

A Culture of Stewardship

By Jim Newman

In the Stewardship part of the Fall Synod agenda, several questions were posed to clergy and lay delegates. The first question was:

If we had a culture of stewardship in Niagara right now, what would it look like?

The responses were really interesting. Some said our focus would be on ministry and service, our churches would be growing, more programs would be offered, and God would be working in people's hearts. Others envisioned a new awareness of parish needs which would be seen as opportunities, not challenges. We would give with thankful hearts; not out of duty. We'd be working together as a diocese.

The financial minds pictured full churches where normal average giving would be at least 5%; and there would be no need for a Director of Stewardship and Financial Development! I really chuckled at that last comment which probably sums it up best. Overall the responses showed thoughtful understanding and a clear picture of what could be.

Are there barriers to developing a culture of stewardship in Niagara?

Some of the responses to the second question were somewhat discouraging. The comments ranged from the plague of consumerism to concern about how money would be used. People cited insecurity about unemployment, a deep sense of scarcity, and even uncertainty about the future of the church. Others perceived a lack of sound teaching on stewardship principles, and a need for focus on mission and outreach. Still others saw the belief in a sense that the church will always exist and God will always provide as a barrier.

But wait! The third question called for action, and the feedback was downright inspiring.

What two things will you do about Stewardship and Financial Development in your parish in the next 10 days?

Clergy and lay delegates offered well over 100 constructive steps that ranged from praying about stewardship to establishing a stewardship committee, and almost everything in between.

They planned to preach about abundance, discuss year-round stewardship, write follow up letters, present a clear picture of parish finances to parish council, question how others feel about stewardship, encourage legacy planning, publicize planned giving, renew storytelling, articulate mission, highlight accomplishments, lead by example, give a testimonial, and emphasize outreach. Generally people felt that communication about stewardship should be improved.

A substantial number plan to review their financial position, create a will, increase their financial giving, seek God's will for their tithes and offerings, and write cheques!

And actions pertaining to year-round stewardship and planned giving were mentioned frequently. Topping that list were developing narrative budgets, instituting preauthorized payments and commitment cards, and encouraging more use of the Legacy Planner.

All in all, I came away with a positive outlook for stewardship and financial development in the diocese. I'll leave a fourth question for you to ponder. **That culture of stewardship . . . it's within our reach, isn't it?**