**Three last-minute stewardship ideas for 2018**

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***1) Hold a ‘Harvest of Blessings Sunday 2018’***

It’s always a good idea to have one Sunday in the fall to remember the harvest – the season when we gather the produce from the farms, fields and orchards. We remember God’s providence for us, and how the seasons of the year provide us with God’s blessings. For liturgies and celebrations, type “harvest liturgy” into a search engine and you fill find prayers, suggested hymns and Scripture readings.

Make the “Harvest of Blessings Sunday” especially important by including a component on financial stewardship – symbolically gathering in the “harvest” from the congregation in the form of estimate-of-giving or pledge cards.

**To run the event:**

Select an appropriate Sunday. You probably want to avoid the big festival Sundays, such as Reformation Sunday, All Saints Sunday or Christ the King Sunday, and you want to hold it before Advent, which begins Dec. 2. This still leaves plenty of Sundays in October and November.

Plan and publicize the event in your congregation newsletter, website and Facebook page. Invite people to reflect on the “Harvest of Blessings” that God gives them in their lives. Remind them of the really important gifts from God – family, friends, love, church community, health, wellbeing, etc.

Identify in advance congregational members who have a good “stewardship story” to tell. Why do they give cheerfully, generously, faithfully, etc. Line up one of these members up every Sunday to share their story with the congregation at some point in the service, such as before the service begins or before the offering.

For two weeks running up to the event, include a flyer in the Sunday bulletin reminding folks of the event.

On Harvest of Blessings Sunday, include envelopes and pledge cards in the Sunday bulletin.

For at least one of the day’s Scripture, select a passage that speaks of God’s bounty. Invite the pastor to preach a harvest sermon that uses themes of financial stewardship. We enjoy the harvest of God’s blessings in our lives. In return we give from our harvest.

Collect the pledge cards with the offering.

Be sure to thank everybody in the following Sundays and in the newsletter. If appropriate, list the totals of money pledged.

ALTERNATIVE IDEA: If “pledging” is a new concept, or if this is the first time you’ve run a stewardship effort, you may simply use this plan as an education tool by skipping the pledge cards. Or, have folks fill them out **without** their names. Or, have them fill out their cards, return them in a sealed envelope with their name on it. Then place the unopened card in their 2019 offering envelope box when you distribute them. Or, just ask them to hang onto it. Next year, you can do something different.

**2) Thanksgiving Sunday – Nov. 18, 2018**

Thankfulness is a key idea in stewardship. We give because we are thankful to God for what God has given us. It’s a gratitude response.

This year, designate Nov. 18 as Thanksgiving Sunday and dedicate the service to thanking God for all that God has given us. Use the Sundays leading up to Nov. 18 to encourage people to focus on what they are grateful for. Tell them in advance that on Nov. 18 they are going to be invited to respond by pledging or providing an estimate of giving card.

**How it works:**

Announce Thanksgiving Sunday in your congregation’s October newsletter, and follow up with an article in your November newsletter. Put the information on your congregation’s website and Facebook page as well.

At some time at worship during the Sundays leading up to the event – perhaps at announcements, or maybe before the offering – invite the congregation to say what they are thankful for that day. Provide a card or piece of paper in the bulletin on which people can write a “Thank You” list for God. They can put the list in the offering plate.

Create a “Thank You Board” in some prominent place in church, such as the narthex, sanctuary or main room of the parish hall, by hanging posterboard or a big sheet of rolled paper. In the Sundays leading up to Thanksgiving Sunday Invite the congregation to write down what they are thankful for.

Invite your members who are on Facebook to post every day what they are thankful for. Get them thinking about gratitude and the abundance of God’s blessings in their lives.

On Thanksgiving Sunday, include envelopes and pledge cards in the Sunday bulletin.

For at least one of the day’s Scripture, select a passage that speaks of thanksgiving for all God gives us. Invite the pastor to preach a thanksgiving sermon that uses themes of financial stewardship..

Collect the pledge cards with the offering.

Be sure to thank everybody in the following Sundays and in the newsletter. If appropriate, list the totals of money pledged.

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***3) Advent to Christmas Stewardship Plan, 2018***

OK, so you don’t have time to plan for the fall, then why not make your stewardship time from Advent to Christmas, or to Epiphany. Invite people to fill out “estimate of giving” or “pledge” cards at a designated service -- Christmas Eve would be a good one, since it is often the best-attended service of the year. Or, how about the first Sunday in Christmas?

**How it works:**

Announce your emphasis in your November newsletter, which can be posted on your congregation website, stating your congregation’s intention to hold a stewardship emphasis during Advent, which begins Dec. 2. Be sure to tell everyone when the drive ends – which day you have designated – and how the pledge cards or estimates of giving will be collected. Will you put them in the offering plate, or have a special basket next to the Creche (if you have one) or Advent wreath, so that people may leave their gifts at the baby Jesus’ feet.

If you can single out a special project or idea for the emphasis, all the better. Give folks a focus and a target, such as $50,000 for sanctuary remodeling, $100,000 to retire the mortgage, or $25,000 for the rainy day fund or to hire that youth worker the church has been talking about.

Invite your members to use the time of Advent to reflect on the gifts that God has given them in family, health, security, love, church, etc. The usual “gift-buying frenzy” that attends the run-up to Christmas may provide ample contrast for people to meditate on the gifts from God.

Continue with the theme with another article in the December newsletter.

Identify in advance congregational members who have a good “stewardship story” to tell. Why do they give cheerfully, generously, faithfully, etc. Line up one of these members up every Sunday to share their story with the congregation at some point in the service, such as before the service begins or before the offering.

Prepare bulletin inserts for each of the four Sundays in of Advent, each with a scripture reading from the week and providing a stewardship reflection on the text or the theme of the week. Write or adapt the prayers you say as you light the Advent wreath candles to reflect the stewardship emphasis.

* + Week 1: Hope
  + Week 2: Love,
  + Week 3: Joy.
  + Week 4: Peace

On the designated day for your gathering, distribute cards and envelopes. Invite members to fill them out and either place them in the offering plate or leave them in the special basket near the crèche or Advent wreath.

Be sure to thank everybody in the following Sundays and in the newsletter. If appropriate, list the totals of money pledged.

**VARIATIONS:**

Rather than collect and count the pledges, send the cards back to the members. Invite those present to seal the envelopes and write their names and addresses on the front. Mail the cards back to the members as a reminder at some significant point in the church year, such as Easter Sunday, Feast of the Pentecost or Christ the King Sunday.