

Assembling a Congregational Stewardship Team

By Terry Parsons, Episcopal Church USA

If you have heeded the plea preached by stewardship conference leaders to “develop a year round stewardship program,” the odds are that you are feeling a bit guilty that the year is marching on and you have done little so far. Where do you start? Here is one possibility.

The first thing, the very first thing to do is pray. God may have a few suggestions for you. However, once you have done that I suggest you begin immediately to assemble the team. Do not pass “GO.” Do not collect \$200. Recruit!

This does not mean that you immediately place an invitation in the church newsletter or bulletin for “anyone interested in serving on the Stewardship Team to call (insert name of committee chair).” Think about the skills you will need to do the work and the members of the congregation who possess those abilities. To assist you in that, I offer the following suggestions. Feel free to adapt the list to meet the unique gifts and needs of your congregation.

The Stewardship Team

Recruiter – someone who can ask others to do things. This is probably the most important member of the group. Though the chair bears the brunt of this responsibility, it doesn’t mean they are good at it. If you are not, try to fill this slot first. Please note, do not settle for the “hopeless asker” in your congregation, the person whose frequent pleas (with whining, nagging, hopeless overtones) for volunteers and other resources fall consistently on deaf ears. Get the person you hate to have ask you to something because you know you’re going to tell them yes but you always sort of like doing the job anyway.

Organizer – a person who loves lists and calendars and who has an eye for details. They may nag sometimes, you may tease them about being anal retentive, but when they are on board, everyone feels a little safer and knows the project will come off smoothly.

Desk top publisher – Look for someone who enjoys making printed materials look attractive and readable. (If no one comes to mind, publish this list in your newsletter. These people will usually volunteer.)

Liturgist – an individual who will write prayers and help plan special campaign liturgies (like a commissioning service for campaign workers.) This role frequently appeals to the quiet types but not always.

Witness - someone who has struggled successfully with their own stewardship and can talk about it in public. Potentially this is every member of the group but don’t be surprised if it’s not.

Party Giver – Think of them as Perle Mesta with an intimate acquaintance with prayer and offering plates. Look for the person whose invitations have you looking forward to their parties. They will probably have a circle of friends capable of helping. Be prepared to sit through discussions of color schemes, table decorations, and angst over the budget. You can also expect to have a good time!

Creative – someone who has ideas. They don’t have to be well organized about it, they just need ideas. A truly great creative will look at things a little differently than the rest of the group and may not be easily understood. Be prepared to be patient. Hint: It helps if they are a little bit nuts.

Cheerful Workers – You need at least two people who will cheerfully (or sort of) set up tables, haul chairs, mount banners, copy, staple, collate, stuff envelopes, haul trash, and generally see that the work gets done. If all you have are thinkers who are too good to sweat, expect your grand schemes to fall far short of their

potential. These people are pure gold. Treat them accordingly.

RECRUITING TIPS

Once you have developed your lists of skills and committee prospects, all you have to do is recruit them. I know, it's easier said than done. A recruiting call is almost identical to an every member canvass call. The same guidelines apply. The following are some additional suggestions that should assist you in building an effective team.

1. Ask God for help. Pray for wisdom about identifying committee prospects and assistance in recruiting them. Ask God to help you issue the invitation.
2. Remember Jesus' example. He recruited the Twelve one at a time, face to face. Imagine what would have happened if He had run a request for volunteers in the Temple newsletter!
3. Tell them the work is important. Most of us are busy. Who has time for an unimportant job?
4. Tell them the work may be challenging. If it is so easy anyone can do it, ask someone else. Remember, I'm busy and have to be selective about commitments.
5. Tell them they have the ability to do the work well. If they do not have the skills to do the work, you would not have asked them to do it.
6. Be specific about the time required. If you expect to meet for two hours each month, say so.
7. Set term limits on the commitment. People are more willing to say "yes" if they know it's for a year than if they are afraid they may be stuck for life. You can always ask them to re-enlist.
8. Be prepared to offer training opportunities.
9. Think "discernment." And ask every member of the committee to do the same. Look for signs of interest in other members of the congregation. New members can be invited to join the group any time. Ask members of the group to be attentive to persons who express interest in you work or have skills you need. Encourage the notion that recruitment is everyone's job, that great committee members help fill the pipeline with new talent.
10. Don't be afraid to be creative. The Stewardship Committee at St. Michael's in Lexington, Kentucky (a fearless group who allow me to offer opinions from time to time) sent a letter to committee prospects modeled after one of those awful sweepstakes announcement letters. You know, the ones that begin "You have already won..." The prize listed in small type between the car and television was membership on their committee.
11. Say "thank you" often and in diverse ways. Acknowledge volunteer efforts in your newsletter. It helps if you are specific about what they did. (Example: Thanks to Mary Ruth for beautiful table decorations and to Billy Joe for setting up the tables.) Personal notes of thanks help a lot, once people get over the shock of receiving one. This may be the most important tip. People who are appreciated enjoy their work. Committees who are thanked can find recruits.
12. As in all things and most especially, give thanks to God.

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Terry Parsons served as the Stewardship Program Officer for the Episcopal Church (USA) from 1996 to 2008.