



The Annual Stewardship Letter

A Travel Free Learning Article

By

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It's stewardship time again. In many churches the stewardship theme is being chosen along with perhaps an appropriate logo. Stewardship supplies are being prepared or ordered and they include letterhead, envelopes, response (pledge, commitment) cards, and perhaps a devotional guide and Bible study lessons.

The target Sunday is set for receiving the response cards back from the members and the pastor is still working on how he or she will again preach on stewardship. How will all this be introduced? Most likely a letter announcing stewardship time will be mailed to the entire congregation and once again they're off in the hunt for a green October.

Beginning this mostly institutional exercise well is highly important. That first letter sets the tone for what will follow and for what can be expected in response. How well will your stewardship letter accomplish its purpose? Can it be missional as well as institutional?

The following outline will help you craft your initial stewardship letter to the congregation.

1. Do not begin the letter by announcing that it is stewardship time again at your church. You want the readers to be drawn into the letter, not set it aside for reading later—maybe. The word stewardship is synonymous with fundraising in the vast majority of churches. Many readers think, the church is asking for my money again.

2. Begin the letter with a story. Choose a story that is an example of what your church does best that readers would recognize as being essential to the personality of the congregation. This could be about worship, a welcoming environment, or your missions program. Story is the most effective form of communication.

3. Segment your letter by the different generations in your congregation or by life stages if you know that about the members. Tell a different story for each generation highlighting how people are serving people inside or outside your congregation. The different generations have different life experiences in work, society and church. They are not all motivated or persuaded by one single thing.

4. Now introduce your stewardship theme. Explain the theme using Biblical, theological and practical reasons. Your opening story should illustrate the theme. Avoid using institutional language that communicates the church has a need for people to give so that the church can pay its bills. Rather, communicate the important solutions that the church offers to meet the needs of people.

5. Use the word "generosity" often along with "stewardship." "Generosity" is a familiar word and a positive word for younger adults. The words "budget" or "pledge" should not appear in the letter. Instead, use "annual ministry plan" and "my personal giving plan." These words also appeal to younger adults much more than budget or pledge.

6. Explain stewardship, and generosity, as spiritual growth opportunities for individual Christians. Stewardship time is a focus on the progress we are making in our spiritual journeys. Churches should position their stewardship emphasis within the faith formation process of the church. Some churches are using the Lenten season for this very reason instead of the traditional fall time.

7. Remind your Christian readers that God is the provider of an abundance of resources for ministry and missions. Your congregation is rich in faith, in service, in love, in talent, in life experience, in care for one another, and in financial capability. Communities of faith have many assets, including financial ones, with which to carry out their mission. They need to be reminded of this wealth.

8. Connect the stewardship theme to your congregation's mission on behalf of the Kingdom of God. The story you began with is a part of your congregation's larger story which is a part of God's greatest story, the Gospel. Stewardship is a part of witness to the grace and generosity of a loving God.

9. Conclude the letter with a celebratory statement about all the good ways that God through this congregation blesses people. Tell your readers to be watching for more stories to come. Create some anticipation of more to come that is worthy of celebrating and giving thanks.

10. This is not in the letter, but be prepared for some anxiety on the part of those who think the letter should have asked people to "pledge the budget." Those who are comfortable with the traditional stewardship appeal may not understand that your purpose is to build on their faithfulness by calling other generations onto the giving path. They will be okay and so will your church.

Important Things to Know



Ruben Swint is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership. He leads the Funding Ministry Team whose work and team members may be viewed at www.FundingMinistry.org. In this role he focuses on capital campaigns, planned giving, and annual giving for congregations, denominations, and parachurch organizations. Send an e-mail to Ruben for a free subscription to *The Generosity Letter* monthly e-zine at RSwint@TheColumbiaPartnership.org. To talk with him about his personal services or that of his team you may also call him at 404.314.7273.

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