

Stewardship Commission

Reports on Listening Tour – May 2012-September 2012

There was a group of six who worked on Objective Two of the Diocesan Strategic Plan, focusing on the second bullet – **Intensify stewardship to increase the core of our giving. The group came up with five goals, the first of which was: *We will engage clergy and lay leadership in conversations about the challenges of implementing the best practices of stewardship in our changing cultural environment. These conversations will be called our “Listening Tour.”*** A total of eleven meetings were held in the three deaneries to have conversations around the questions listed below.

At the end of this document, there is a brief list of “best practices” alluded to by various congregations in these conversations. We did not have the time to learn all of the details of these “best practices” Those wishing more information on any of these practices may contact Joanna Shreve at jrshreve@aol.com to get contact information for the congregations using these practices.

At its first meeting of this team in December 2011, the chair, The Rev. Channing Smith, asked each team member to share his/her experiences with successful stewardship. These stories shared some commonalities and so we started each of the Listening Tour meetings with the following:

There are four key aspects of a parish that is practicing good stewardship.

1. *The parish has a strategic plan or vision for the parish and can articulate it.*
2. *The leadership joyfully embraces the tithe.*
3. *Parishioners have a personal understanding of God’s call in their lives.*
4. *There is a discipleship program for people new to the church.*

We then opened the conversations asking participants to explore these key aspects in their own congregation’s setting and respond to the questions which follow. The responses of participants are summarized below each question.

A. Share a moment in your congregational experience when you have felt the presence of God working through the members.

1. Parish shared in a windfall gift
2. 91 year old left an endowment to the church
3. Shared experience of Relay for Life
4. Parish energized by Diocesan interest
5. Parish provided for a member whose house burned down
6. Hope with Sudan
7. Combined congregation; unified service
8. Home service; joining folks together
9. Calling a new priest
10. Willingness to try anything
11. Witnessing to faith

12. Passing the peace
13. Congregation embracing a member who was schizophrenic and, upon his passing, creating a meaningful service which memorialized his many contributions to the congregation.
14. Sharing of “Epistlers” during pledge season – witnessing to what their congregation has meant to them.
15. Sharing of the members of a search committee – with 12 different ideas of how God touched their search process and work.
16. Understanding that pledging is like a marriage commitment to church.
17. Investing in starting up a preschool – and all that entails

B. Around what area of ministry is your congregation invested or generous?

1. Healing ministry
2. Haiti
3. SMUM and other outreach
4. Lost Boys
5. Outreach to the homeless
6. Indaba
7. The more we ask, the more the parish feels invested
8. Common sense of mission and purpose
9. Not a rich parish; more about service and fellowship
10. Lots of caring
11. Joyful as a community
12. Hospitality
13. Generosity of time
14. Members sharing their lives and life issues
15. An attitude of “let’s get it done”
16. Involvement in the community
17. Outreach and social justice
18. Understanding that Outreach is both financial and “boots on the ground”
19. A second-hand resale shop which is run largely by volunteers and provides substantial money for outreach programs

C. Does your congregation have a sense of its mission? If so, how would you describe it? How do your members and new members come to know this?

1. Welcome all; Worship fully; Witness to God’s grace; Walk the way of Christ
2. Mission statement by committee didn’t work.
3. Group think is tough...no sense of mission
4. Have mission statement but don’t know what it is.
5. Joy in action; Making a difference in the world.
6. Newcomers – not as much communication as there should be.
7. Invite to membership class
8. Here’s what it means to be a Christian; Anglican; Episcopalian; part of a Diocese
9. Need to ignite passion
10. Vestry visible to the parish
11. A church where God’s children gather and grow
12. Repeats mission at every service

13. All people are welcome at Christ's table
14. State mission/goals and progress toward those goals
15. Identify core values and goals of ministry each year – understanding that these need financial support

D. Is there an invitation to your members to explore God's call in their lives? If so, how does that happen? How do new members learn this?

1. Spiritual gifts assessment/inventory.
2. Quarterly forums asking question about "Where is God calling you?"
3. Episcopal 101 for newcomers.
4. Build relationship; find opportunities for new members
5. People want to be called
6. Identify other people's gifts and then individuals invite others into ministry
7. Time and talent drive
8. Ministry fair
9. Message from the pulpit
10. Use multiple channels of communication
11. How to use spiritual gifts
12. Shared ministry – shared LEADERSHIP
13. Newcomers' brunch introduces the lay leadership as well as the clergy

E. Describe your stewardship program.

a. What is the most difficult aspect of your stewardship program?

1. Top 10 givers = 60% of the pledge dollars
2. Top 20 givers = 80% of the pledge dollars
3. Emphasis on "just pledge"
4. Teaching "what is a pledge"
5. Source of funds not sustainable.
6. Lay leadership and participation
7. Small congregation problem – not enough people
8. Not much talk of the tithe
9. Putting people at ease
10. Getting it together early enough
11. Year round stewardship
12. Include EVERYone
13. Late pledges
14. New generation wants ROI
15. Getting people on the team; motivation
16. Aging population
17. Money is tight
18. Fewer pledges, more regular givers
19. The term "stewardship" has baggage
20. Need to celebrate more
21. The former rector never recorded pledges – it was faith based giving.
22. We are stuck – 90 pledges each year, stuck mostly for \$100 per month.
23. We tried pleading with our people to help save our declining congregation, and it did not work.

24. "I hate to ask my people to give money to the church."
25. We ask our people to pledge a portion of their income (no further guidance provided)
26. "I am new and have never done a pledge campaign before."
27. We need rental income to make up for a lack of pledges.
28. "We would never ask people to tithe – it might give them guilt."
29. To do it right, it takes a lot of work by a lot of folks.
30. We need help.

b. What has been the positive effect of your stewardship program?

1. Parish sharing stories
2. Deepening relationships
3. Shared ownership
4. Physical manifestation of relationship
5. Attitude of sharing
6. Shared vision, hopes and dreams
7. Keep everyone involved
8. Made to feel "needed"
9. More than giving money
10. Helps families
11. Year end surprises
12. We are having our vestry members meet with each family in their homes to help make up a \$40,000 deficit.. As a result we are learning a lot.
13. Our total giving, average pledge, and percent of our congregation pledging has increased substantially over the years.
14. People are more engaged and are enjoying a more fulfilling experience.

c. In what ways is stewardship discussed in your parish? What is the effect of this message on the congregation?

1. Shared stories
2. Shared vision for the money
3. Accountability
4. Sense of gratitude
5. Educational
6. Witnessing
7. Harvest Dinner is a catered event to show gratitude to the community for its faithful stewardship in the past year
8. We begin each spring to develop our three-year vision.. We provide the tithe as a biblical standard.

d. How does the leadership talk about stewardship? How are they involved in your stewardship program?

1. Theme of generosity
2. 100% participation
3. Cohesive message
4. Budget transparency – this is what it takes
5. Leaders set an example

6. Emphasize – pledging is confidential
7. Leadership is both clergy and lay
8. Need transparency
9. Sermon discussion groups
10. Congregational reflections
11. Laity discuss their life with Christ and in the church.
12. Lay and clergy leaders discuss the tithe, proportionate giving, and percentage giving. And regardless, that all pledges are welcome in any amount. It's even ok if you can't pledge this year.

e. How do newcomers come to know the stewardship traditions/culture in your parish? Is there a formal or informal way that they come to know that? What is the practice/culture of stewardship in your congregation?

1. Newcomers class
2. Communicate without using the word “stewardship”
3. “We are in this together”
4. “We are in it to make things different”
5. Non-threatening
6. Committing to common values
7. Sense of belonging
8. Small group ministries
9. Covenant groups
10. At a newcomers gathering pledging is discussed and our pledge brochure provided along with a pledge card.

F. As we met to begin this work, we developed four areas of stewardship. They are:

- a. The parish has a strategic plan or vision for the parish and can articulate it.
- b. The leadership joyfully embraces the tithe.
- c. Parishioners have a personal understanding of God's call in their lives.
- d. There is a discipleship program for people new to the church.

Which aspect is the strongest in your parish? Which is the most underdeveloped?

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| 1. Strong: Vision with a plan | Weak: bringing in newcomers |
| 2. Strong: Vision | Weak: Newcomer orientation |
| 3. Strong: Joyful giving | Weak: Sacrificial giving |
| 4. Strong: Personal | Weak: Discipleship |
| 5. Strong: Call to mission | Weak: Proclaiming the tithe |
| 6. Strong: Involvement | Weak: No obvious weaknesses |

G. What is the biggest barrier to a stronger stewardship program in your congregation? What would help you overcome it?

1. No one likes to talk about money
2. Effectively engaging in the vision
3. Year round visioning
4. Ongoing messaging
5. Message from pulpit needs to be stronger
6. Need to agree on sense of purpose – what will the dollars go for?

7. Putting people at ease
8. Challenge of getting “it” all together in a timely manner for the pledge drive
9. Be sure to tell people when things are going well, and not just when there is a shortage
10. Promoting that “We are all in this together.”
11. Legacy of prior rector. Many changes.
12. We do not know how to do stewardship effectively.

BEST PRACTICES

1. Harvest Dinner
2. Newcomers’ Brunches/Meetings
3. Vestry works on and publishes its own Stewardship Statement
4. Witnessing of laity – within the liturgy, by writing individual stewardship letters, newsletter articles, etc.
5. Postcard mailings with details of shared core values etc.
6. Sharing of annual goals (needs for financial support)
7. Vestry calling on people whose pledges are tardy
8. Ministry Fairs
9. Educating about spiritual gifts
10. Studying of books by lay leadership: Ask, Thank, Tell by Charles Lane
Total Money Makeover by Dave Ramsey
11. Year round stewardship building a three-year vision each spring.
- 12 Rector divides members into different groups based on giving and sends a personal letter to everyone in each group with a different message depending upon group.
13. Other resources on Diocesan website – www.edecr.org