

The Stewardship of Worship

In his book, “Giving to God: The Bible’s Good News about Living a Generous Life”, author Mark Allan Powell tells the story about visiting inactive members in a congregation where he served as the pastor:

“All of the people I visited told me in one way or another that they had quit coming to church because they weren’t ‘getting out of it’ whatever it was that they thought they should get out of it. People had different ideas with regard to what they thought the church should do for them, but all of the inactive members agreed that, whatever that was, the church had failed to do what they thought it should do for them.”

He continues:

“This surprised me because when I was a child and my family went to church on Sunday morning, my mother used to tell us, ‘We are going to worship God.’ I’m not sure if it even occurred to me that I was supposed to get anything out of it. Certainly, that wasn’t the reason we went. I didn’t know very much about church or about what it all meant, but even at a very young age I knew that it wasn’t about me—at least, it wasn’t all about me. These people didn’t come from all over town Sunday after Sunday just to get together and meet my needs. No, they came to worship God.

‘Six days a week God blesses us,’ my mother would say, ‘and on Sundays we give thanks.’ That has always stuck with me, although I know that there is more to it than that. Pastors and worship leaders work very hard to provide their congregations with services that they hope will be meaningful and inspirational to all who come. Of course. But I still think my mother was right: the main reason for going to church is not to get our needs met; the main reason, the most important reason, for going to church is to worship God.

And now that I am (a lot) older, I have discovered something else. When people do this—when they come to church to worship God—something wonderful happens. They invariably discover that they are much more likely to get something out of the experience than if they had come for any other reason. I don’t know why this is—maybe God just has a sense of irony. Or maybe the point is that one of our greatest needs is to worship God. We don’t always know this, but it is true nonetheless, and when we quit focusing on ourselves and focus instead on worshiping the God who is so good to us, one of our deepest needs is met. We just didn’t know, perhaps, that that was what we needed.

...When we worship God, we make God (rather than ourselves) the center of our devotion. Doing this always involves some element of self-denial or sacrifice, giving up something that we value, giving up attention to our wants and our needs in order to focus on God.”

Reflection Questions

- Why do you “go to church”? Is it to “worship God” or “to get something out of the service”?
- How do you acknowledge the many ways in which God blesses you?
- In what ways do you focus your life (or any portion of it) on God?

Blessing Others as an Outreach Strategy

It began as an object lesson to teach fourth graders how to help others. The kids received envelopes with either \$20, \$50 or \$100 and within a week's time, they were to use the money to help someone. A handful of members were so impressed, they approached the pastor and said they wanted the whole congregation to have the opportunity to experience what the fourth graders did. They prayed about it and they had a total of \$150,000 to distribute across the congregation. And so they did...

Three hundred envelopes were prepared—each contained a check for \$250, \$500 or \$1,000 and at the end of worship on March 4, a member gave a stewardship talk about how joyful generosity had mattered to his life and the pastor asked each family to send a representative to come forward and take an envelope from a table up front. “I told them we wanted them to take care of the greatest need God had places on their hearts,” he said. “If they had medical bills or rent, they could use the money on them. They could use it on an organization dear to their heart...no strings attached.” (See “*Blessed to be a blessing*” by Megan Brandsrud in the August, 2018 issue of “*Living Lutheran*”, pp. 8-10 for the full story).

I was so impressed with the story, I telephoned the pastor and asked him to tell me more. Here is what he told me:

- We are blessed to be a blessing, so look for those around you who are in need of this kind of blessing right now. People near to or far from you, strangers, organizations close to your heart, etc. Do not consider re-gifting this back to the church—it is meant for our community!
- Enter a time of prayer for God's Spirit to lead you to the organization or person in need right now. Pay attention to where God pulls your heart.
- If you have children who are helping, take time to listen to all the ideas. One child asked his family to pool the gift with others, so that they could buy new toys at a children's cancer unit.
- After 30 days, the congregation cancelled any outstanding checks and the funds were directed to another area of need.
- Everyone at worship, including people who were visiting, were invited to come forward and participate in this extraordinary ministry. After the worship services, leftover envelopes were distributed to people who called the church, including local news reporters and people in need.
- People were invited to share the good news of their outreach on the congregation's website. They were also asked to share on their social media networks about receiving the gift and plans they had with what to do with it.
- Local community businesses also became involved through matching gift programs.

Of the many things about this ministry that impressed me most are these three things:

- (1) The congregation wanted to find ways to reach out to people in need and this was a way in which every family could participate in ways that were meaningful to them. Can you imagine what it would be like to go up to someone and say, “Here is a gift of \$250, \$500 or \$1,000 from our church. May God bless you.”?
- (2) The project was **not** funded by the congregation's budget; the \$150,000 came from those members who wanted the congregation to experience the joy of helping others.
- (3) This kind of ministry project can be replicated in any congregation of any size and in any location.

Imagine the kind of impact that we could have on people's lives if First Lutheran undertook something like this as an outreach project.