

ONE-MINUTE *Stewardship*

**Creative Ways
to Talk about Money
in Church**



Charles Cloughen Jr.

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Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Contributing Authors xi

Foreword by The Rt. Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton,
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Introduction xix

Terminology xxv

Section I Theology of Stewardship 1

Section II Ultimate Stewardship: Don't Leave a Mess 27

Section III How to Construct Your Own Stewardship
Meditations and Use Them to Encourage
Generous Giving 37

Section IV Stewardship Meditations 41

Section V Giving Meditations. 71

Section VI Special Occasion Meditations 89

Section VII Planned Giving Meditations 149

Bibliography 159

Indexes. 161

Contributing Authors 169

Introduction

O*ne-Minute Stewardship: Creative Ways to Talk about Money in Church* finds its basis in three principles:

- The first principle: connect the vision and mission of the parish or congregation with its stewardship. How parishioners use their time, talents and abilities, and their money can make this vision and mission a reality. Thank them for the generous giving of their time, their talents and abilities, and their money.
- The second principle: stewardship preaching and teaching must take place all year long. A parish should not confine it to six weeks in the fall.
- The third principle: generous giving requires creating good relationships and connections.

How Is Your Congregation Connecting with One Another?

Today we live in a world of connection in ways I could not have imagined when I wrote *One-Minute Stewardship Sermons* some twenty years ago: weekly e-mails to congregants, Facebook, texting, Twitter, and Instagram. These media are connecting people and are changing our world in ways we are just beginning to understand. Today, many congregations have Facebook pages that highlight activities in the congregation and parishioners' involvement in these parish ministries. Parishes can send out e-mail blasts with details on the funeral arrangements for a beloved parishioner or to describe a special event at the church. The incredible feature is that these cost nothing to send out; the only expense is a person's time and talent to compose the e-mail. In some

of our smaller congregations, a weekly e-mail from the rector keeps the congregation up-to-date on the ministries that are being done in the name of Jesus. Since many of our parishioners no longer attend every Sunday, the weekly e-mail and Facebook may be the only connections to the congregation. I believe every congregation needs a weekly e-mail that can be used for the teaching and practice of stewardship. My concern is for those who do not have e-mail. I recommend a monthly newsletter to be sent out by both e-mail, as well as through the postal service—for those who don't have a computer. These can have articles about giving and stewardship.

How Are These Challenging Times for Our Church Community to Keep Connected?

Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry was asked at an event I attended, “What is the most challenging thing facing the Church?”

He answered, “I was on my way to preach at the church of one of my vicars in rural North Carolina. I asked, ‘What is your competition: the Baptists, Methodists, or Disciples of Christ?’ As we [the bishop and the vicar] rounded the bend, there was a soccer field with several hundred children and parents. And this was in *rural North Carolina* on a Sunday morning.”

Sunday morning has radically changed in America. The church has major competition from all kinds of activities. For many, it is children's athletics: traveling soccer and football teams in the fall, and baseball and lacrosse teams in the spring have supplanted Sunday worship. Good parents who value Sunday worship need to say “no” to Sunday morning athletics. But when the championships arrive, parents are hesitant to pull their children off a team they have been with all season. I remember one Pentecost when two of my finest and most dedicated parishioners were off coaching opposing teams on one of the most important days of our liturgical calendar.

Also one finds more people attending various marches for causes like breast cancer, juvenile diabetes, and the environment. They all seem to take place on Sunday mornings. Then one adds weekend traveling

for mini vacations and to see family. Sunday is no longer a day just to attend church. This is a challenge to our parishioners' exercise of faithful stewardship.

A church community needs to make every Sunday count and every worship service a celebration of our Christian community. Stewardship needs to be taught most Sundays—in the bulletin, leaflet, or program, at the offertory, occasionally in the sermon, and especially in the weekly e-mail for those who are not in worship.

What Then Should We Do to Teach Stewardship?

Back when I was ordained in 1969, churches would focus on a six-week stewardship program beginning in October and ending with an every member canvas on a Sunday afternoon. The rector would preach one stewardship sermon, and two letters would be sent. Following the reception of the pledges, a general thank-you letter would be written. That would be the only time stewardship received attention for the year until next October.

Today we need year-round stewardship education based on a theology of abundance and gratitude. We need to confront a worldview of scarcity, the fear of never having enough of what we need. We, as the church, can offer a different way of looking at our world. When many new members enter the church today, they have no experience of pledging or faithful giving. They may have never been a member of a church community, or they may have been dropouts from another congregation. They often begin as token givers. Over the years, with good year-round stewardship education, they can become generous givers. Good stewardship education grows givers. We all need to be reminded of God's abundant generosity and the need to share it with others through our church's mission and ministries.

One-Minute Stewardship: Creative Ways to Talk about Money in Church provides a resource for pastors and congregations to conduct stewardship education all year long through meditations by outstanding stewardship leaders. These meditations contain illustrations of good

stewardship and generous giving. They show ways to connect stewardship and giving to the church's ministries, mission, and vision.

One of the challenges all denominations, including the Episcopal Church, face today is demonstrating the need to connect the mission of the local congregation to the mission of the diocese or other judicatory structure. Why should the congregation financially support any ministry or mission outside its own community? Some of these meditations will connect this work beyond the local community with the congregation's mission and vision. By providing a way to link the resources of many congregations, ministry and mission can be accomplished far beyond what the local congregation could do on its own. For example, part of every dollar given in an Episcopal church goes to fund diocesan work. Then each diocese sends a percentage of their income to support the work of the Episcopal Church.

It always will be more challenging to connect the congregation to a national or international church body, such as the Episcopal Church. Our presiding bishop, the Most Rev. Michael Curry, challenges us to see ourselves as the Episcopal version of the Jesus Movement. Some of the meditations in this book connect the local church to the good work of the Episcopal Church. For example, more than one thousand youth gather for the triennial Episcopal Youth Event held in various dioceses, the Episcopal Migration Ministry serves refugees, and various campus ministries offer care to college students away from home.

We take much for granted in communication with our church members. We tell them once and expect them to remember and integrate the stewardship message in their busy, complex lives. These meditations are organized to be used by a rector or pastor, a stewardship committee, the person who composes the monthly newsletter, the person responsible for the Sunday bulletin, and the person responsible for weekly e-mail messages to the congregation.

How Are These Meditations Organized?

- By stewardship theology: these meditations are organized by the title of the meditation, which specifies the topic of the meditation.

- By giving illustrations, stories, and vignettes.
- By special occasions: these are organized by parish and diocesan ministries: altar guild, electronic funds transfer, eucharist ministers, vestry, and diocesan support. These can be customized and used to honor a ministry on a specific Sunday, such as members of the altar guild, adult choristers, people who provide the refreshments for hospitality hour. In addition, special occasions will include certain Sundays in the church year, such as meditations for Epiphany or for Palm Sunday. Episcopal Relief and Development, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Campus Ministry, Episcopal Service Corps are examples of ministries that take place for the entire Episcopal Church, but in which individual parish members may be involved. Participation in supporting ecumenical ministries, such as Godly Play, Five Talents, Overseas Study Ministries Center, Seafarers' Center, could also receive thankful recognition.
- By planned giving: these are organized by the ways parishioners can remember their parish or other religious institution in their will or estate plans.

Any of these meditations can be inserted in a Sunday bulletin, in parish e-mail, in the monthly newsletter, or in clergy comments at the offering or sermon.

In summary, my theology of stewardship and the central point of all the mediations can be found in six key words that permeate my book: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. My theology of stewardship also includes the mantra, "No gift is too large for God's work."