

Episcopal Diocese of West Texas

Creating A Vestry Stewardship Statement

by Tom Gossen, Executive Director, TENS

I'm not sure when I first learned the principle that leadership has a responsibility to lead, but I do know this reality: **when leadership doesn't lead, the group depending on leadership doesn't make progress.** This is an essential truth for us as we encourage generosity for the purpose of doing God's work in the world.

In matters of generosity-and of Christian Stewardship in general-one effective way that leadership can be exercised in congregations is by agreement to produce a leadership stewardship statement (see definition in [Glossary of Terms](#)).

At first glance, the essential elements of a Stewardship Statement seem simple. Consider, for example, a vestry (or church council) meeting that begins this way:

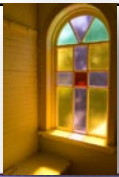
*"At this meeting we will discuss among ourselves the topics indicated by some open-ended statements. Then we will develop a comprehensive statement on which everyone can agree and bear witness to. It will go like this:
Concerning the subject of Christian Stewardship,
We believe...
We commit...
We invite (or commend)...
Witnessed by (signatures of clergy and each vestry member)"*

Without proper preparation and a carefully planned process, *chaos may well ensue!* The clergy person above will have learned to never approach that subject again!

In a second scenario, vestry members are presented a draft of a completed statement. They are asked to review it, think about it, and maybe even pray about it. In addition, they are to be prepared to discuss the statement, making any necessary minor adjustments, and sign it at the next meeting.

In both illustrations above, the task at hand lacks proper preparation and execution. Paradoxically, **the principal benefit of developing a Vestry Stewardship Statement is not in the finished product.** Rather it is to be found in the experience of the process itself. There are a number of helpful ways to maximize the opportunities for participants to realize a meaningful experience. A few are:

- Invite a trained facilitator. Look for one who has specific training in the development of stewardship statements.
- Set aside sufficient time for the process. Friday evening through mid-afternoon Saturday is an ideal period.
- Stress the value and importance of participation in the process to the participants. If the expectation is that stewardship be taken seriously by the members of the congregation, then every vestry member must also take it seriously.
- Literally and intentionally recruit every individual vestry member to participate. Do not simply announce when and where the event will take place, leaving the actual attendance of the participants in doubt. Get a commitment to attend.



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- Promise the participants a quality experience. Small group Bible study and fellowship are important components of the process.
- Have a plan for sharing the experience with the entire congregation. An article in the parish newsletter (including pictures) can be written by someone who is recruited in advance. The experience can be the subject of the sermon on the Sunday following the event, and the completed statement can be brought forward as part of the Sunday offering. Post the Vestry Stewardship Statement in a prominent place and invite all members to add their signatures of witness. Include the statement on materials developed for distribution during the annual commitment (pledge) program.

A caution: don't carve the statement into stone by engraving it and framing it in a way that suggests, "We did this once, and now we don't ever have to do it again!" Instead, use the statement as a tool in recruiting candidates for election to the vestry. Remind them that an expectation of leadership is to review and renew a witness to a Vestry Stewardship Statement annually. The expectation is that a completely new statement will be developed in the context of a vestry retreat every three years.

Example #1

We believe God is the source of all gifts, spiritual and material. Our faithful response, in gratitude, is to be givers and creators ourselves. While we strive to be good stewards of all God's gifts to us, we believe that the way we use our money reflects the state of our spiritual lives.

We commit to follow Christ in community. In prayerful witness to our faith, each of us is already tithing or is committed to increasing his or her personal giving to reach or exceed the tithe.

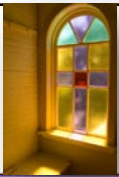
Our experience is that joyful giving results in spiritual growth. **We invite** the parish to join us in this commitment to deepening our faith.

Adapted from the **TENS** [A Manual for Stewardship Development Programs in the Congregation](#).

Example #2

Vestry Commitment the [Church] 2009

1. The Rector is a tither – or is committed to a personal program of increased giving, the goal of which is tithing, and will witness to that commitment within the parish.
2. Individual members of the Vestry are committed to proportionate (%) giving, the minimum goal of which is tithing, and will witness as a Vestry to that commitment within the parish.



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3. The Vestry is officially committed to proportionate (%) giving as the pattern for Christian stewardship and demonstrates this commitment by waiting until after the canvass to formulate its budget for the 1999.
4. The Vestry is committed to a goal of giving an increasing proportion (%) of its income for purposes outside the parish recognizing the needs of others including its annual apportionment to the Diocese.
5. Every member and/or family unit of the congregation will be contacted by a trained canvasser in a direct, person visit.
6. One person for each four families in the congregation will be recruited to participate in three (3) hours of education, at the conclusion of which she/he may commit to serve as a canvasser.
7. The Vestry commits itself to a systematic follow-up program of stewardship education including contacting all new members as part of orientation to parish life and ministry.
8. The Vestry agrees to pray daily for this stewardship plan and to lead the congregation to accept their responsibility as stewards of God's gifts.

(This is an adaptation of the eight criteria in the West Texas Plan developed by Ted Burkhart while serving as consultant for his home parish as they prepared for the Every Member Canvass.)
