

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Stewardship After COVID-19

The church and the world have started to emerge from crisis mode. This was not a crisis of our making. It was foisted upon us. A part of the creation that was made good by our Lord but corrupted by humanity's sin has turned on us. The material from which we were created has mutated and is now becoming the death of far too many of us. We are confronted by this deadly reality daily, but not usually on this grand of a scale. This pandemic has changed every aspect of our life. Life, and death, in a broken world has punched us in the mouth and threatened to send us reeling.

The same stewardship in new ways

The church has responded in a way that is nearly miraculous. Every local congregation has changed the way it stewards the Gospel. For many in the church, Facebook was previously a cute way to see pictures of the

grandkids on the other side of the country, YouTube was a place where you watched funny videos and "Zoom" was the sound you made as you pushed your child on the swing set. But in less than two months, all of these have gone from novelty to necessity. These are the ready-made platforms where the disciple, the disconnected and the searching are connected to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sermons and services, Bible classes and catechesis, and nearly every aspect of parish ministry has moved from in-person to online.

The church cannot shut down. Too many people are dying, not only because of this viral outbreak, but because of the ongoing outbreak of sin! As faithful stewards of the Gospel, with limited experience and expertise, and even more limited time, the church sprang into action. The stewardship

of our baptismal call rippled out in a way that Luke could not have conceived when the Holy Spirit led him to write Acts 1:8.

As time has passed and we have honed our stewardship of the Gospel in this unprecedented time, we are now starting to get our bearings. We are learning some things from this epidemic. We are learning that we can steward technology in such a way that it serves as a messenger rather than a master. We are learning that octogenarians can learn to use an iPad to worship, gather for Bible study and keep in contact with their church families. We have also learned that there are other vital ways that God's created and redeemed children can faithfully steward the gifts entrusted to them by God for the sake of the Gospel and for the benefit of their neighbor. Congregations, many of

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which have either been hesitant or unaware of new methods of giving, have found new ways to receive faithful offerings. Online giving and giving by text have quickly become useful tools for churches to help their members continue to give faithfully.

What next?

As the fog of crisis burns off and we start looking forward as the church, what happens when the heat of this moment starts to dissipate? Do we breathe a sigh of relief and go back to the way we have always done it? That really isn’t possible. Just as our forefathers put the German language away after the trauma of two World Wars in the last century, so the church will be faced with the reality that many of our temporary measures of Gospel stewardship may be with us for the long haul. While there may be a desire to move forward as if this time of crisis never existed, that is a fool’s errand. It isn’t good stewardship of this time the Lord has given us to expand and evaluate the **why**, **what** and **how** of our stewardship of the Gospel.

Now is the time for the church to start looking to adapt its stewardship culture. To do this will take a time of serious study of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to remind us of **who** we are and **why** we exist. Once we have a good grasp of our **who** and **why**, we can look to adapt our infrastructure and the mechanics of **how** and **what** we do. This may mean we need to rethink some of the ways we “do” stewardship because they may no longer clearly connect and point us, and our neighbor, to Jesus in our current context.

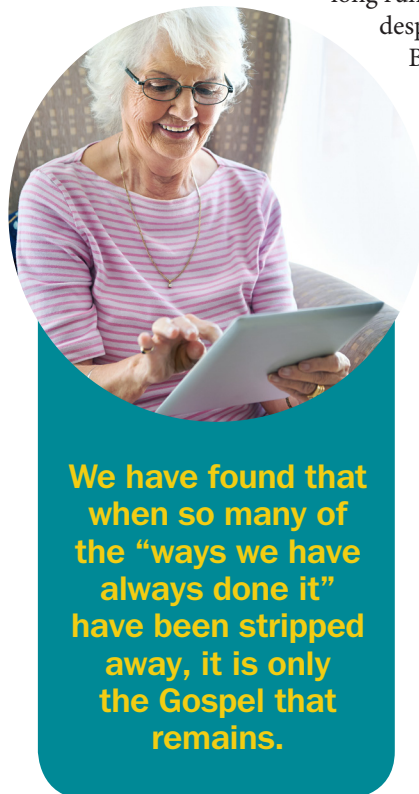
C.S. Lewis ends “Mere Christianity” with these words: “Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your

ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death for your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness,

despair, rage, ruin and decay.

But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.”

Post-COVID stewardship will be different than it was before. It can never be about us. It was, is and always will be about Jesus. What we have learned in these days of epidemic is what is of first importance. The Lord’s Word, the Lord’s House and the Lord’s Table are the core of the steward life. When we could not do those things the way we have always done, we looked outside ourselves for new avenues and answers. And the Lord provided!



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We have found that when so many of the “ways we have always done it” have been stripped away, it is only the Gospel that remains. The Gospel is the heart of who we are and why we do what we do. We are not our bills or our budgets, our traditions or our personal tastes. We are created by God to steward His good gifts entrusted to us, His baptismally-adopted stewards. This is the paradigm that needs to form our stewardship going forward. Clinging to Christ and His promises, we can let go of the dross and cherish the precious treasure provided by His cross and empty tomb. They were about His love for us. Our stewardship needs to reflect that same image. It must be about Jesus for us and for the world. The **how** and **what** of this will take shape in the years to come. The **who** and the **why** need to be solidified now.