

Stewardship is a widely misused concept. One common misconception is to call stewardship a program which persuades parishioners to donate money to pay the bills of the church. This is when people are asked to give to the congregation, they are told of budgets, rising costs and the need to dig deeper into their wallets.

Charles Lane in his little book (128 pages), *Ask, Thank, Tell, Improving Stewardship Ministry in Your Congregation*, demolishes this concept by giving the reader a broader, fuller understanding of what it means to be a steward. It is not about how an institution pays its bills; rather it is, as the Bible portrays it, about the intimate connection between how a person handles their financial matters and that person's relationship with God. In five clearly written chapters (almost 50% of the book), Lane makes the biblical case that stewardship is a manifestation of becoming and being a disciple of Jesus. All chapters are superb stewardship homilies; worth re-reading at those times when we get too wrapped up in what our society deems worthwhile and forget "it all belongs to God."

But how can a congregation put this concept into practice? Lane, a Lutheran pastor, gives practical easy-to-follow steps in strengthening a church's stewardship ministry. However, before he provides guidelines for a stewardship ministry, Lane provides an important chapter on what a congregation has to do to transition itself. He writes there are two necessary steps: one is for a congregation to talk plainly about money, and the second is to have its spiritual leaders fully involved.

Lane condenses a congregation's stewardship ministry into three verbs: Ask, Thank, Tell. The Ask part of the book constitutes three chapters where the author discusses ways for a congregation to respond to the blessings God has given them. Lane says that a key approach for churches continues to be the annual pledge campaign. In one chapter (worth the price of the book) he provides effective, tested ways of constructing this major building block in a parish's stewardship ministry and mistakes to avoid. The Thank section suggests we Christians are much less inclined to thank our contributors than are other nonprofit groups, and this observation means that we have lessons to learn and practice. Finally, our supporters want to know that their giving makes a difference in people's lives: We have to Tell our mission story. Our congregations and our communities need to know the good things that are happening.

But how does a parish do it all? One approach could be a stewardship committee. Another way is to have teams, who use the gifts God has given them. For instance, one group may be much better at asking; another at thanking, and finally a third may be more effective at telling what a parish is doing to make a difference.

*Ask, Thank, Tell, Improving Stewardship Ministry in Your Congregation* is published by Augsburg Fortress Press (800-265-6397).