



Vital Practices

for leading congregations

*Wholehearted
Stewardship*

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Wholehearted Stewardship

BY ERIN WEBER-JOHNSON

My book club just watched Brené Brown's "The Power of Vulnerability" TED Talk. (Yes, we were a book club watching a TED Talk; it was a tough month.) And, I couldn't be more grateful. After four years at the Episcopal Church Foundation, four years of teaching fundraising and thinking about stewardship...one 20-minute video shifted the way I look at annual giving.

Brown points out the truth that each of us deeply desires to know how to eat right, lose weight, save enough for our retirement, and raise our children. We want to know how to have/be enough. Yet, most "How to" lists are full of things we already know. I can't tell you the number of times I've read a magazine headline promising to change my life in three easy steps only to be disappointed when I already knew the answers. There is no silver bullet, no step-by-step process to the

perfect life.

So it is too with fundraising. Really, what we need is not "How to raise money positively/effectively," but to ask what is keeping us from living into fundraising as a (to borrow a phrase from Brown) wholehearted ministry.

What follows is not a step-by-step process to the perfect stewardship campaign. Rather what I can tell you, from my experience, are the hallmarks of a positive approach to annual giving – call it wholehearted stewardship.tling on Crissey Farm, a local reception hall. Volunteers came forward to set up and break down the worship space each Sunday morning.

Here is what I know:

1. The end goal isn't an amount. Parishes need to raise enough money to meet operating costs. But what are those costs for and

why do we need them? People. Community. Ministry.

Annual giving that forgets to focus on where the money is going and why it's important is like securing groceries for an excellent meal, but forgetting to cook...or why you were even cooking to begin with!

Henri Nouwen writes, "Fundraising is precisely the opposite of begging. We are asking people to give their resources for the Kingdom of God."

2. One size does not fit all. Each generation has their own particular needs. We understand this in pastoral care and with spiritual formation opportunities. Yet, we take it for granted with fundraising that the same tool can be used for everyone. For example, writing an annual letter will only connect to a portion of your demographic.

Let's take a moment to look at who is in your pews:

- **Greatest Generation:** Defined by WWII, trust of authority, language of loyalty.

- **Baby Boomers:** Defined by the idealism of the 60's, distrust of institutions

- **Generation X:** Defined as first

generation of divorce, distrust of authority

- **Millennials:** Defined by over-programming, seeking mentor relationships, more immediate gratification

That Gen X'er is just as inclined to give as your Greatest Generation retiree. Yet, the language and tools need to adapt to each cohort – from print to digital and right down to the way we phrase our "ask."

3. Language of Obligation:

The Reverend Gerald Keucher, ECF Consultant, wrote recently, "Usually we communicate a sense of urgency, if not panic, because there's never enough money. That makes people anxious, and many find it annoying to be made anxious year after year. We also almost communicate a sense of obligation: you should, you have to, you need to, you ought to contribute more than you are giving."

#3 makes sense in light of #1 and #2. Many Baby Boomers and Generation X'ers are defined by doing the exact opposite of what authorities tell them they "should" be doing. Shaming a person into a gift may get you an initial pledge, but won't develop lifelong givers with a passion for giving to your parish.

4. Same Old People working to "just get it done:" When we think about annual campaigns, most of the time we just want to get the job done. What about seeing this as an opportunity to train new leaders and seeking ways to form young givers?

I was recently working on a campaign where the youth were invited to pledge \$.50/week or \$24/year by a donor willing to match their gift, securing \$58/ year for each youth.

Earlier I mentioned that Millennials often seek mentoring relationships. In fact, the both the New York Times and Harvard Business Review have run articles about the impact this has had on the workplace. A parish I recently worked with saw this as an opportunity and has sought to pair Millennials with established members in the parish. Part of this relationship is talking transparently about giving to the parish.

5. It doesn't just happen from September-December. Part of Stewardship is the process of thanking those who have given all year round. I encourage parishes to have "PBS" moments where once a week they take a moment to highlight a ministry and say thank you to parishioners for making this possible. For example,

if the choir sings a particularly beautiful anthem, a rector might stop and thank them for their gift to the parish and then thank the parish community for their gifts of financial resources, which make it possible.

I recently worked with a parish that determined and then highlighted the number of volunteer hours necessary for each Sunday's worship service. Everyone was amazed at how much was given each week. Many were grateful to be recognized. And, with this increased transparency, still others felt more inclined to give of their time and their financial resources.

Your annual giving campaign can be an opportunity for growth and excitement. What have you done that has reached out to different generations in your parish? How have you communicated the ministries at work by beloved people in your parish without using the language of obligation and shame? What positive experiences can you share about your campaign and its impact on the life of your parish? Where are you seeing wholehearted giving in the communities where you live and serve and lead?

Erin Weber-Johnson joined the Episcopal Church Foundation as a capital campaign consultant in

2009. In addition to capital campaign consulting, Erin has facilitated diocesan and vestry retreats on annual stewardship, the development of a spiritual ethos for giving, and debt retirement. She holds a graduate degree in public administration from NYU.

Erin and her husband, Jered, previously served as missionaries of the Episcopal Church, based in Taiwan, and now live in St. Paul, MN where Jered is rector of St. John the Evangelist. Erin and Jered have two sons, Jude and Simon Henri, and are proud to call Minnesota home.

Resources

- Brené Brown "The Power of Vulnerability" TED Talk (video) http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html
- Henri Nouwen: The Spirituality of Fundraising http://www.henrinouwen.org/Spirituality_Series/Fundraising/Fundraising.aspx
- Gerald Keucher, "The Seductive Power of Coercion" <http://www.buildfaith.org/2013/02/25/the-seductive-power-of-coercion/>
- Webinar: Stewardship in a New Millennium <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/>

Editor's Letter

September brings a different sort of energy, a different sense of time. There's a renewed sense of urgency – the 'lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer' are behind us, replaced by a desire to get organized, to get on with things.

For many of our churches, September is the month we return to our regular worship schedule. Sunday school starts again, as do other programs as our churches adopt the rhythm of the school year.

September is also the time that many churches ramp up their annual campaigns. Congregational leaders look for inspiration, for ways to bring freshness and new ideas to their giving programs, often with the objective of raising more money than in years past.

In this issue of Vestry Papers, we embrace 'wholehearted stewardship,' sharing stories and resources from congregations, dioceses, and individuals who have explored the question "what is keeping us from living into fundraising as a whole hearted ministry?"

In Vestry Papers this month:

- "Wholehearted Stewardship" by Erin Weber-Johnson explores this question, offering six truisms for congregational leaders to explore. Available in English and Spanish.
- Is there a connection between spiritual vitality and stewardship? Bill Nesbitt's "Spiritual Vitality" shares what happened in his congregation following their participation in a pilot project designed to both assess spiritual vitality and support spiritual growth.
- In "Doing More with Less," Eric Law shares a lesson learned as a young child at his mother's table. The family dynamics of passing the "leftover" around generated a spirit of appreciation and affirmation, leading to his deeply ingrained belief in this radical value: It is better to have less than the other.
- "Liberating Stewardship" by Demi Prentiss, offers congregations a road map for breaking out of a narrow understanding of stewardship and charting a different course. She offers a model for year round stewardship, with practical advice relating to both formation and administration.
- Our lives are often touched by simple acts of kindness. Time passes, and these simple acts are easily forgotten – but not always. These kindnesses can live on, perhaps in ways we never know about. "Squash Tithe" by Nancy Moore shares how the gift of a summer squash from one parishioner to another in 2012, lives on in an unexpected way. Available in English and Spanish.
- For many people, talking about money is difficult – even with family. In "Honest Sharing" Angela Emerson offers a glimpse into the private struggle many of us experience as we wrestle with our feelings related to giving, not only of our treasure but our time.
- Was it a coincidence that the priest, with a vision of and funds for a community garden walked into the AgriLife Extension service office the day after their plans for a community garden were crushed after their grant application was denied? "God Had a Hand in

This” by Luke Blount shares the story of strangers brought together by a shared vision.

- Dan Edwards preaches: “When God says, when you feel like you don’t have enough, take some of what you have and give it away. In “Crazy Wisdom” he shares stories, from biblical times to the present, of people who have walked in faith, giving away what they have and finding that they still have enough. Available in English and Spanish.

Following each article is a list of resources offering additional information and/or practical tools.

If someone shared this copy of *Vestry Papers* with you I invite you to consider subscribing to *ECF Vital Practices* and *Vestry Papers*. Visit www.ecfvp.org and click on Register, located on the upper right corner of the page. Complete the registration form to have *Vestry Papers* and *ECF Vital Practices* content delivered twice a month to your email inbox.

Faithfully,

Nancy

Nancy Davidge

PS: To make it easier to find the resources offered through *ECF Vital Practices*, please consider adding a link to ECF Vital Practices to your website. Here’s how: Using your websites ‘add a link’ tool, insert our full URL – <http://www.ecfvp.org/>.

PPS: Do you live in an area with limited Internet access? If you have a smart phone, consider browsing ECF Vital Practices from your mobile device; the site has been optimized for smart phones which makes it easier to search for content.

Spiritual Vitality

BY BY BILL NESBIT

If spiritual vitality of a congregation were measured, where along a continuum would the members in your church be?

For 12 congregations in the Diocese of Chicago, including St. Charles Episcopal Church, spiritual vitality would be high.

A medium size church in suburban Chicago, St. Charles participated in the diocese's RenewalWorks pilot project (then known as Episcopal Spiritual Life Renewal – link here to Clarence's piece). While I was present for the initial assessment, the work of evaluating the data and planning our response took place during my sabbatical.

I returned to an energized evaluating and planning group, and four action steps, none of which included anything to do with stewardship. The four steps were:

1. Increased breadth of bible study opportunities;
2. Establishment of a women's prayer group (Daughters of the King);
3. Develop a better way to integrate visitors into the life of the church,

engaging them more quickly and systematically into the life of the parish;

4. Building deeper relationships among members by spiritual mentorships.

As we began the process of sharing our vision and building energy and excitement we began to see more clearly how business as usual had been sapping the energy from our mission. We began to look at how spiritual renewal might have a positive effect on everything we did, often in ways we had never thought about before.

Last year's budget debate at the annual meeting provides an interesting example. As always there was much conversation on the need to grow the budget. What was original was the discussion that centered on the budget as a reflection of the spiritual faith of the community. There were comments about the need to continue to grow the faith of the community, to better discern God's mission for our community, and to better attract and integrate new members of the broader community into the life of the parish. Though triggered by

a shortfall in the pledge drive, the response was regarded more as a crisis of faith, the perception of a disconnection from the abundance of God.

Coming out of that discussion, our stewardship group renamed itself "The Generosity Project" and began broadening their vision, working to heal that breach. Using a spiritual gifts assessment tool they hosted small group meetings to help people become more aware of their own spiritual gifts. Heading into the fall pledge drive they are working to explore the different ways people perceive their own spiritual discipline of giving, and how to present information in a compelling way regardless of their different understandings. The work continues, but I am optimistic about the outcome.

So, when it gets right down to it, did RenewalWorks affect our stewardship? Directly, no, but indirectly very much so. RenewalWorks has helped to move us away from a consumer mentality of working to provide church to those who come to the building on Sunday, to a missional spirituality of being the church in

the world, a vibrant part of God's mission of reconciliation to the world.

Bill Nesbit came to St. Charles Episcopal Church in St. Charles, Illinois in 2000 and his laughter has been heard through the building ever since. Starting out as a pharmacist with a heart for the church, Bill heard an angel say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us" when he was a lay reader and finding himself answering "Here am I; send me," began the wonderful, terrifying, fascinating discernment that led him to the priesthood.

Resources

- *Move* by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, published by Willow Creek Association <http://www.willowcreek.com/ProdInfo.asp?invtid=PR34989>
- Renewal Works www.renewalworks.org
- Episcopal Spiritual Life Renewal Process Pilot <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/increasing-spiritual-vitality-renewal-works/>
- *Follow Me: What's Next for You?* by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, published by Willow Creek Association <http://www.willowcreek.com/prodinfo.asp?invtid=PR35414>
- "Forward Movement Launches RenewalWorks, a Center for Spiritual Growth" <http://renewalworks.org/2013/05/forward-movement-launches-renewalworks-a-center-for-spiritual-growth/>

Do More with Less

BY ERIC H.F. LAW

When I was young my family always had guests for dinner. On any given day, there might be twelve to fifteen people at the dinner table. Dinner was a time of joyful sharing of food and stories. I thought we were quite wealthy, feeding so many people every night. Only when I was older, while talking to my mother about the good old days, did I find out that we were not rich at all. My mother told me that some days she only had three dollars to feed fifteen people. How could that be? I could not remember a day when there was not enough food! What my mother did with three dollars was a miracle in itself. If you asked her how she did it, she would tell you how she determined what to buy in what season and, more importantly, her techniques in bargaining. But I think there is more to this miracle than just knowing what to buy and how to bargain. Not only was everyone around the table filled every night; there were always leftovers. I believe the way we dealt with the leftovers at the dinner table is indicative of how this miracle of doing “more with less” was accomplished.

Toward the end of dinner, there was always something left on a plate in the middle of the table. Everyone would be staring at it, especially when it was a piece of meat, which was an occasional, special treat. But no one would make a move to take it. Then someone would say, “Why don’t you take it, Grandma? You are the oldest.” But my grandma would say, “No, I’ve been eating this stuff all my life. Give it to the little one. He’s the youngest and needs the nourishment to grow up to be big and strong.” Now all eyes were on me - the youngest. But I, who also learned this ritual, would say, “No, not me. I am completely full because I have the smallest stomach. Give it to my older brother. He has an examination at school tomorrow. He needs it so he can do well.” My oldest brother would say, “No, not me. Give it to my sister. She has a piano lesson tomorrow . . .” The ritual would go on around the table; each person would find an excuse not to take the leftover piece of food. While we offered it to each other, we also affirmed each other’s worthiness in the family. As a result, the piece of meat would sit in the middle of the table, destined to be

left over, to be transformed into a new delicious dish the next day. The leftovers became a symbol of our appreciation of each other’s worth. This leftover piece of food became a sign of the abundance we shared –we can do more with less.

At the dinner table of my childhood, I learned a very important life lesson, which has become part of the spirituality I strive to live out. The lesson was very different from a more popular spirituality based on scarcity, which drives us to take and keep and to have more than the other. The spirituality I learned at my dinner table was a different twist on modernism’s credo: Less Is More. (This credo is attributed to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.) By insisting on having less than the other, we learn to appreciate more of each other’s worth. Furthermore, I learned from my childhood dinner table, the new credo: Do More with Less. (This one is attributed to R. Buckminster Fuller.) The dynamics of passing the “leftover” around generating a spirit of appreciation and affirmation did so much more than fighting over the last piece of meat, as a fear-of-

scarcity-minded group would do.

For me, this radical value – it is better to have less than the other – behind the leftover ritual is the key to stewardship that can unclog the blockage of the flow of resources in our churches and in our communities. In order to practice this spirituality, people in our communities must believe in the abundance that comes from giving. If everyone in your community gives until he or she has less, it generates a dynamic that will keep everyone giving and receiving. Eventually what you give away will actually return to you. Once people realize that giving is not a one-time “losing” game, but part of a dynamic process that keeps resources flowing in our community, they will have the courage to give generously. To demonstrate how this works, here is an exercise you can do with any group in your various communities to show how “do more with less” can work.

Size of group: 8-25 participants.

Material needed: 100 note cards; a projector or large sign with the following quote
It is better to have less than the other.

Instructions:

- Divide the note cards into 4

piles of 25 cards.

- Give four participants 25 cards each. Explain that each card represent a kind of currency. They could be money, time, talent, relationship, etc.

- Project or post in large print on the wall the following quote:
It is better to have less than the other.

- Explain the rule of this simulation as follows:

- o The four participants who have the cards are rich with resources. If we live the spirituality of scarcity, most of us would want to keep what we have. In that case, nothing will happen – no movement, no flow of currencies. The four resource rich persons might decide to trade with each other but there will be no engagement with those who had nothing.

- o What if the new rule for this community is: It is better to have less than the other?

- What would happen?
- Can you imagine that?
- For the four of you who have, as you encounter another who has none, what would you do with this new spirituality?

- The one with 25 cards would give at least 13 cards away to another participant who has none.

- Let’s try that. Now if everyone in this community is committed to live out this new spirituality, what will happen?

Give the group time to experience this. Observe what happens. The cards will be distributed to everyone in the room. Those who gave away their cards initially will eventually and very quickly get some cards back. The process will evolve into an endless dynamics of giving and receiving. This is what doing more with less looks like.

After some time, stop the simulation and invite participants to complete the sentences:

- I noticed . . .
- I wonder . . .

After participants have shared what they noticed and wondered about, engage them in a conversation on stewardship. Invite participants to also imagine the cards in this exercise as other kinds of currency in addition to money, such as time, talent, relationship, leadership, etc. What does this exercise teach us about sustainability?

The Rev. Eric H. F. Law is the founder and executive director of the Kaleidoscope Institute, which offers resources and training for intercultural competency, congregational development and stewardship. He also writes a weekly blog: *The Sustainist-Spirituality for Sustainable Communities in a Networked World*. <http://ehflaw.typepad.com/>

<http://ehflaw.typepad.com/blog/2013/06/scorecards-for-sustainable-communities.html>

- *The Sustainist-Spirituality for Sustainable Communities in a Networked World* blog <http://ehflaw.typepad.com/>

This article first appeared as a blog post on The Episcopal Network for Stewardship's website and is reprinted with permission.

Resources

- *Inclusion Making Room for Grace* by Eric H.F. Law <http://www.chalicepress.com/Inclusion-P222C1.aspx>
- Kaleidoscope Institute <http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/>
- *GracEconomic Exchange Center* by Eric H.F. Law <http://ehflaw.typepad.com/blog/2013/06/graceeconomic-exchange-center.html>
- *GracEconomic Grocery Story* by Eric H.F. Law <http://ehflaw.typepad.com/blog/2013/06/graceeconomic-grocery-store.html>
- *Scorecards for Sustainable Communities* by Eric H.F. Law

Liberating Stewardship

BY DEMI PRENTISS

One of my favorite definitions of stewardship is “Everything we do after we say, ‘I believe.’” For me, stewardship is a whole-life concept, calling for right use of all the resources that God has given us. Healthy stewardship formation, then, obliges congregations to expand their definition to touch on every aspect of faithful living. Gratitude knows no season. Generosity is a year-round practice for Christians. Yet we’re inclined to define “stewardship” as an annual campaign, and to confine it to a few weeks’ “beg-a-thon,” designed to fund a congregation’s operating budget. When we approach stewardship in this way, we’re not only misunderstanding our Christian vocation – we’re also putting God in a very tiny box, perhaps the better to limit God’s call on our lives.

The Christian vocation of proclaiming and responding to God’s prodigious generosity is a year-round calling. Forming good stewards – whole-life stewards – is an essential job of our congregations, equipping members to live in right relationship with the many resources available to them. Making stewardship a year-round endeavor is a two-pronged undertaking for

leaders in congregations, requiring efforts both in formation and in administration and summoning many different gifts from the congregation as a whole.

Stewardship Year Round – Formation

Does your congregation think about and talk about stewardship only during the annual funding campaign? If so, you’re missing year-round opportunities for formation. Each week’s lectionary offers an opportunity for a mention of good stewardship, particularly since our culture has adopted money as the defining currency of relationships of all kinds – personal worth, social standing, educational opportunities, and even, in some families, respect.

Preaching

Nearly any scripture reading can be related to stewardship, and particularly to money – our relationship with it, our use of it, our passion for it. A dominant message of the Hebrew scriptures is the warning against idolatry of all kinds. Our human tendency to raise up objects to worship in place of the Living

God is clear evidence of our misunderstanding of the wealth of God’s gifts to us. And chief among those gifts is our being entrusted with the stewardship of all of creation, including ourselves. The Hebrew scriptures tell us, over and over: “God first.” And they promise that, when we exercise good stewardship in our relationship with God – when we reject idolatry and practice “God first” – our lives and our relationships become right-ordered.

In the Gospels, Jesus mentions money frequently, sometimes as a metaphor for our God-given gifts but just as often as the thing itself. Jesus reminds us that our relationship with money can become a proxy for our relationships in general – with God and with others. For example, the rich young ruler, who “goes away sad” when Jesus challenges him to sell all that he has, was possibly not put off by our modern-day fears of homelessness or hunger or a lack of a retirement nest egg. After all, the followers of Jesus seem to have been reasonably provided for. But the young man may well have been unwilling to relinquish the comfort and predictability of relationships

mediated by his money.

Teaching

In addition to opportunities for the preacher to call attention to good stewardship each week, every congregation has opportunities – book studies, rector’s forums, Sunday school classes, mission events – to make stewardship a priority “out of season.” If your annual fund campaign is in the fall, consider convening a Lenten (or Epiphany or Eastertide) study with a stewardship theme. Stewardship of creation, of time, of financial resources are all topics that many families – especially young families – value hearing framed in the context of their faith, within their faith community.

New member classes are also an ideal time for the congregation to listen to the expectations that new members have of their church community, and to discuss the congregation’s expectations of its members. In my work with new members, among those expectations I name regular worship, study for personal growth in faith, daily prayer, participation in the governance and ministries of the church, and clear communication of needs and concerns. In addition, I like to offer proportional giving as a tool for deepening financial commitment to God’s

work through the church, with the tithe as the biblical standard.

Modeling

Year-round stewardship also means offering a wide variety of opportunities to practice gratitude and generosity. When congregations and their leaders explicitly express thanks to members of the congregation and to the larger community, they model practices that foster good stewardship. Commission a group in your congregation to create thoughtful, innovative ways the congregation can say “thank you.”

Presenting opportunities for giving – not only money but also time and talent – and explicitly acknowledging the responses also sets a norm of generosity. Make sure you offer opportunities not only for making an annual pledge, but also for contributing to specific projects throughout the year.

As your congregation models transparency and responsiveness in its budgeting process, members are further formed in good stewardship. Be sure your treasurer and governing body are mindful of soliciting and listening to input around congregational expenditures and accountability.

There are congregations where formation in good stewardship is

so deep and complete that they no longer conduct an annual fund campaign. In my diocese, St. Luke’s Stephenville (TX) is such a congregation. They produce a leaflet that summarizes their culture of stewardship, which they call “abundance stewardship.” Over the course of more than 30 years, this congregation has so embedded the culture of radical generosity in their congregational life that they no longer solicit pledges, relying on the regular sacrificial contributions of their members. Their faith statements give rise to practices of generosity that have reshaped their life together.

Year-Round Stewardship – Administration

The administrative prong of all-season stewardship begins with forming a stewardship team just as soon as the vestry takes office. Such a team becomes a significant partner with the congregation’s leadership in forming a generous congregation.

The stewardship team’s work goes well beyond planning and executing the annual fund campaign. They will also propose and help develop opportunities throughout the year that will help develop good stewards – events varying from days of community service to financial management classes to environmental

awareness work. Those opportunities touch on many different areas of our stewardship lives: environmental stewardship, growth in faithfulness, giftedness, financial health, life and faith priorities, strategic planning, congregational ministries, outreach to the community, and more.

The team will also study the congregation's giving practices and patterns, both to shape formation activities and to engage the congregation in growing as stewards. Their portfolio is limited only by their imaginations and by the congregation's willingness to follow their lead.

Laurel Johnston, now the executive director of The Episcopal Network for Stewardship (TENS), has developed a checklist and a planning guideline for stewardship teams planning an annual giving campaign, work that is best accomplished over the course of a full year. She advises, "Remember the purpose of an annual giving campaign is not only to raise support to fund the vision and mission of your congregation, but also to help people explore intentional and proportional giving as a spiritual practice that reflects gratitude and generosity for all that has been given. Take time to consider how you can implement

any or all of these components that will lay a firm foundation for the success of an annual giving campaign."

The team's year-round efforts will not only mean a team and a congregation prepared to engage in thoughtful discernment around stewardship. The 12 months of work will also model for the congregation the deep grounding in stewardship that is our Christian calling. God's prodigious generosity calls us to respond in kind, intentionally directing our resources to further God's work in the world.

***Demi Prentiss** is ministry developer for the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth. For 25 years she has worked in national, diocesan, and congregational settings equipping and supporting God's people as they become intentional partners in God's dream for the world. She lives with her husband and two dogs in Denton, Texas.*

Resources

- *Abundance Stewardship St. Luke's Style* <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/abundance-stewardship-st-lukes-style/>
- Annual Giving Campaign Tools (checklist and timeline) <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/annual-giving-campaign-tools/>

org

- A Year of Living Generously, United Church of Christ: <http://www.ucc.org/stewardship/year-round-stewardship/>
- Diocese of West Texas Year Round Stewardship Calendar: <http://www.dwtx.org/departments-ministries/stewardship/year-round-stewardship/>
- Ideas for a Year-Round Stewardship Program, Diocese of Washington: <http://www.ecww.org/sites/default/files/51%20IDEAS%20FOR%20A%20YEAR%20round%20program%20by%20Michael%20Reeves%20and%20Tom%20Gossen.pdf>
- Year Round Stewardship Communication, an ELCA site: <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Discipleship/Stewardship/Year-Round-Stewardship-Communication.aspx> Note the "year 'round Planning Calendar for Growing Stewards in your Congregation"
- "No More Pledge Cards – Please!" by Angela Emerson, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers September/October 2012 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/practicing-generosity/no-more-pledge-cards-please/>

Seeds of Hope

BY SHIRLEY BOWEN

Nota - Este artículo es disponible en español

“Our backs are to the wall. We’ve got to start fighting if we are going to hold on to our church.” The year was 1958 and the conversation was about money. For years the congregation had been trying to recover from the closing of the textile mills and the departure of the workforce, many of whom were parishioners.

The history of Christ Episcopal Church in Biddeford, Maine tells the story of how this church, organized in 1869 to meet the spiritual needs of mill workers from England, developed into a working class faith community committed to feeding all aspects of the lives of Biddeford residents. This history shares the church’s commitment to the community and choices made, through periods of growth and decline and frequent financial struggle.

In 2008, the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church in Biddeford decided to let go. And in letting go, they were reborn – intentionally transforming themselves from a house of worship to a Jubilee Center – and discovering that, as Seeds of Hope they were now sharing God’s presence and abiding love

with so many more people than they ever would have as Christ Church.

Here is our story:

At the end of 2006, the Christ Church congregation needed to make a decision. Having a three quarter time rector was becoming impossible to support; they cut the position to half time and were then in need of a new priest.

As the new priest-in-charge, called in 2007, it was clear that the congregation was at a low point. After several months together, conversations began happening in earnest as to the future of the parish. Two things became clear. First, because most of the people served by the parish are poor, working class, or on fixed incomes, the size of the congregation could triple, but it would have little effect on the budget. Second, residing in one of the poorest sections of the city illuminated how much desperate unmet need surrounded the tiny church.

For many years there have been conversations among congregations in Southern Maine regarding collaborations, mergers, and the

like. Each time, the conversation ended with no substantive change. This time, the conversation focused not on our survival, but on our ministry in our neighborhood and the community. From the very beginning, it felt different.

Our parish hall was ‘home’ to a number of community organizations. Each of these groups served the poor in Biddeford and, like us, wondered how the need could ever be met. We gathered and talked. What services were being offered? Where were there overlaps? Where were the gaps? How might we work together to better serve our community?

With this collective insight, supported by a sister parish, our 15 congregants came to understand that they were articulating a Jubilee Ministry mission – serving those in need and trying to help break those things which kept people in need.

This was a critical moment in the life of the parish. With an endowment already in place, the parish could have decided to reduce the priest-in-charge position to an even smaller per-

centage and continue for a very long time. Or, the parish could listen to the Baptismal Covenant, take the risk of expending all its endowed income on serving others, and possibly eventually close or become something very different. We chose the latter, and have never once looked back in sorrow. A new kind of mission was born:

“The Seeds of Hope Neighborhood Center offers hospitality and support to all those who pass through our doors. The collection of our efforts strives to offer hope to those who are struggling, care for those in need, advocacy for those who have been silenced, companionship for those who are alone, and compassionate love for all.

“As a Jubilee Center we will partner with poor and oppressed people, wherever they are found, in the spirit of mercy and justice - to meet basic human needs and to build a just society.”

With support from the Diocese, over the course of the next five years the Seeds of Hope Neighborhood (Jubilee) Center has continued to expand its conversations into the community, including the neighbors served, the city of Biddeford, multiple social service organizations, sister churches in surrounding communities, community and civic

organizations, the local University and interested individuals. It has grown from being open two days/week and serving breakfast to 10-15 people a day, to:

- Being open four days/week serving breakfast and lunch to 70-100 people a day
- Offering free clothing and a staffed Career Resource Center - working to help people seek living-wage employment
- Serving as a warming and cooling center in the city of Biddeford
- Serving as a hub for neighborhood meetings and community engagement
- Being a regular referral site for many of the local social service organizations who serve those in the city that need a place to feel safe, accepted, and welcomed
- Serving as a resource in the community to assist with facilitating difficult conversations and encouraging collaborate partnerships helping to care for families and victims of violent crime, fire and other tragedies
- Offering sacramental opportunities to those who have no

parish home and/or who cannot afford funerals fees, or who desire to experience the blessed gifts of communion and reconciliation in a safe environment.

Operating as a non-sectarian organization, all services are available for everyone. A balance has been struck between creating a climate that is welcoming to everyone, regardless of his or her background, including religious beliefs, and being responsive to those who are seeking spiritual support. And, although the worship services at Christ Church have been suspended, pastoral care, occasional services, and reconciling love permeates the Center. All of the programming, volunteer recruitment and training, outreach, and collaborations are grounded in the Baptismal Covenant of the Episcopal Church. The Community Guidelines and the ways in which they are implemented are based on a very basic principle: everyone who walks through the doors is a precious child of God. This principle requires two components: everyone deserves to be treated as such, and has a responsibility to treat others the same.

This work is counter-cultural for those who are served at Seeds of Hope, many of whom live with violence in all its forms on a daily

basis. Communication can often be narrowly defined by profanity, threats, or silent submission. The work is daily acknowledging the dignity of every individual and offering compassion and kindness. It is about having high expectations for behavior and offering, sometimes for the first-time, loving boundaries and the accompanying caring environment. The work is giving the opportunity to people who don't know God but know the staff and volunteers of the Center, to know God because of being cared for at the Center.

The spirit of Christ is alive at the Seeds of Hope Neighborhood Center. The holy conversations over the past six years have given more visibility to God's presence and love as manifested in the work of Seeds of Hope than the small parish could have done on its own. Former members of the parish have transferred to a parish in a neighboring community, but their hearts continue to hold Christ Church/Seeds of Hope in prayer. And our hope is that in time we will once again foster a regular worshiping community, although likely in a different form than Christ Church had been. When caring for God's people is the foundation of the conversation in our communities, truly, the listening and sharing are holy.

The Rev. Shirley Bowen is the Executive Director/Chaplain at Seeds of Hope, and helped bring the Jubilee Center into being in 2008. She has served as parish priest at Christ Church from 2007 – 2012, and also served as the Campus Missioner for the Diocese of Maine.

Resources

- Christ Church Biddeford <http://www.christchurchbiddeford.org/history.html>
- Leadership Development Initiative <http://diomassleads.org/about-ldi/>
- “Molting Out Of Old Shells” a video by Tom Brackett <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/molting-our-of-our-old-shells/>
- Seeds of Hope <http://seedsof-hope4me.org/about.php>
- Strategic Planning for Your Church, Episcopal Church Foundation <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/strategic-planning-for-your-church/>
- “The Difference Between Mission and Vision” by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices Vital Post <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/the-difference-between-mission-and-vision/>

Mayordomía Incondicional

BY ERIN WEBER-JOHNSON

Nota - Este artículo es disponible en español

Mi club de lectura acaba de ver la TED Talk de Brené Brown titulada “The Power of Vulnerability (el Poder de la Vulnerabilidad)” . (Sí, éramos un club de lectura mirando un TED Talk; fue un mes difícil). Y no podría haber estado más agradecida. Después de cuatro años en la Fundación de la Iglesia Episcopal y cuatro años de enseñar recaudación de fondos y pensar en la mayordomía... un video de 20 minutos cambió mi manera de encarar las campañas anuales de donativos.

Brown señala la verdad de que todos nosotros deseamos profundamente saber cómo comer bien, bajar de peso, ahorrar lo suficiente para la jubilación y criar a nuestros hijos. Queremos saber cómo tener y ser lo suficiente. Sin embargo, la mayoría de las listas de “Cómo hacerlo” están llenas de cosas que ya sabemos. No les puedo decir el número de veces que leí el título de una revista que prometía cambiar mi vida en tres pasos sencillos, sólo para sentirme desilusionada porque ya sabía las respuestas. No hay una varita mágica ni un proceso paso por paso para llevar una vida perfecta.

Lo mismo ocurre con la recaudación de fondos. En realidad, lo que necesitamos saber no es “Cómo recaudar fondos positiva y efectivamente”, sino preguntarnos qué está impidiendo que encaremos la recaudación de fondos como (para tomar prestada una frase de Brown) un ministerio incondicional.

Lo que sigue no es un proceso paso por paso para realizar una campaña de mayordomía perfecta. En lugar de ello, lo que les puedo describir, por mi experiencia personal, es las características de un enfoque positivo de la campaña anual de donativos, lo que se podría llamar mayordomía incondicional.

Esto es lo que sé:

1.) **La meta final no es una cantidad.** Las parroquias tienen que recaudar suficientes fondos para cubrir sus costos de funcionamiento. Pero, ¿cuáles son esos costos y por qué los necesitamos? Gente. Comunidad. Ministerio. Misión. Dios.

¡Las campañas anuales de donativos que olvidan concentrarse en

dónde va el dinero y por qué es importante equivale a comprar ingredientes de primera para preparar una comida extraordinaria pero olvidar prepararla... o por qué la estamos preparando!

Henri Nouwen escribe, “La recaudación de fondos es exactamente lo opuesto de mendigar. Estamos pidiendo a la gente que dé sus recursos para el Reino de Dios”.

2.) **Una misma talla no le queda bien a todos.** Cada generación tiene sus propias necesidades. Entendemos eso en los cuidados pastorales y en las oportunidades de formación espiritual. Sin embargo, en la recaudación de fondos damos por sentado que la misma herramienta se puede usar para todos. Por ejemplo, escribir una carta anual sólo se conectará con una parte de la mezcla demográfica de una parroquia.

Tomemos un momento para ver quiénes están en nuestros bancos:

■ **Generación de mayor edad:** Definidos por la Segunda Guerra Mundial, confianza en la autoridad, lenguaje de lealtad

- **“Baby Boomers”** (nacidos inmediatamente después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial): Definidos por el idealismo de la década de los 1960, desconfían de las instituciones
- **Generación X:** Definidos como la primera generación de divorcio, desconfían de la autoridad
- **Milenios:** Definidos por el exceso de programación, la búsqueda de relaciones de mentores y de más gratificación inmediata.

Los de la Generación X están tan inclinados a donar como los jubilados de la Generación de mayor edad. Pero el lenguaje y las herramientas deben adaptarse a cada cohorte, desde los materiales impresos hasta los digitales y hasta la manera en que expresamos nuestro “pedido.”

3.) **Lenguaje de obligación:** El Reverendo Gerald Keucher, consultor de la Fundación de la Iglesia Episcopal, escribió recientemente, “Por lo general comunicamos un sentido de urgencia, por no decir de pánico, porque nunca hay suficiente dinero. Eso inquieta mucho a la gente y a muchos les resulta fastidioso que los inquieten todos los años. También prácticamente comunicamos un sentido de obligación: debe, tiene que, necesita contribuir más que lo que está dando.”

El párrafo No. 3 tiene sentido en vista de los párrafos Nos. 1 y 2. Muchos “baby boomers” y miembros de la Generación X están definidos por hacer exactamente lo opuesto a lo que las autoridades les dicen que “deben” estar haciendo. Avergonzar a alguien para incitarlo a que haga una donación puede obtener una donación inicial, pero no crea donantes vitalicios con una pasión por dar a su parroquia.

4.) **Los mismos de siempre esforzándose en “simplemente hacerlo”:** Cuando pensamos en nuestras campañas anuales, casi todo el tiempo simplemente queremos hacer el trabajo. ¿Por qué no verlo como una oportunidad para capacitar nuevos líderes y buscar maneras de formar donantes nuevos?

Trabajé recientemente en una campaña en la que un donante dispuesto a realizar un donativo paralelo a los de ellos invitó a los jóvenes a que prometieran donar \$0.50 por semana o \$24 por año, lo que garantizó \$58 por año de cada joven.

Mencioné anteriormente que los del Milenio a menudo buscan relaciones de mentores. De hecho, tanto el New York Times como el Harvard Business Review han publicado artículos sobre el impacto que ello ha tenido en el lugar de trabajo. Una parroquia que visité

recientemente lo vio como una oportunidad e intentó unir a miembros de la generación del Milenio con miembros establecidos de la parroquia. Parte de la relación era hablar con transparencia sobre donar a la parroquia.

5.) **No ocurre repentinamente de septiembre a diciembre.** Parte de la Mayordomía es el proceso de agradecer a los que donaron durante todo el año. Insto a las parroquias a que tengan momentos “PBS” una vez por semana para dedicar tiempo a poner de relieve un ministerio y agradecer a los parroquianos por hacer que sea posible. Por ejemplo, si el coro canta un himno especialmente hermoso, un rector puede parar y agradecerles su don a la parroquia y después agradecer a la comunidad de la parroquia por sus dones de recursos financieros, que hacen que eso sea posible.

Trabajé recientemente con una parroquia que determinó y después puso de relieve el número de horas de trabajo voluntario requeridas todos los domingos para el servicio de culto. Todos quedaron asombrados por lo mucho que se donaba semanalmente. Muchos quedaron agradecidos por ser reconocidos. Y, con esta mayor transparencia, otros se sintieron más inclinados a donar su tiempo y recursos financieros.

Su campaña de donativos anuales puede ser una oportunidad de crecimiento y de inspirar entusiasmo. ¿Qué ha hecho que alcanzó a diferentes generaciones de su parroquia? ¿Cómo comunicó los ministerios en curso realizados por seres amados en su parroquia sin emplear el lenguaje de la obligación y la vergüenza? ¿Qué experiencias positivas puede compartir sobre su campaña y el impacto que tiene sobre la vida en su parroquia? ¿Dónde está viendo que se está dando incondicionalmente en las comunidades en las que vive y sirve y lidera?

***Erin Weber-Johnson** se unió a la Fundación de la Iglesia Episcopal en 2009 como asesora de campañas de capital. Además de ser asesora de campañas de capital, Erin ha sido facilitadora de retiros diocesanos y de juntas parroquiales sobre mayordomía anual, el desarrollo de valores espirituales de dar y el pago de deudas. Tiene un título de posgrado en administración pública de NYU.*

Erin y su esposo, Jered, anteriormente fueron misioneros de la Iglesia Episcopal en Taiwán y ahora residen en St. Paul, MN donde Jered es rector de la Iglesia St. John the Evangelist. Erin y Jered tienen dos hijos, Jude y Simon Henri, y se enorgullecen de ser residentes de Minnesota.

Recursos

- Brené Brown “The Power of Vulnerability” TED Talk (video) http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html
- Henri Nouwen: The Spirituality of Fundraising http://www.henrinouwen.org/Spirituality_Series/Fundraising/Fundraising.aspx
- Gerald Keucher, “The Seductive Power of Coercion” <http://www.buildfaith.org/2013/02/25/the-seductive-power-of-coercion/>
- Webinar: Stewardship in a New Millennium <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/>

Squash Tithe

BY NANCY MOORE

In the Episcopal Churches of Piscataquis County, Maine where I serve as a priest, stewardship is not a season, a few weeks in the fall when we consider how much money to give in the coming year. Stewardship not just the dollar amount we fill in on our pledge card every fall as we begin to plan for the coming fiscal year. Stewardship is not some onerous duty that we undertake so that we won't be embarrassed when we fill out that line on the parochial report about "signed pledge cards."

It has taken some time, but now stewardship is understood as a habit that informs our decisions about how we use all the blessings we have received from God.

Our pledge card includes space for commitments of both money and time. They fulfill the nonmonetary portion of their pledge in a variety of creative ways: by volunteering in the thrift shop and food pantry, cleaning the church, doing routine maintenance around the church property, providing transportation to those who can no longer drive, administrative support and pastoral care. Our pledge card invites us to promise to pray for our congrega-

tion and regularly participate in Sunday worship. Stewardship is an expression of our faith in God's ability to provide, our gratitude for all the ways we have been blessed, and our priorities in Christian mission in the poorest county in Maine. Stewardship is grounded in the belief that blessings are never just for ourselves alone; blessings are meant to be shared. I've been with these congregations for twelve years, and they still manage to surprise me with new ways of being generous.

At St. Augustine's in Dover-Foxcroft, many gardeners bring in flowers for the altar and vegetables to be shared with those in our congregation who can no longer maintain gardens for themselves. When I returned from vacation in August, I was amused when one man, I'll call him "Joe," started arriving every Sunday bearing summer squash.

I noticed that he is very particular about the weekly recipients of his squash. This past week, he made a point of giving one to the elderly woman who lives alone and had to have her cat euthanized last Monday, another to a woman

whose Alzheimer's makes him very uncomfortable.

And one to me.

A great big, overgrown, lumpy-skinned summer squash that curves at the top so it looks a little like a swan. What on earth was I going to do with this thing? I smiled graciously and thanked him for his offering as he went and sat in his pew, smiling enigmatically. I put the squash in my office and didn't think much more about it until coffee hour when I finally stopped long enough for him to tell me the whole story.

Joe started worshiping with us a few years ago. It was immediately clear that Joe had some mental health challenges. This congregation is usually very good at welcoming and incorporating newcomers, but it took a little longer than usual for them to adjust to some of Joe's quirks. Fortunately, "Bob" took Joe under his wing and helped him feel safe and involved, even giving up one of his own ministries so that Joe would have a way to participate in Sunday worship.

And apparently, last year Bob gave Joe a summer squash.

What none of us knew at the time is that when Joe got home that Sunday afternoon, he didn't just mindlessly slice it up, steam it and enjoy it with his dinner. No, for Joe, this simple gift from a church friend was too important for that.

Joe cut open the squash, carefully scooped out the seeds, rinsed them off, spread them out on newspaper to dry, and saved them through the winter. Then, this spring, he started his own garden, an entire plot dedicated to summer squash. He beamed as he told me this story, and then said, "And I give one-tenth of all my squash away." He gives them away because he wants to share with others the simple joy he felt when he received his squash from Bob last year.

Where is the line on the Parochial Report where I report, "squash tithe"?

Nancy Moore is the vicar of the Episcopal Churches of Piscataquis County in the Diocese of Maine and a substitute teacher in the local elementary school. Last December she agreed to serve on the Diocesan Finance Committee and was pleasantly surprised to discover that budget building can

be spiritually rewarding.

Resources

- Attack of the Squash People, a poem by Marge Piercy <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/squash-tithe-resources/>
- Episcopal Churches of Piscataquis County Pledge Card <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/squash-tithe-resources/>
- Messy Church: Generosity <http://www.messychurch.org.uk/resource/messy-month-2013>

Honest Sharing

POR ANGELA EMERSON

It does not happen very often – real, genuine conversations about money, giving, and vocation. The fact that we were hiking was significant. We were so keenly aware of the power and beauty of the earth, the effect of altitude and the sun, and our dependence on water from the very ground on which we walked. Every step took effort but we were determined to “get to the mountain top,” whatever the time and effort, the pain and sacrifice. Yes, there was, and is, something quite formative about being so close to and aware of the earth that breeds honesty and vulnerability.

Along the way, my friend started talking to me about his giving to the Church. He and his wife were both doctors and gave generously of their time and money although he conceded that his wife gave more time than he did. But something did not feel right to him. He was aware – troubled actually – that he spent more on his favorite hobby than he gave to the church. “I just get this nagging feeling that I should give more,” he said. “How will I know when I am giving enough?” My answer came quickly: “When the nagging goes away!” The answer was easy but I knew

that for him to get to that point in his life would be as arduous as our hike up the mountain.

We talked on for quite some time about the role God played in his life. He confessed that his wife wanted very much for both of them to join Doctors Without Borders. She was ready to go NOW! He was willing to consider such a move at some time in the future. “I am afraid,” he said. “I am afraid of all that I might have to give up if we start down this path. I just don’t think I can do it.”

Generosity is a gift of the Spirit and it is part of a package! The gift of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (*Galatians 5:22-23 NRSV*). When the Spirit takes over our lives we are truly made into new people with a new relationship to God, each other, the earth, our gifts and skills, and our relationship to material abundance. Generosity can be a scary thing because it opens the door to the Spirit and when the Spirit leads, we may go in a direction that we would never have chosen for ourselves.

My friend and I were hiking together long enough for the Spirit to lead our conversation into a space of honest sharing. Regardless of the activity - golfing, cooking, picnicking, hiking, gardening, cleaning, eating, service project, etc. - we can all share our stories.

As faith communities we must be increasingly imaginative about how to offer this kind of time and space separate and apart from worship. A congregation might consider a “spiritual gift” of the month and ask everyone to share a story from their life with someone else: Fears. Setbacks. Questions. Anything that could be shared in newsletters or on websites, or during worship.

The more stories a congregation shares, the more apt we will be to move from passive listening to active sharing. We don’t need to climb a mountain to do this, but it will not happen overnight. Remember, patience, too, is a gift of the Spirit.

Angela Emerson is the minister of stewardship development in the Diocese of Vermont. Actively involved with TENS, The Episcopal Network for Stewardship, she

currently serves as a board member and blogs regularly for TENS.
<http://www.tens.org>.

Resources

- Acknowledge their Offerings
<http://www.tens.org/resources/blog/acknowledging-their-offerings>
- “Our Money Life” by Davis Fisher <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/our-money-life/>
- Henri Nouwen Society <http://www.henrinouwen.org/>
- “Spirituality of Fundraising” by Anne Ditzler, ECF Vital Practices <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/spirituality-of-fundraising/>
- What Does it Take to be a Good Steward (video) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecnWuTXmsJc&feature=related>

God Had a Hand in This

BY LUKE BLOUNT

Leslie Lazenby was devastated. After she had made all the plans for a community garden in Madisonville, Texas, her hopes were crushed when her grant application was denied in February 2012.

“I had a fit with the Lord because we had been building up to the point where I knew that this was going to come together, and then I didn’t have the money to do it,” said Lazenby, a program assistant for Texas AgriLife Extension.

The following day, February 2, the Rev. Debbie Daigle, vicar of Holy Innocents Episcopal Church in Madisonville, walked into Lazenby’s office with her own vision for a community garden. Daigle had the funds but hadn’t been able to raise the support for her dream of a community garden that would nurture body and soul in the small East Texas town. Even though the church was across the street from Lazenby’s office, the two had never met, and they knew this wasn’t just a coincidence.

“We both cried and knew it was God,” Lazenby said. “Debbie came in with a benefactor and money,

and we have been rolling ever since.”

Together, Daigle and Lazenby gathered support for a community garden on the site of a burned-down elementary school. In just over one year’s time, the community garden has blossomed into something much bigger than fresh vegetables. Through an ecumenical network of city churches, the community is using the garden and adjacent office space to host events for children that include tutoring, nutrition classes, animal education, and anything else community volunteers have the gifts to offer.

The surrounding neighborhood features a variety of income levels, but just north stands a series of old mobile homes and trailers, some held together by duct tape. These are home to many of the students served by the outreach ministry of Daigle and her partners. According to Daigle, more than half of the students who attend gardening days and tutoring have a parent or relative in prison. Huntsville, the unofficial state prison capital, is just 30 miles south, on Interstate 45.

The garden project, now called Restoration Community Gardens, has become a hot spot for community gatherings and intermingling of different social networks seldom seen anywhere else.

In March, Restoration Community Gardens held their spring planting, inviting all members of the community to help sow seeds for the next season. Despite the cold and wind, kids and adults arrived to take part in the festivities, which included a petting zoo, arts and crafts, cakewalk, hot dog lunch and, of course, playing in the dirt. People of all religions, races, social status and ages braved the biting wind to reach out with one another and work together.

“It isn’t just about a garden,” Daigle said. “This is about changing the complexion of a community. You can’t just look at what you produce out of the ground, but what’s the ‘fruit’ of this?”

The ‘fruit’ can be seen in the faces of the children, who are learning new things and taking ownership of something special. And the fruit can also be seen in the adults and

and volunteers, who are learning a great deal about their community and themselves as they work in the gardens.

Daigle believes that something about pulling food out of the ground has a profound impact on the students. They are endlessly surprised to find treasures beneath the surface.

“They said, ‘Oh my gosh! Look what’s in the ground.’ Then they dug up all the potatoes and gave them all away,” Daigle explained. “They got to keep a few, but we went door-to-door giving potatoes away. That’s really what the Gospel is about.”

Luke Blount is a staff writer and communications specialist in the Diocese of Texas. This article was originally published in the June 2013 issue of *DioLog*, the magazine of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. It is reprinted with permission.

Resources

- “It’s Time to Grow” ECF Vital Practices themed content <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/its-time-to-grow/>
- How Does Your Church Garden Grow?” by Peter Strimer, ECF Vital Practices <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/how-does-your-church-garden-grow/>
- Diocese of Texas Stewardship pages <http://www.epicenter.org/stewardship/>
- Restoration Garden, a video interview with Leslie Lazenby <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNE5-zzp3o0>

Crazy Wisdom

BY DAN EDWARDS

After 40 years of captivity, the Jews had returned to find the walls of the city torn down, which made them afraid the same way we might be if we lived in a bad neighborhood and the door was missing.

The Temple was destroyed.

So they had a major problem with their worship space. It was rubble.

If they didn't worship in the Temple, they did not think they could flourish or succeed agriculturally, economically, or militarily.

So they set out to rebuild the City, but it wasn't going well. The capital fund drive flopped. People were squabbling with each other, blaming and blame shifting, left and right.

They felt poor -- and the poorest among them, the am ha-aretz, the people of the land, were a burden on the better off folks. It wasn't that the better off folks were stingy or greedy. They were just afraid. They were financially, militarily, and spiritually insecure. They didn't have enough army, enough police, enough wall, enough Temple, enough anything.

Scarcity and fear were the hallmarks of the day.

So they hunkered down. They pinched their pennies. They adopted a fortress mentality; suspicious of outsiders and even of each other.

Then along came a prophet with this surprising message from God: "If you want to restore your City, you gotta do it differently. You are going about it all wrong. Here's how it's done: If you remove the yoke from among you . . . if you offer your food to the hungry, and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light will rise in the darkness and your gloom be like noon-day."

They were looking at the construction costs and seeing there just wasn't enough money in the building fund.

So God said, "Not a problem. Here's what you do. Take some of that money in your building fund and put it in outreach. You don't have enough construction workers on the wall project? Send a few of them over to tutor the children of the am ha-aretz, the poor folk."

"Just do it," God said, "and watch what happens.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt, you shall raise up the foundation of many generations, you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in."

God is saying something completely counter-intuitive.

God is saying when you feel like you don't have enough, take some of what you've got and give it away. Poverty is the occasion for generosity.

It doesn't make any sense at all does it? That's because God doesn't play by our rules.

God also said through Isaiah, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts and my ways higher than your ways."

God says that at the deep down core of things, when you get to realest possible level of real, the take it to the bank truth of life, everything we think we know is

wrong.

It's wrong because everything we think we know is based on fear and scarcity. Our basic assumption is that life is a zero sum game. There isn't enough of it to go around.

But God says "not so."

"I came that you might have life and that you might have it abundantly," Jesus told us. Life isn't something to be seized by fang and claw. It's a gift to be received in faith, and the test of faith is generosity, the courage, when we don't have enough, to give away some of what we have.

Crazy, of course. In some spiritual traditions, they call it "crazy wisdom."

There are churches that live like that. Last year I was at the budget meeting of a congregation as they adopted a deficit budget without blinking an eye. Then they began expressing their concerns. They had heard some other congregations were struggling and they wanted to help. They got an unexpected gift and they sent it to a local ministry.

When the diocese sent them their assessment rebate they gave it to St. Jude's Ranch For Children.

You just can't help some people.

It is a leap into the dark, an exercise in faith. It is a leap into God's ways, a trusting in God's gift. It's like exhaling in the faith that the air will still be there so we can inhale again.

Crazy like that.

But you know that crazy congregation somehow manages to pay the light bill and they just bought some additional land. How do they do it?

They don't. It's a God thing.

It's exciting to see congregations walk by faith because that's the only way we can walk into the Kingdom Mission; and the Kingdom Mission is the only thing that makes life count.

So in itself the faithfulness of a church is a good thing. It gives God a chance to demonstrate God's faithfulness.

But the best thing about it is a faithful congregation teaches its people how to live faithfully. It doesn't just talk about faith and trust. It shows us what they look like: these congregations teach the art of breathing. Living churches and living people - they breathe, in and out. You have to breathe out all the way so you

can breathe back in.

The heart of being a Christian is living by faith instead of fear, by God's ways instead of human ways. When we are baptized or confirmed or received we make a life commitment. We take our stand on this earth as believers.

To believe means to invest our trust. We don't just say, "I believe that God exists." That's just an opinion. An opinion and \$1.85 will get you a tall coffee at Starbucks. We say, "I believe in God the Father. I believe in Jesus. I believe in the Holy Spirit." I jump out of this burning building of mortal life because I believe they are holding the net.

A young man in another of our churches, a financially prosperous young man, carefully calculates the church's value to him -- it's the difference between his kids' tuition at our camp and the tuition at a comparable private camp. At the end of the year, after he makes sure all his other obligations are paid, he gives that amount to the church.

And God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways. My measures of worth are not your measures of worth, nor your calculations my calculations."

Brothers and sisters, you are in a time of discernment. You are discerning who you are called to be, what part you are called to play in the Kingdom Mission, and who will best provide the leadership for that calling. I cannot answer any of those questions. But God can and God will.

“The Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched places and you shall be like a watered garden, like a water spring whose waters never fail.”

Dan Edwards is bishop of the Diocese of Nevada. Learn more about him here <http://www.episcopalnevada.org/About%20Us/greetings-from-the-bishop.html> and follow his blog <http://bishopdansblog.blogspot.com/> This article first appeared on The Episcopal Network for Stewardship (TENS) website as “Walk by Faith” on August 23, 2013. It is reprinted with permission.

Resources

- “Recipe for Spiritual Growth” by Doreen Rice, ECF Vital Practices <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/practicing-generosity/recipe-for-spiritual-growth/>
- The Episcopal Network for Stewardship (TENS) <http://tens.org>
- “Who is the Owner?” by Jesus Reyes <http://www.tens.org/resources/blog/who-is-the-owner><http://www.tens.org/resources/blog/who-is-the-owner>
- “My Annual Spiritual Checkup” <http://www.tens.org/resources/free-resources/free-resources-blog/my-annual-spiritual-checkup> from Spirituality and Money: 7 Questions That Saved My Spiritual Life by Bruce Rockwell <http://www.tensstore.org/p/SAM7QTSMSL.html>

Diezmo de Calabacines

POR NANCY MOORE

En las Iglesias Episcopales del Condado de Piscataquis, Maine, donde sirvo como sacerdote, la mayordomía no es una temporada, unas pocas semanas en el otoño cuando consideramos cuánto dinero donaremos el año entrante. La mayordomía no es sólo la cantidad en dólares que llenamos en nuestra tarjeta de donativo todos los otoños cuando empezamos a hacer planes para el próximo ejercicio fiscal. La mayordomía no es una obligación onerosa con la que cumplimos para no avergonzarnos cuando llenamos esa línea en el informe parroquial sobre las “tarjetas de donativos firmadas”. Ha llevado algo de tiempo, pero ahora la mayordomía se entiende como un hábito que orienta nuestras decisiones sobre cómo usamos todas las bendiciones que hemos recibido de Dios. Nuestra tarjeta de donativo tiene un espacio para compromisos de dinero y de tiempo. Los feligreses cumplen la parte no monetaria de sus promesas de muchas maneras creativas: realizando trabajo voluntario en el baratillo y en la olla popular, limpiando la iglesia, realizando mantenimiento de rutina en la propiedad de la iglesia, proporcionando transporte a los que ya

no pueden conducir y brindando apoyo administrativo y cuidados pastorales. Nuestra tarjeta de donativo nos invita a orar por nuestra feligresía y a participar regularmente en el culto dominical. La mayordomía es una expresión de nuestra fe en la habilidad de Dios de proveer, de nuestra gratitud por todas las maneras en que hemos sido bendecidos y de nuestras prioridades de misión cristiana en el condado más pobre de Maine. La mayordomía está enraizada en la creencia de que las bendiciones nunca son sólo para nosotros, sino que se deben compartir. He estado doce años con estas feligresías y todavía me siguen sorprendiendo con nuevas maneras de ser generosas. En St. Augustine’s, en Dover-Foxcroft, muchos jardineros y hortelanos traen flores para el altar y hortalizas para ser compartidas por aquellos en nuestra feligresía que ya no pueden cultivar flores y hortalizas por sí solos. Cuando regresé de mis vacaciones en agosto, me causó gracia cuando un hombre, al que llamaré “Joe”, empezó a llegar todos los domingos con una carga de calabacines amarillos.

Noté que era muy especí-

fico sobre quiénes recibirían semanalmente sus calabacines. La semana pasada le dio uno a una anciana que vive sola y cuyo gato había muerto el lunes pasado y otro a una mujer que padece de Alzheimer y que lo hace sentir muy incómodo.

Y otro a mí.

Era un enorme calabacín lleno de protuberancias y una curva en la punta que lo hacía parecerse un poco a un cisne. ¿Qué haría yo con esa cosa? Le sonreí amablemente y le agradecí su regalo cuando se dirigía a su asiento, sonriendo enigmáticamente. Puse el calabacín en mi oficina y no pensé mucho en él hasta la hora del café, cuando finalmente me detuve un rato suficientemente largo como para que Joe me contara la historia completa.

Joe empezó a rendir culto con nosotros hace unos pocos años. Fue inmediatamente obvio que Joe tenía algunas deficiencias mentales. Por lo general, esta feligresía es muy buena en dar la bienvenida e incorporar a recién llegados, pero les llevó un poco más de tiempo que lo habitual

acostumbrarse a algunas de las rarezas de Joe. Por suerte “Bob” se dedicó a proteger a Joe y a ayudarlo a sentirse seguro y participante, incluso renunciando a uno de sus ministerios para que Joe tuviera una manera de participar en el culto dominical.

Y resultó que el año pasado Bob le dio un calabacín amarillo a Joe.

Lo que ninguno de nosotros supo en ese momento es que cuando Joe regresó a su casa ese domingo por la tarde no se limitó a cortarlo, cocerlo al vapor y disfrutarlo con su cena. No, para Joe ese sencillo regalo de un amigo de la iglesia era demasiado importante como para eso.

Joe cortó el calabacín por la mitad, sacó cuidadosamente las semillas, las enjuagó, las puso en papel de diario para que se secaran y las guardó todo el invierno. Después, esta primavera inició su propio huerto, un espacio dedicado a calabacines amarillos. Estaba henchido de felicidad cuando me contaba esta historia y después me dijo: “Y regalo la décima parte de mis calabacines”. Los regala porque desea compartir con otros la sencilla alegría que sintió cuando recibió su calabacín de Bob el año pasado.

¿En qué línea del Informe parroquial indico este “diezmo de cala-

bacín”?

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Recursos

- Attack of the Squash People, un poema escrito por Marge Piercy <http://www.ecfvp.org/your-turn/squash-tithe-resources/>
- Episcopal Churches of Piscataquis County Pledge Card <http://www.ecfvp.org/your-turn/squash-tithe-resources/>
- Messy Church: Generosity <http://www.messychurch.org.uk/resource/messy-month-2013>

Sabiduría Loca

POR DAN EDWARDS

Tras 40 años de cautiverio, los judíos regresaron para encontrar los muros de la ciudad derrumbados, lo que los asustó de la misma manera en que lo haría si viviéramos en un barrio peligroso y nos faltara la puerta de nuestra casa.

El Templo había sido destruido.

Así que tenían un problema muy serio con su espacio de culto. Era un montón de escombros.

Pensaban que si no rendían culto en el Templo no podrían salir adelante ni tener éxito en la agricultura, la economía y el ejército.

Así que se pusieron a reconstruir la Ciudad, pero las cosas no iban bien. La colecta fracasó. La gente estaba discutiendo entre sí, culpando a diestra y siniestra.

Se sentían pobres – y los más pobres entre ellos, los am-haaretz, los que labraban la tierra, era una carga para los más pudientes. No era que los más pudientes eran tacaños o angurrientos. Simplemente estaban asustados. Se sentían inseguros financiera, militar y espiritualmente. No tenían suficientes fuerzas armadas, sufici-

ente policía, suficiente muro, suficiente Templo, suficiente nada.

La escasez y el temor dominaban sus días.

Así que se recluyeron.

Economizaron. Adoptaron una mentalidad de fuerte, en la que sospechaban de los de afuera y hasta de sus vecinos.

Después vino un profeta con este sorprendente mensaje de Dios: “Si quieren reconstruir su Ciudad, lo tienen que hacer de otra manera. Lo están haciendo mal. Lo tienen que hacer así: Si alivian la carga de los que están a su alrededor. . . si ofrecen su comida a los hambrientos y satisfacen las necesidades de los afligidos, vuestra luz se elevará en la oscuridad y vuestra penumbra será como el mediodía.”

Estaban estudiando los costos de la construcción y vieron que no había suficiente dinero en el fondo de reconstrucción.

Así que Dios dijo: “No hay problema. Hagan lo siguiente. Tomen parte del dinero en su fondo de reconstrucción y pónganlo en

extensión comunitaria. ¿No tienen suficientes albañiles para el proyecto del muro? Manden a varios de ellos a enseñarles a los niños de los am-haaretz, los pobres.”

“Simplemente háganlo”, dijo Dios, “y vean qué pasa. Sus antiguas ruinas serán reconstruidas, sentarán las bases de muchas generaciones, los llamarán los reparadores de la brecha, los restauradores de las calles para vivir en ellas.”

Dios está diciendo algo completamente contraintuitivo.

Dios está diciendo que cuando uno sienta que no tiene lo suficiente, que tome lo que tenga y lo regale. La pobreza brinda una oportunidad de ser generoso.

No parece tener sentido, ¿verdad? Eso es porque Dios no sigue nuestras reglas del juego. Dios también dijo por medio de Isaías: “Porque mis pensamientos no son vuestros pensamientos, ni vuestros caminos mis caminos. Como son más altos los cielos que la tierra, así son mis caminos más altos que vuestros caminos, y mis pensamientos más que vuestros pensamientos.”

Dios dice que en el centro más profundo de las cosas, cuando llegamos a la verdad más verdadera de la vida, vemos que todo lo que pensamos que sabemos está mal.

Está mal porque todo lo que pensamos que sabemos está basado en temor y escasez. Nuestra suposición básica es que la vida es un juego de suma cero y que no hay suficiente para todos.

Pero Dice “eso no es cierto.” “Yo he venido para que tengan vida y la tengan en abundancia”, nos dijo Jesús. La vida no es algo de lo que se uno apodera a denteladas y zarpazos. Es un don que se recibe en fe y la prueba de la fe es la generosidad y la valentía de dar parte de lo que tenemos cuando no tenemos lo suficiente. Una locura, por cierto, que en ciertas tradiciones espirituales se conoce como “sabiduría loca.”

Hay iglesias que viven así. El año pasado estuve en la reunión del presupuesto de una feligresía que adoptó un presupuesto deficitario sin pestañear. Después empezaron a expresar sus inquietudes. Habían oído que otras feligresías estaban luchando y querían ayudar.

Recibieron un donativo inesperado y lo mandaron a un ministerio local.

Cuando la diócesis les envió un reembolso se lo dieron al St. Jude’s Ranch For Children.

Es un salto en la oscuridad, un ejercicio de fe. Es un salto de confianza en los dones de Dios. Es como exhalar teniendo fe en que el aire seguirá estando allí para que lo podamos volver a inhalar.

Así de loco.

¿Pero saben de esa feligresía loca que de alguna manera se las arregla para pagar la cuenta de la luz y acaba de comprar un terreno? ¿Cómo lo hacen?

No lo hacen. Es cosa de Dios. Es apasionante ver feligresías moverse en la fe porque esa es la única manera en que podemos movernos hacia la Misión del Reino; y la Misión del Reino es la única cosa que hace que la vida cuente.

Así que de por sí la fidelidad de una iglesia es algo bueno. Le da a Dios la oportunidad de demostrar la fidelidad de Dios.

Pero lo mejor de ello es que una feligresía que se mueve en la fe ayuda a su gente a vivir de esa manera. No se limita a hablar de fe y confianza, sino que esas feligresías enseñan el arte de respirar. Iglesias vivas y gente viva:

respiran, inhalan y exhalan. Hay que exhalar del todo para poder volver a inhalar.

Lo central de ser cristiano es vivir en la fe en lugar de vivir en el temor, a la manera de Dios en lugar a la manera humana. Cuando nos bautizan o confirman o nos reciben nos comprometemos de por vida. Adoptamos una posición de creyentes en esta tierra.

Crear significa invertir nuestra confianza. No nos limitamos a decir “Creo que Dios existe”. Esa es sólo una opinión. Una opinión y \$1.85 le obtienen a uno un café grande en Starbucks. Decimos, “Creo en Dios Padre. Creo en Jesús. Creo en el Espíritu Santo”. Salto de este edificio en llamas de la vida mortal porque creo que están sosteniendo la red.

Un joven en otra de nuestras iglesias, un joven financieramente próspero, calcula cuidadosamente el valor de la iglesia para él: es la diferencia entre la matrícula de sus hijos en nuestro campamento y la matrícula en un campamento privado similar. Al final del año, después de pagar todas sus obligaciones, dona esa cantidad a la iglesia.

Y Dios dice: “Porque mis pensamientos no son vuestros

pensamientos, ni vuestros caminos mis caminos. Mis mediciones de valor no son vuestras mediciones de valor, ni sus cálculos mis cálculos.”

Hermanos y hermanas, están en una época de discernimiento. Están discerniendo quiénes están llamados a ser y qué papel están llamados a desempeñar en la Misión del Reino y quiénes proporcionarán el liderazgo para responder a esa llamada. No puedo contestar ninguna de esas preguntas. Pero Dios puede hacerlo y Dios lo hará. “Y el SEÑOR te guiará continuamente, saciará tu deseo en los lugares áridos; serás como huerto regado y como manantial cuyas aguas nunca faltan.”

Dan Edwards es obispo de la Diócesis de Nevada. Aprendan más sobre él aquí y sigan su blog. Este artículo apareció por primera vez en el sitio web *The Episcopal Network for Stewardship (TENS)* como “Walk by Faith” en agosto de 2013. Se vuelve a imprimir con permiso.

Resources

- “My Annual Spiritual Checkup” de Spirituality and Money: 7 Questions That Saved My Spiritual Life por Bruce Rockwell <http://www.tens.org/resources/free-resources/>

free-resources-blog/my-annual-spiritual-checkup and <http://www.tensstore.org/p/SAM7QTSMSL.html>

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