

Episcopal Diocese of West Texas

Year-round Stewardship Programs

The practice of good stewardship requires constant effort. We must educate the congregation about stewardship throughout the year. This year-round approach is necessary for improving stewardship practices. The most basic year-round stewardship is simply our awareness of it in our own lives. I find that the people I know whose sense of accountability to God for their lives is strong, naturally see their lives in terms of their stewardship every day. They make their choices about what they will do or not do, what responsibilities they will accept, even what social obligations they will take on, in terms of where they can best use the gifts that God has given them. The most effective messages on stewardship are delivered, year round, by people who are aware daily of the accountability of their lives before God.

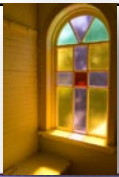
The Rt. Rev. John H. MacNaughton, author of *More Blessed to Give*, and retired Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of West Texas (San Antonio), identifies, beginning on page 104, several issues about the importance of year-round education for stewardship as follows:

"...without the support of a broader year-round emphasis, even the very best financial stewardship programs, while maintaining their theological/biblical appearance, will over the years degenerate into simple fund raising.... In its broadest terms, what is the heart of our stewardship before God? Is it not to know and to accept that God is the ultimate source of all that we possess...?"

Three Ways to Teach Stewardship Year-round

1. Divide the 12 month calendar into four natural stewardship teaching times.

- a. **January**-Choose a Sunday as near to the first of the year as possible. Here is an ideal time to focus on the theme of the **stewardship of time**. How do we spend our time? If time is not infinite, it is important that we use what we have in ways that are responsible to ourselves, to others, and to God. How do we break up the time we are given responsibly between service to self, service to others, and service to God?
- b. **May**-Choose a Sunday around Arbor day. The second stewardship emphasis naturally falls here on the theme of the **stewardship of the earth** (creation). When we plant a seed in the ground we demonstrate our sense of partnership with God. When we set out a garden, plant a tree or a bush, or sow a field of grain we experience an example of our dependence on the generosity of God expressed through the created order. Spring is an excellent time to be reminded of our responsibilities to protect the gift of all creation in order to pass it on to the future as undamaged as possible.
- c. **September**-Choose a Sunday as near as possible to Labor Day. This is a natural occasion to focus on the theme of our **stewardship of talent**. Consider a theme in terms of the way that our work-our vocations, professions, and jobs-can be used in helping others, directly or indirectly.
- d. **October to early November**-Normally the focus this time of the year is on the **stewardship of money**. However, the financial aspect of our total stewardship no longer stands alone, but becomes a part of a larger concern, a concern that encompasses most, if not all, of our lives.



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In addition to the sermon, all other aspects of the worship service, insofar as possible, should be geared to emphasize the Sunday theme. This includes the choice of hymns, anthems, the use of special prayers on the theme, and at least one bulletin announcement directed to the theme. The key to the congregation's understanding of the Sunday focus on an aspect of stewardship is that it be identified as such in the spoken word and in the printed bulleting.

2. Every Member Canvass of Time & Talent

A second way to bring stewardship into the Church's program year-round is to undertake an Every Member Canvass in the spring for pledges of time and talent (instead of the fall visitation for financial pledges).

3. Sunday Bulletin and Monthly Mailings

Another effective way to keep stewardship on the minds of the congregation year-round is to use the Sunday bulletin and monthly mailings to write about it. The key to this approach is to have breadth and diversity in the messages in order to emphasize that stewardship is what we do, all the time, with everything we have. Again it becomes important for congregational understanding that the focus of any one article be identified as a stewardship focus.

Adapted from A Manual for Stewardship Development Programs in the Congregation