



Cultivating generosity

Teaching a congregation to live generously is challenging in times like these. There are many reasons for a congregation to avoid talking about giving away any of its precious resources these days—a global economic recession, soaring unemployment rates, people awash in debt and late mortgage payments. Congregations are struggling, as are the people in them. Allowing charitable giving to recede into the background has become a natural process for many congregations.

But what happens to a congregation's missional identity when giving starts to disappear? How does a congregation keep generosity at the forefront of its missional identity? Does it matter?

At Advent Lutheran Church in Manhattan, we have worked hard to cultivate a climate of generosity in our parishioners' lives and the life of our congregation. Advent has been through tough times. There were many years when Advent's future was uncertain. Meetings were held with the synod about the possible closure of the church in the 1980s and 1990s. For many years, Advent felt it was unable to give away any of its limited resources to outside organizations. After years of fear and uncertainty, it has taken deliberate attention to enable Advent to be bold and take risks in giving.

One way we have cultivated generosity is through monthly Mission Moments shared at Sunday worship services. At first glance, Mission Moments might seem like another boring temple talk the congregation must sit through. But for us, it has been transformational.

A few years ago we challenged ourselves to commit a specific percentage of our undesignated income to charitable giving. We committed to synod mission support, but also to other organizations we wanted to support. We then challenged ourselves to increase that commitment one percentage point each year. We had a sense of satisfaction and renewed hopefulness from these commitments, but something was missing. The ministries we were giving to seemed removed from the

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daily life of our congregation. How could we take the “out there” causes and bring them “in here?” Or, more specifically, how could we see “out there” as the core element of why we are “in here?” Somehow we needed the ministry inside and



Pastor Paul Block gives a mission moment at Advent, Manhattan

Making Christ #1

Who is Christ in your life? What place does he take in the many priorities we set before ourselves? How we answer that as followers of Jesus has a huge impact on how we will live out a life of commitment to our Lord. Paul addresses the same questions in his letter to the Colossians. He writes:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. (Colossians 1:15-18)



For Paul, knowing Jesus the Christ is essential to understanding the whole creation. Today we believe the same. All that we are, all that we have, all that we hope for and aspire to springs forth from God in Christ and his saving work on the cross. From the first day of creation, to the first commandment given to Moses, to the first day of the week at an empty tomb, God is at work in our lives in the person of Jesus. Christ was, Christ is, and Christ will be forever. He is the head of the body, the church, first in all things!

One way Christians respond to Jesus' incredible love is through generous giving and living, to build up the church. Through our stewardship of what God is doing in our lives, we give thanks by offering monetary support to grow Christ's mission and ministry lived out in our congregations and wider church.

However, conversations in the ELCA and the synod have revealed that many of our congregations do very little in stewardship programming. The spiritual, faith-building aspect of stewardship is not developed, so the talk revolves only around money and budgets rather than generosity related to God's abundance. Many pastors are also uncomfortable talking to their own people about money, fearing that it would seem self-serving.

How can we grow in this regard? The newly formed Stewardship and Mission Support Table of the synod is sponsoring a synod-wide opportunity for congregations

for the fall of 2010. Culminating on Christ the King Sunday, November 21, the program of stewardship commitment emphasis will train stewardship committees, mobilize spiritual formation groups for lay people, and involve pastors in a synod-wide pulpit exchange.

Our focus will be on the spiritual discipline of stewardship. Spiritual formation small groups will center themselves in the Word, in conversation, and in prayer for three sessions. The purpose is not a Bible study per se, but an opportunity to interact with God and others in spiritual conversation. Leading up to Christ the King Sunday, mission interpreters and/or others will deliver mission moments celebrating the congregation's ministries. A week or two before the event, congregational leaders meet with the guest pastor from another congregation who will thank leaders and offer biblical grounding about our interconnectedness within the Body of Christ in mission.

May we be strengthened in mission together as we seek to nurture faithful followers of Jesus so that Christ might come to have first place in everything!

✦ **THE REV. DR. JACK HORNER** is Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission. For more information about the synod Stewardship Commitment Sunday Emphasis, contact him at 212-665-0732 x229 or jhorner@mny.org.

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475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1620
New York, NY 10115
212-665-0732 • www.mny.org

Bishop
The Rev. Robert Rimbo

Editor & Designer
Sarah Gioe

Copyeditor
Lily R. Wu

Printer
Organizational Printing
Deacon Ed Tatlian

outside of our walls to be regarded as one ministry; we needed to view our generosity as central to our congregation's missional identity and not an afterthought if we had some extra cash at the end of the year.

Two years ago, we started participating in the Mission Interpretation ministry. Each month, we highlight a ministry or an organization to which Advent has committed financial and people resources. The Mission Moment comes at the end of the Passing of the Peace, before the offering is received. By having the Mission Moment at this time in the service, we remind ourselves that giving is an act of worship.

Making sure the Mission Moment is clear, concise and compelling is critical to its effectiveness. To ensure this, we observe the following guidelines:

1. The Mission Moment is limited to four to five minutes.
2. We request it be written out in advance so as to avoid rambling or tangential speaking.
3. The speaker is asked to highlight core elements of the ministry, connect the ministry to faith in daily life and thank the congregation for its support of the work.
4. The speaker is asked to be available after each service for questions and additional conversation with interested parishioners.

In addition, Advent commits "people resources" to each Mission Moment ministry. For example, in December 2009, we hosted a Christmas Tree sale to benefit Transfiguration Lutheran Church in the Bronx. Transfiguration sent a delegation of members to help with the sale. We worked together, gathering around the common goal of supporting this vital ministry. Pastor Paul Block was invited to share a Mission Moment in January. This partnership enabled us to see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ united around the same gospel and sharing the light of Christ from the Upper West Side to the South Bronx—one ministry, inside and outside of our walls.

Sometimes we need other people and congregations to teach us how to be generous in our ministries. Mission interpretation and Mission Moments have helped us do just that.

✦ **THE REV. J. ELISE BROWN** is pastor of Advent, Manhattan.

Sharing the stories of mission and ministry

The synod's Mission Interpreter Network is made up of over 70 volunteers who commit to deliver intentional mission moments across the synod. The goals of the mission moments are three-fold: to help people understand where their offerings go, to connect people to the wider church, and to thank people for their support. To find stories to share, tips, sample presentations, and other interpretation resources, visit www.mnys.org/mi. Could you be a mission interpreter for your congregation? Contact Sarah Gioe, Director of Communication and Interpretation, at 212-665-0732 x222 or sgioe@mnys.org.

What is mission support?

Mission support is an offering. The same way that individual members give an offering to God to support the work of their congregation, individual congregations give an offering to God to support the work of the synod and the wider church. Congregations are encouraged to model tithing and give a percentage of their income to the synod as mission support.

What does mission support actually do?

When the synod receives your mission support, a portion is automatically shared with the ELCA churchwide organization. This is one way that we live out our calling as an interdependent church. In 2010, the Metropolitan New York Synod will give 48% of what it receives to churchwide ministry. (The percent increases by one-half percent annually until it reaches and remains at 50%.) This 48% supports

- new congregations, missionaries
- seminaries, colleges and universities, campus ministries
- early childhood centers, elementary schools
- outdoor ministries
- social ministry organizations, advocacy, and community development

on a national scale. Partnership dollars come back to synods and congregations in the way of grants, services, programs, staff, and resources.

The other portion of your mission support is used to fund the work of the synod. That means that your offering is supporting

• **Life for the church**

Worship

The call process, candidacy, mobility

Diakonia, the synodical diaconate

Synod governance, Synod Assembly, communication, and administration

• **Learning for the faith**

Educational grants

Leadership training, conference strategies, retreats

Children, youth and family ministry

• **Loving for the world**

Work with local social ministry organizations

Evangelical outreach, partnership grants

Hunger relief

Multicultural mission

Relationships with our two global companion synods

Ecumenical relations

God is certainly at work through your mission support.

Thank you!



Tell everyone what God has done!

**MISSION
INTERPRETATION**

Hard work and blessings add up to 102%

What can God do with five believers in a crumbling church building? Here's one congregation's story after stepping out in faith on their stewardship challenge

Zion Lutheran Church (“Sión”) is the oldest Spanish-speaking Lutheran congregation in the United States. Founded in 1950 by a group of Puerto Rican immigrants under the leadership of Pastor Antonio Contreras, Sión drew its members from the Latino community around its place of worship on East 119th Street in East Harlem. The community thrived through the ‘50s and ‘60s, but began a long decline in the 1970s, as the increasingly prosperous founding members moved from East Harlem into the Bronx, Queens and nearby suburbs.

When Pr. Contreras retired in 2003, Sión found itself with only five remaining members and a crumbling building dating from 1873. With an energetic new pastor, Fabian Arias, we set out to rebuild the congregation and began the long process of building a new congregation and educating our members in the concept of stewardship. With membership coming largely from Roman Catholic backgrounds, many of these concepts were new at Sión.

We’ve had our challenges. In September 2007 we demolished the old building—it had become unsafe and we simply didn’t have the money to maintain it. In June 2008 plans for a new condominium and sanctuary fell through due to permit and financing problems that arose from the economic crisis.

Though we had hope that our plans for a new building would be realized in the future, it was apparent that we needed to act quickly—the finances were a mess. In the fall



Pastor Arias leads worship in Sión's temporary worship space

of 2008, the council met and formed a group consisting of the president, the treasurer and one other member to begin introducing stewardship to our congregation while being sensitive to the institutional memory of longtime members. The approach was very basic: we started with the balance sheet, Accounting 101. We communicated the need to work toward financial independence and committed to regular reporting on revenues and expenses.

“We reached out to the congregation and asked individuals to make a pledge, which we hadn’t done in previous years. That was one of the biggest aids to our success,” says Jeff Velastegui, Sión’s president. “Out of 35 families, 20 enrolled. In spite of the horrible economy, everyone gave whatever they could and then some.” A system of numbered envelopes was instituted so that members would be guaranteed privacy. Finally, all council members set an example and pledged

what they felt they could contribute, some contributing far more than a traditional tithe.

In 2007, Sión had already achieved a 15% increase in giving. In 2008, there was a 12% increase. By 2009, the congregation saw their efforts pay off with a 102% increase in community-generated revenues! The bulk of the money came in the form of hard-earned cash and envelopes in the offering plate.

How was such an increase possible? "It was a combination of hard work and blessings being sent down from above," Velastegui believes. "We still have a long road ahead of ourselves, but this is our mission and we needed to make a change. There's really an overwhelming energy here to give back to the community and do the Lord's work."

The new temporary sanctuary periodically has no heat. We've also lived through a small fire and lack suitable community space. But with the support of other congregations within the Metropolitan New York Synod and of the synod itself, we've persevered and are determined to position ourselves for the future. And we've demonstrated to ourselves that collectively that we can travel down the road to independence.

Stewardship resources

Visit www.elca.org/stewardship to find many stewardship resources, including annual response programs, sermon starters, online newsletters, videos, fundraising programs, and ideas for year-round stewardship.

Good reads

Giving to God: The Bible's Good News about Living a Generous Life by Mark Allan Powell
Ask, Thank, Tell: Improving Stewardship Ministry in your Congregation by Charles R. Lane

Today, we have come closer to realizing our dream of erecting a new building on the site of the original sanctuary, and are proud of the progress we've made. We believe that the principles of stewardship will allow us to mature into a self-supporting congregation within a few years.

✦ **PETER GREENE** is a member of Sión, Manhattan.

Viewpoint

✦ Photos by JOAN LARSEN WOZNIAK

Five new pastors were ordained on December 12 at St. Peter's, Huntington Station



God's blessings upon the new ordinands, Pr. Dolores McKay, Pr. Joseph Mantovani, Pr. Flora Hartford, Pr. Danielle Fey, and Pr. Robert Cederstrom. Ecumenical partners Reverend Dr. Jon Norton (left), executive minister of the Synod of New York, Reformed Church in America, and Reverend Dr. J. Oscar McCloud (right), acting executive presbyter of the Presbytery of New York City, participated in the service.





A matter of life and health

Stewardship is often introduced as simply “everything we do after we say, ‘I believe.’” If this is true, then the steps we take to care for our bodies, minds and spirits is as much a matter of stewardship as is what we do with our money, time and material goods. Stewarding the health of our whole selves means becoming healthy leaders for the sake of healthy ministry and ultimately, a healthy church.

Being a healthy leader is a personal journey. The journey begins with small, individual steps, and is renewed daily as

For the sake of the work we do together in Jesus’ name, make a commitment to be a healthy leader. It’s a daily decision.

part of a discipleship path. If “all that I am and all that I have is God’s gift to me,” being a good steward of these gifts is part of my baptismal call. However, a decision for good health is not only made for myself, but also for the sake of the community which I serve and to which I belong.

The ELCA Board of Pensions website lists 10 reasons for us to be good stewards of body, mind and spirit:

1. To be a more effective leader for the sake of the world
2. To role-model healthy behaviors for our children
3. To have a healthier relationship with God
4. To endure hardship with resilience and grace
5. To feel better in mind and body
6. To avoid lifestyle-related illness
7. To better steward gifts given by God
8. To age with strength and dignity
9. To lead my congregation toward wellness
10. To help decrease overall health care costs and increase mission dollars

Simply put, when I feel healthy and well, I am more effective at my work, more pleasant to be around, and more aware of the giftedness of life and ministry in Jesus’ name.

I have a new “app” on the iPod Touch—Doodle Jump. This little doodle jumps from pod to pod upward, with the help of springs, a beanie with propeller, or a rocket pack. But just one miss, and the doodle is back at the bottom, game over, right where it started. I often feel my quest to be a good steward of my health is like that game. I’ll be doing so well—walking from the train to the office, eating my vegetables, balancing my prayer life and work and rest. Then something slips. One piece, like three meeting nights in a

row or not walking because I’m in the car, or someone suggested cheesecake—and everything seems to slip out of place. There I am, right back where I started. Do over.

The most challenging part of the puzzle personally is maintenance of a healthy weight. I know in my head what works. Good food choices, portion control, regular exercise. The other pieces that I have found to be essential are participation in a support group, an accountability partner, and—I hate to even write it so I saved it for last—keeping track of what I eat by writing down every bite that crosses my lips. Makes me crazy, but it works. I have been a Lifetime Member of Weight Watchers since 2001. Sometimes that feels like a life “sentence.” At other times I can find reason for celebration. I’m not in this alone. I have been successful before. I can be successful again. The lesson that’s hardest to come to terms with is that once I’ve reached my goal weight, the work isn’t over. Maintaining a healthy weight is a daily decision. A matter of discipline, discipleship, and good stewardship.

I have an invitation for you. Maybe you’ll hear it as a challenge. Either way, I hope you’ll accept. Will you join me on this journey? For the sake of the work we do together in Jesus’ name, make a commitment to be a healthy leader. It’s a daily decision. A matter of discipline, discipleship, and good stewardship.

+ THE REV. KATHLEEN R. KORAN is Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations.

Taking a survey = money

The annual Mayo Clinic Health Assessment is a good place for leaders with ELCA-primary health benefits to begin in making a commitment to stewardship of self. Taking this simple survey will provide a personal mini-health review, and if 65% of our eligible leaders (128 people) take the Health Assessment by April 30, the synod would net approximately \$36,000 in health care savings. Fewer than 38% participated in the assessment in 2008. In 2009, our participation grew to 44%. This could be the year for us to reach the 65% benchmark. The synod staff has committed to 100% participation. Will you join us?

Participating in the health assessment is one way that leaders can earn money for their personal wellness accounts. Thanks to these accounts, leaders have spoken of significant financial savings on health care. Others have appreciated the support made available through a personal coach. Access the health assessment online at www.elcaforwellness.org.

Caring for creation

What steps—small or large—is your congregation taking to care for creation? A new Environmental Stewardship Committee has been formed as voted upon by Synod Assembly. The committee will work to educate churches on issues of environmental integrity and promote specific actions each church community and member can take to act with greater responsibility. The committee encourages all synod churches to increase their commitments to recycle, use recycled materials, and reduce the amount of waste produced. At the synod office, staff members are printing double-sided to conserve paper; recycling paper, metal, plastic, and glass; and using eco-friendly kitchen products. Tell the committee your green news and tips at mnyses@googlegroups.com.



A visit to our companions in Tanzania

A delegation of 12 people, including five rostered synod deacons, visited the North Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania for two weeks in February. The group visited educational and medical ministries in Bukoba and Arusha, worshipped at the local cathedral (above), met students at Kibeta English Medium Primary School, and enjoyed a safari. The next companion synod trip will head to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Romania in summer 2011.

Multicultural Commission at work

The Multicultural Commission, one of three Metropolitan New York Synod commissions, has been reactivated and is working to fulfill its stated objectives of 1) bringing the various ethnic communities of the synod together to work for the good of each community within local congregations and the synod as a whole, 2) enhancing greater understanding of the Lutheran faith traditions and customs within each community, 3) assisting one another with congregational issues that are common to communities not traditionally part of American Lutheranism, and 4) working for deeper integration within the whole mission and ministry of the synod, including sharing with non-ethnic-specific congregations and communities about our mutuality as a global community within the Lutheran Church.

The commission has representatives from the Arab and Middle Eastern, Latino, Asian, European and people of African descent communities within our congregations. Look on this page in future issues of *The Lutheran New Yorker* for profiles of these communities. In addition, an International Festival of Culture and Information is planned for Friday evening at the Synod Assembly, May 14-15. This work is intended to deepen our understanding of who we are as the diverse body of Christ in the Metropolitan New York Synod.

If you have any questions or would like to know more, please contact Pr. Gary Mills, Assistant to the Bishop for Global and Multicultural Mission, at 212-665-0732 x232 or gmills@mnys.org.

Synod leaders honored

Synod treasurer Robert Buescher and his wife Janet were honored in December with the Soli Deo Gloria Award for distinguished service to The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. The Bueschers, devoted Lutherans since birth, are active members of Our Redeemer, Seaford.



In February, Bishop Rimbo was one of four alumni honored by The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. The Distinguished Alumnus Award for Churchwide Service recognizes the myriad ways Bishop Rimbo has enriched the church through his service over the years as parish pastor, bishop's associate, bishop, speaker and published author. Congratulations!

Ministerium discusses sexual ethics

The annual winter ministerium brought together 125 rostered leaders at Saint Peter's, Manhattan in February. The keynote speaker was Dr. Timothy Wengert, renowned Reformation history and Lutheran Confessions professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Wengert delivered three lectures that examined a Lutheran approach to ethics, especially as it relates to present discussions over sexuality and the recent decisions of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

God gives us more

The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) is one of my favorite stories about epiphanies, and it's a *strange* story to boot. Jesus comes to a wedding reception in Cana. When the wine gives out, he tells them to fill up six large stone jars with water. When they do, the water is turned to wine, lots and lots of wine, more wine than anybody could possibly need to have a good party!

There's plenty more in this story. For example, the wedding feast occurs on "the third day," a poetic allusion to the Resurrection that occurred on the third day.

More: The six jars are described as *completed* by the 180 gallons of fine new wine Jesus created. This means the old creation was passing away, and a new age was at hand when Jesus would do away with the imperfections and restrictions of the law and bring the new wine of grace now made available to all.

More: This is also the story of the marriage between God and people. Jesus is not just a guest at the wedding, but the *bridegroom* who has come to make a loving and lasting commitment with God's people.

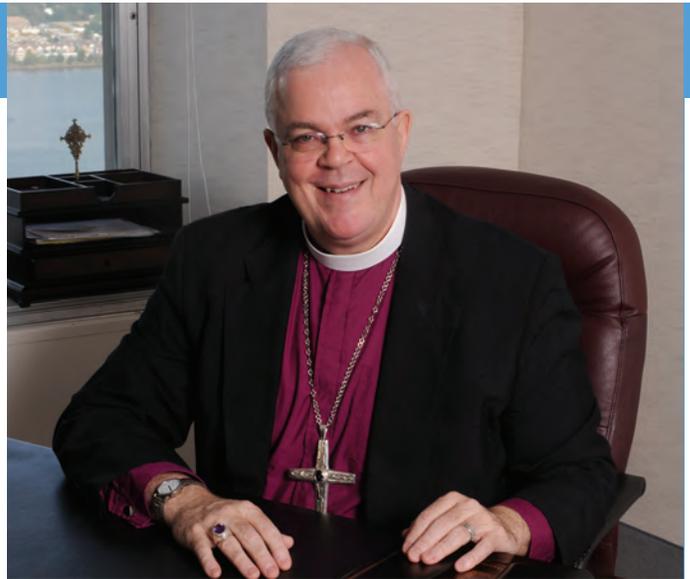
More: St. John says that this was the first of Jesus' seven *signs*—not just miracles, but signs of something deeper.

More. There is so much more. More in *our lives* as God's new people. Jesus beckons us into a renewed, expanded, more abundant creation. For when Jesus comes among us, there is more: remarkable epiphany, extravagant glory, abundance of love.

We all have to work and grow from *this* stance of a theology of *abundance* in our own stewardship of life, of creation, of resources. Growth in stewardship comes from that awareness of God's abundant love.

I know a young couple in their forties. She's an educator. He's a pastor. They have adopted four children: one from China, twins from Korea, and most recently a youngster from the Philippines. Part of me says, "Is this wise?" A young couple, struggling financially, paying off college and seminary loans. So many mouths to feed.

But that's because I'm operating from a theology of scarcity. I ask myself, "How much love can two people give?" And they say—in the way they live—"It never



Love is a renewable resource.
The more you give, the more
you seem to have.

runs out. Love is a renewable resource. The more you give, the more you seem to have."

When Jesus-God-With-Us came to earth, things broke forth, broke out, overflowed. There is no cautious, careful restraint in this story in particular—or the gospels in general. Jesus just shows up and there is this miraculous effervescence of glory. Meanwhile we are apt to have trouble with this story not just because we are so modern and sophisticated and scientific, but because we are so careful and restrained. We don't make big moves in life. We don't ask big things of God. We keep our faith to ourselves. We keep our prayers cautious and careful.

Perhaps we think our relationship with God is a matter of what *we* feel, what *we* believe, or what *we* do. And we *all* know how limited, how frail and finite *our* resources are.

But what if all our Lutheran talk is true? What if our faith itself really *is* a gift of God? What if it is *not* our achievement? What if *God* is there, wanting to give us *even more* faith, more love, more energy to meet the demands of discipleship? In short, what if the gospel is *true*?

The miracle at Cana is the sign of real abundance, the "more" we can claim and celebrate: And that is, God will give you what you need to be a faithful, resourceful disciple. God will give you more.

✦ **THE REV. ROBERT ALAN RIMBO** is bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod.