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### **Be Generous.**

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This fall I was driving Interstate 94 in Minnesota. I saw a billboard with a black background and white lettering that said, “Be Generous.”

As I drove back to Montana, all I could think of was this sign. Who put it up? Why did they put it up? Why didn't they put on the sign their company's name or a logo? There was nothing on the sign except these two words and the period. Was it the Salvation Army, a local church, a United Way campaign? I had no idea, but I realized as I drove how rare it is to see an ad today that is not pointing to a product. Even the subtle ads sublimely suggest buying, voting, or using something. On this billboard there was not a Nike swoosh or a Target bullseye, just two words and a period. My suspicious mind still is telling me that it is a set up by some fancy advertising campaign. When I find out “the rest of the story,” I will feel that I was tricked and will be embarrassed for writing this piece.

In the meantime, however, I am thinking how refreshing it is to see someone promote an attitude without calling attention to him or

herself. How different would my life be if I could live by this value?

In my relationships, rather than worrying if I am accepted or not, rather than feeling the need to compete, or have others know how wonderful I am, it would be refreshing if I could just be generous to all I encounter. I could be generous with my time, rather than telling others how busy I am. I could be generous with my attention, rather than thinking about what I need to be doing. I could actually be present with the person I am with. How different would life be if I could be generous in all that I encounter?

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### ***The Answer to How is “Yes!”***

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Business guru Peter Block, in his book by the above noted title, advises that acting on what matters is what counts. Often people and institutions are crippled because they are distracted from discerning what matters by seeing complexity where there is simplicity, second guessing every decision and focusing on their anxiety more than on their capacities.

Funding God's mission in your congregation can pose the same challenge.

**Q: So where do I start?**

- Accept your role as a steward leader with prayers of thanks. Your baptism gives you all the tools you need for this ministry.
- God's people want to be generous and you have the privilege of accompanying them in this part of their spiritual journey.
- It's the Holy Spirit that forms stewards and your efforts are part of a wider and deeper work that God is up to in the life of every baptized child of God.

**Q: They're not rushing to join the Stewardship committee!**

- Think of someone you'd enjoy working with and invite them to join you in this ministry. Ask them to help you figure out what God has in mind for your congregation.
- Don't wait for volunteers, this is not a club. Recruit people who want to grow their faith.
- Ask someone who is not the 'usual suspect' for this ministry. Perhaps a WELCA group, or a couple of high school youth, or the person who always comes up with crazy ideas, would be useful partners in this ministry.

**Q: Our Team met but we don't know where to start.**

- Take a little inventory (informally). Notice where you see people being generous in your congregation. Ask them who helped them become generous and if you can share their story with others.
- Make a list each week of things you are thankful for at your congregation. Share your lists and have them published in your bulletin or newsletter.
- Find ways to say 'thank you' in the Prayers of the Church in worship for the generosity that bubbles up in your congregation. Thank the Holy Spirit for making this happen.
- Suggest to your congregation that their main focus is to fulfill God's mission in your community. Work together to see, lift up and tell the story of this mission to one another and in your community.

**Q: The Church Council is concerned about our budget and wants us to raise money!**

- Great! You can actually do something about this on one condition, that the money you raise

funds God's mission and not the church budget!

- Giving and generosity are acts of worship and faith in response to God's grace and love. 'Teaching the faith' is more important than 'fund raising' when it comes to growing generous stewards.
  - People give to people in mission who 'ask.' Use a *Financial Response Program* that fits with your church's ministry context. It will guide you as you 'teach the faith,' 'ask' clearly with an attitude of holy hopefulness and grow lifelong investors for God's ministry in your congregation.
  - Be bold and ask for advice. Your synod staff or stewardship specialist has broad experience with stewardship programs and ministry challenges. Their ministry is to accompany you as you lead your congregation in acting on what matters.
  - Remember, the answer to "how" is "yes"!
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