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The Annual Stewardship Letter

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 date has been 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 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 in crafting your initial stewardship letter to the congregation.

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.

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

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.

Now introduce your stewardship theme. Explain the theme using Biblical, theological and practical reasons. Your previous story should be illustrative of the theme.

Use the word "generosity" often along with "stewardship." The words "budget" or "pledge" will not appear in the letter. Instead, use "annual ministry plan" and "my personal giving plan."

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.

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.

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.

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.

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." They will be okay and so will your church.