
Introduction:

Fresh Stewardship

The movement corresponding to what in the U.S. we call “Emerging Church” is named “Fresh Expressions” in Great Britain. This movement began in the first decade of the new century with initiatives and innovations related to the publication of the book, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions in a Changing Context* (New York; Seabury, 2010). Phyllis Tickle wrote: “The mission-shaped series is a God-send, literally. Every congregation on both sides of the Atlantic, be they Anglican or Episcopalian, liturgical or evangelical, should delve into these books immediately and thoughtfully and, above all else, prayerfully.”

How can we reimagine the mission of the church beyond the “attraction” model toward an “accompaniment” model, where members of congregations understand that *Christians are called to create church in all the intersections of life where people gather*? Finally, *church is about the life-giving relationships God is engendering wherever and whenever people meet*. We allow church to happen by naming the presence of God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit in fresh expressions, as tradition and innovation come to intersect.

This issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* addresses what stewardship looks like through fresh lenses. The authors have been encouraged to follow their passions in imagining stewardship afresh for our times. **Steve Oelschlager** asserts that Jesus did not ask us to follow him to make our lives worse. Even though there is a cost to discipleship, there is a corresponding benefit that is meant to lure us into something better: abundant life and the life that truly is life. Ultimately, our hope as church is that stewardship should be about both personal and social transformation, including making the world a better place.

Grace Duddy Pomroy affirms how the church—as it seeks to expand the meaning of stewardship, grow generous givers, and fund its mission—needs to look to Millennials as an example, not just for their own generation, but for those who came before and those who will come after them. Millennials desire to talk about money openly, hear an organization’s “why” story, use technology to create a larger, positive impact, and illustrate generosity with their whole lives. Such intergenerational learning can help the church make great strides in both stewardship and evangelism.

Ann Fritschel reflects on how Millennials want to be a part of a movement that has a clear vision and mission to help others and change the world. They are uninterested in belonging to institutions that are primarily concerned with survival or serving the needs of their members. Congregational “stories” seeking to engage Millennials need to articulate mission that is directed outwardly. Spiritual practices—including the imitation of God, concrete expressions of God’s love, living in trust, and offering joy

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and gratitude—are holistic ways of helping people grow in their faith, love, and discipleship.

Timothy Siburg discusses how being a deacon broadens the senses to God at work in the larger world. A deacon, as a minister of Word and Service, makes the connection between the faith community and larger world more intentional. This connection helps listen, learn, share, and tell stories of God’s work and promises. It also helps tell the stories of the world’s needs, inviting the people of God to participate and respond, and to thank them for doing so. In other words, a deacon helps the faith community live and grow in its identity as stewards of God’s love.

Sara Yotter applies faith development theory to encourage people of every age and stage to grow in the spiritual discipline of generosity. Through interaction together, multiple generations can create effective cognitive and experiential learning to encourage all ages to be more generous followers of Jesus. Wonderful exercises for congregational use are included in this article.

Taryn K. Montgomery insists that stewardship is most profoundly experienced in relationship with others. We often learn this generosity by witnessing and hearing the stewardship stories not only of those we love, but also of strangers. This article explores stewardship as storytelling, highlighting three important movements leaders must engage to help congregants name, claim, and tell their own stewardship stories.

Allana Helland reflects on the stewardship of stories based on the author’s sharing through social media stories based on transformative experiences from global immersions. She describes the rationale for sharing the stories through social media and several creative examples are provided. The article provides practical advice and encouragement for others to steward and tell their stories.

To make this issue accessible and useful for congregational study, the authors provide *discussion questions* at the close of each article. We hope that these articles will freshen your own understanding of stewardship, as with the coming of spring.

In our *Listening to Immigrant Voices* feature, **Javier Alanís**, Executive Director of the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest, relates the story of border-crossing Lutherans at the U.S. – Mexico border during the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic. Borders are not only geopolitical in nature, but also constructs of the heart and mind. In crossing a border to serve the immigrant neighbor from Mexico, a German Lutheran family transcends the borders of cultural, linguistic, and national origin. In a “third space” of human encounter and relating, they experience the tenderness of the heart that sows the seeds for Lutheran ministry that has flourished for one hundred years.

The *Currents Focus* article by **Cristina Plamadeala** provides a contradictory depiction of Paul in respect to women, as evidenced in 1 Corinthians, in which he is simultaneously egalitarian and misogynist toward his female counterparts. The author offers a possible explanation of this inconsistency, rooted in a potential sentiment of envy toward women, which Paul and the men surrounding him may have shared. This approach exists in tension with Jesus’ own rather democratic and glorifying treatment of women, also as witnessed in Gnostic literature.

We are grateful for the marvelous contributions of our select authors who provide insightful *Preaching Helps* for the next seasons of the church year and lectionary cycle. As always, this issue also includes a selection of current book reviews of interest to both church leaders and scholars. May the fruits of your labor, enriched by these materials, lead to fresh stewardship in your vocation of serving neighbors in all your roles and relationships day by day.

Craig L. Nessan, Issue Editor