

Stewardship Conversation One

THE ISSUE: Defining Stewardship

“Stewardship is a beautiful word with a bad reputation. It has become a catchall for a lot of rubbish. Used for every imaginable type of money-raising scheme, it is a tired, tarnished word that has lost its luster,” wrote Carl W. Berner Sr., in *The Power of Pure Stewardship*.

How is stewardship defined?

“In the New Testament, ‘stewardship’ [*oikonomia*] is never used to designate the action of giving, much less the giving of money. *Oikonomia* relates primarily to the office of administration or management or to the implementation of a plan...One of the scriptural terms which describes the divinely appointed relationship of man to God is that of stewardship. We are stewards of God. Unfortunately the term has in the usage of the church lost its broad and all-inclusive meaning and has been applied quite persistently to man’s responsibility as to his temporal possessions. Most people think of Christian stewardship in terms of money rather than in terms of life. Stewardship teaching in our circles has been primarily financial...true stewardship comprehends the responsibility of a Christian in all the many relationships of life. It takes into account every phase of human living...all of life, and all its interests and ramifications, belongs to God and is without qualification to be placed into His service,” wrote Roy Bleick, in *Much More Than Giving*.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Definition:

Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God’s family, the Church, in managing life and all of life’s resources for God’s purposes.

Talking It Over

- Discuss: The most important starting place for Christian stewardship is to get the definition right.
- How have you defined stewardship? How does it compare with the LCMS definition?
- How did you come to your definition?
- What damage does a narrow definition of stewardship (limiting it to money) do to a Christian’s relationship to God?
- What meaning is given to the word *oikonomia* in each of the following passages?
 - Luke 16:2-4
 - 1 Corinthians 9:17
 - Ephesians 1:10
 - Colossians 1:25
 - 1 Timothy 1:4
- Since the word “stewardship” has a bad reputation, should another word be used? If so, what? If not, how would you go about reclaiming its proper definition?

Putting It Into Practice

Survey members of the congregation to determine their definition of Christian stewardship. How can members be helped to understand and live out the true meaning of stewardship?

Digging Deeper

- Read *A Theology for Christian Stewardship* by T. A. Kantonen. It can be found online at faithaflame.lcms.org under the tab “Stewardship Book Resources.”
- Check out the stewardship resources online at Godsstewards.com and faithaflame.lcms.org.

