

# Creating and developing a Stewardship Season in your congregation

## **KEEPING STEWARDSHIP ON THE AGENDA**

Teaching and promoting the Christian giving of time, talent and money should be a regular activity in the life of a congregation. The way in which we use our time, talent and money is a fundamental part of our Christian living, our Christian discipleship.

Stewardship programmes tend to be occasional and infrequent events in the life of a congregation because they involve a considerable amount of work over a number of months, as a planning group prepares for the special event at the heart of the programme and follows up the responses which come from the members of the congregation.

Many congregations have seen the fruits of their labours in increased offerings and increased involvement, but having completed stewardship programmes, most congregations want to wait for a number of years before embarking on another such venture.

If they wait too long, they risk losing the benefits they have gained.

It is also important that congregations take seriously each of the traditional aspects of Christian stewardship – time, talent and money. This is best done by considering each of the three on its own. Looking at time, talent and money together can dilute the Christian message about each and the Christian response to each.

This approach encourages congregations to keep Christian stewardship on their agenda by considering the giving of time, talent and money separately in a three year cycle, and in different ways from the traditional stewardship programme.

## STEWARDSHIP SEASON

- Pick a MONTH which does not already have special occasions, e.g. Easter, Remembrance, Christmas, and is not one of the main holiday times.
- Designate that month the STEWARDSHIP SEASON.
- Reflect on the Christian giving of TIME or TALENT or MONEY during that month, with each being considered over a three year period.
- Focus the congregation's life on this theme during the STEWARDSHIP SEASON:
  - Worship themes
  - Study groups
  - Children's ministry
  - Youth activities
  - Guild meetings.
- Organise a SPECIAL EVENT for the whole congregation.
- Look for a particular RESPONSE from members of the congregation during the STEWARDSHIP SEASON each year.

## CHRISTIAN GIVING OF TIME

TIME is a fundamental part of God's creation (Genesis 1: 14-19) and should be recognised as a very important gift from God. The stewardship of TIME is often neglected by the Church as it often concentrates its attention on money and talent.

In considering the Christian giving of TIME, members are encouraged to reflect on the way they use their TIME – all of it.

The following themes will provide a useful exploration of TIME:

### **Time for God**

Why are corporate worship and private devotions essential ingredients for a healthy human life? In what ways does time for God differ from time for the Church? Should time for God be regarded as time spent in activity or time when we stop doing, stop being busy?

### **Time for Friends and Family**

In what ways does time spent with friends and family enrich human life? How important is time for friends and family when we prioritise our use of time?

### **Time for Work**

What are the benefits from spending time working? In what ways is the balance of life upset when there is no opportunity to work or when time for work encroaches on time for other things?

### **Time for Rest and Recreation**

How does time for rest and recreation differ from time for family and friends? What was Jesus saying when he emphasised the second great commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" ?

### **Time for the Church**

In what ways do we give time for the work of the Church? Does the Church make the best use of the time we give? In what ways could the Church make better use of our gift of time?

These are only a few of the questions which might be explored during a STEWARDSHIP SEASON dedicated to the Christian giving of TIME.

Consideration of the stewardship of TIME in this way takes people beyond the life of the Church to the whole of life. This is to be welcomed as Christian stewardship and Christian discipleship should be concerned with the whole of life.

Focussing on the stewardship of TIME is also an opportunity to reflect on the different amounts of 'free' TIME that are available to people at different stages in their lives.

### **Practical Exercise**

Invite the congregation (adults and children) to keep a TIME DIARY for a week before the month when the Christian giving of TIME will be considered. This will show how much time is used on eating, sleeping, and work or education. The time that is left is the time when we make choices about what we do.

- What choices do we make?
- Does our use of time lead to a balanced life?
- What different choices could we make?

### **Response**

The response which will be sought from members and adherents is a re-commitment to giving TIME for God, through participation in worship and creating space for Bible reading and private prayer.

## **CHRISTIAN GIVING OF TALENT**

The story of the birth of twins, Esau and Jacob, to Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 25: 19-28) reminds us that each person is unique, with his/her own physical characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. This theme is developed by Paul in his New Testament Letters (Romans 12: 3-8; 1 Corinthians 12: 1-31) when he refers to Christians as different parts of the body of Christ and encourages them to use their particular gifts for the glory of God.

The Christian giving of TALENT is concerned with members identifying their particular gifts, skills, strengths – knowing what they can do well (and what they cannot do well) and recognising that everyone has some gift. This process will reveal the POOL OF ABILITY which is available in the congregation – available for involvement in the worship, mission and service of the Church.

This POOL OF ABILITY will distinguish between those skills and strengths which are people-orientated, e.g. children's ministry, pastoral care, leadership, and those which are of a more practical nature, e.g. maintenance of buildings and grounds, music, administrative tasks.

Once the POOL OF ABILITY has been identified, members and adherents will be encouraged to be more involved in the life of the Church by giving their skills and strengths in appropriate ways.

Consideration of the TALENT available within a congregation will ask questions about the existing structure of the congregation:

- Do the current members and adherents have the skills and strengths necessary for all the traditional roles in the congregation?
- In what ways can the pattern of congregational life be changed to make best use of the available skills and strengths, and minimise the need for skills and strengths which are not readily available?

- What skills and strengths are surplus to the congregation's requirements, but could be used in a neighbouring congregation?

### **Practical Exercise**

At meetings of the Kirk Session or the Guild or Youth Groups or Study Groups, invite each person to share with another whom he/she knows well. In each pair one will tell the other what talents the other has, and then the process will be reversed. This overcomes the difficulty that some of us are too modest to admit our own talents.

This should be a positive exercise. One person should not be telling another what talents the other does not have. A person can indicate the lack of particular talents for himself/herself.

### **Response**

The response which will be sought from members and adherents is a commitment to give their TALENT to enable the sharing of the gospel through the work of the Church. This commitment has to begin with a person's skills and strengths, and not with a list of jobs which 'need' to be done.

## **CHRISTIAN GIVING OF MONEY**

For some people, stewardship is solely concerned with MONEY. For others, a broad view of stewardship can be a way of ignoring MONEY for as long as possible. MONEY is an important aspect of any consideration of Christian stewardship and Christian giving.

There are many references in the Old Testament to the way in which the people of Israel and Judah should use their MONEY AND POSSESSIONS (e.g. Deuteronomy 26: 1-15; 2 Samuel 12: 1-6; Ezekiel 18: 5-9).

In the gospels we read of many occasions when Jesus spoke of MONEY AND POSSESSIONS (e.g. Luke 12: 13-21; 18: 18-25; 21: 1-4). Some of the most practical comments in Paul's Letters are concerned with MONEY (1 Corinthians 16: 1-4; 2 Corinthians 8: 1-15). Encouraging a financial offering to God is a theme which runs through the whole Bible, and has been an essential part of Christian discipleship throughout the history of the Church.

It is also important that we remember that Christians are accountable to God for what they do with all their MONEY – not just the amount they give as an offering for the work of the Church.

The various biblical models for giving – first fruits, tithes, sharing, sacrifice, made in the image of a Giving God – can be explored during a STEWARDSHIP SEASON dedicated to the Christian giving of MONEY.

Members and adherents will be encouraged to give regularly and generously:

- to show gratitude for all that is received from God;
- to make a difference to individual lives, the life of the community and the life of the world through the worship, mission and service of the Church.

Members and adherents will be encouraged to think about their OFFERING OF MONEY. How does it relate to their total income? How generous is it?

### **Practical Exercise**

Invite the congregation (adults and children) to consider their own personal budgets – all that they have and how it is spent.

- What proportion is given to charity (including the Church)?
- How does my charitable giving relate to what I spend on myself?

- What would my Church offering buy if I did not give it to God for the work of the Church?

## **Response**

The response which will be sought from members and adherents is a commitment to make a generous OFFERING OF MONEY –

- using offering envelopes
- or a bank standing order
- and, if taxpayers, signing a Gift Aid Declaration to enable the congregation to recover the tax already paid on the money given
- considering a GIFT TO THE CHURCH IN THEIR WILL.

## **HELP IS AVAILABLE ...**

The Church's Stewardship staff want to assist and support congregations in the creation and development of a STEWARDSHIP SEASON.

Various items of stewardship material are available:

Worship Resources

Bible Studies

Leaflets

Posters

These items of material consider the biblical and theological basis of Christian giving; the nature and purpose of the Church; Ministries and Mission Contributions; Gift Aid; legacies.

One of the staff will be willing to meet with Kirk Sessions as they consider establishing a STEWARDSHIP SEASON.

As Stewardship Groups in congregations begin planning the STEWARDSHIP SEASON each year, one of the staff will be available to provide support and assistance.

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