see to stewardship?

Introduction

At first glance, the story of Moses appointing judges to share in the work doesn't seem to be a stewardship story. At least if we only think of stewardship as the sharing of financial resources or caring for our neighbor. In the Exodus story, Moses is sharing leadership with others as well making a shift in his stewardship of time.

What are stories of stewardship in scripture that stand out to you?

Individual Reflection: Scripture Stories

What are stories of stewardship in scripture that stand out to you?
What values and themes do you notice?

Congregational Story

Compile the stories of stewardship and what values or themes folks notice in those stories. Next, invite folks to wonder what of those values or themes are present in the congregation. Are there ones you want to live into more?

Story 5: Scripture Stories 2

Scripture Connection

Read Acts 4: 32-37

Invite responses: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What connections do you see to stewardship?

Introduction

A congregation was asked “What stories in scripture connect to your congregation’s story?” Because they had lost the church in a flood, the story of Noah’s Ark and God’s promise after were core to their story. Another congregation had never owned a building, so they resonated with the Exodus story and stories of wandering.

Individual Reflection: Scripture Stories 2

What are key parts of your congregation’s story, or what is central to your mission? What stories in scripture connect to your congregation?

Congregational Story

Compile the list of scripture stories and how they are connected to your congregation. Invite folks to determine the top 3 stories and share with the congregation.

Story 6: Celebrating Generosity

Scripture Connection

Read Psalm 95: 1-7

Invite responses: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What connections do you see to stewardship?

Introduction

The leader of a local congregation noted that the congregation was generous around providing meals and sharing food. When this was pointed out, they responded: “That counts as ministry? That’s just what we do!”

Sometimes we just keep doing the things we do without stopping to claim them or tell the stories, or celebrate our shared generosity.

Individual Reflection: Celebrating Generosity

Make a list of things you donate or ways you share time or however you are generous. Jot down things your congregation has supported in the past that you are proud of. Next, write down things the congregation is currently doing and supporting as part of your generosity.

Congregational Story

Create a communal list of individual and congregational generosity from the individual lists. Write it ALL down, or make check marks next to repeated answers. Bonus: invite folks to snap or say YAY! after each answer! Next, note any themes or often repeated answers and create a cultivated list of your core areas of generosity alongside the full list.

Story 7: What is the offering for?

Scripture Connection

Read Exodus 36:1-7

Invite responses: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What connections do you see to stewardship?

Introduction

A congregation was asking for money for a new air conditioner. When asked why they needed to buy a new air conditioner, someone replied "Because it's broken". Of course that is the obvious answer. Upon further conversation, the leader finally named that it was important that the Sunday School kids needed a comfortable place to come learn about Jesus.

The lines in our budgets or spending plans often get reduced to only bills we need to pay. But those bills we pay allow for ministry to happen and love to be shared.

Individual Reflection: What is the Offering For?

Pick out a utility or administrative expense from your congregation's budget or spending plan. Make a list or write about what ministry is able to happen because you pay that expense.

Congregational Story

From your individual lists and stories, fill out the congregational story guide with a budget item and what ministry happens because of that line.

Story 8: Core Activities

Scripture Connection

Read Acts 6: 1-7

Invite responses: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What connections do you see to stewardship?

Introduction

In the Acts story, it is clear that distributing food to widows and tending to scripture are both core ministries of the early church. Both needed to be tended to for the church to accomplish its mission.

Today, there are many areas of mission and ministry that a congregation could engage in, but no congregation can do everything! Identifying your core ministries can help ensure the things that matter most don't get neglected!

Individual Reflection: Core Activities

List out everything (or as much as you can think of) your congregation does or supports. Circle things you think are essential, or core, to who you are as a congregation. But a dash or question mark next to things you might consider not essential (even if you think they matter!)

Congregational Story

Make a list of things folks named as absolutely essential to who you are as a congregation. Have them share why they are essential and include that in the story too!

Story 9: Cultivating our Shared Story

Scripture Connection

Read 2 Kings 4: 1-7

Invite responses: What do you notice? What do you wonder? What connections do you see to stewardship?

Individual Reflection: Looking Back

Look back at the past 8 story prompts. What do you notice? What have you learned about your story? Your congregation's story? What stories do you want to share with the congregation and beyond?

Congregational Story

Look back on the past 8 story prompts. Cultivate a list of learnings, wonderings, themes, celebrations, etc. Share key learnings and stories with the whole congregation!

What's Next?

Optional Next Steps

- If you did this with the council or another group, consider inviting another group to work through the story prompts, or do as a whole congregation.
- Continue defining or clarifying your story with synod resources: developing a purpose statement, core values, inside/outside checklist, etc. www.eandsynod.org/resources/congregational-vitality-resources
- Explore a Narrative Budget
- Group book study: *Funding Forward* by Grace Duddy Pomroy
- Consider a deeper dive into generosity & stewardship through the Generosity Project or Cultivating Generous Congregations.
- Continue your generosity story and planning with Lacey Kraft, EaND Generosity Director: lacey@eandsynod.org

For more information, contact Deacon Erin Power, EaND Synod