

# Your Stewardship Toolkit for February 2019!

This month's theme: **Stewardship of Loving Relationships**

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Good, thoughtful, consistent communication, education and action can help develop a healthy culture of stewardship and generosity in your congregation. This kit is designed to help get you there!

You can use the resources of this kit by themselves to educate and encourage stewardship, but they would be more effective as a monthly emphasis about a different aspect of stewardship. You could plan bible studies, temple talks, a preaching series and other activities.

This month's emphasis is **Stewardship of Loving Relationships**

Here's what you'll find below:

**-Stewardship Snippets:** Put a "Stewardship Snippet" every week in your Sunday bulletin! It's a quote from the week's Revised Common Lectionary lessons, followed by a brief reflection. Just cut and paste!

**-Newsletter Article:** Publish something in your newsletter every month on stewardship and faith, or post it on your website. Keep your people thinking about stewardship. Just cut and paste!

**-Links to Resources:** You'll find links to resources on the Web:

-The "think it" resource – Something thoughtful and insightful to get your mind turning and your soul fired up. Share it with your leadership, or use it for a temple talk.

-The "teach it" resource – Your folks ought to prayerfully and faithfully wrestle with some of stewardship's biblical, theological and discipleship issues.

-The "do it" resource – Talk, as they say, is cheap, so put your stewardship efforts into action.

-The "preach it" resource – Check out the weekly Lectionary Reflection written by Lower Susquehanna Synod pastor and synod staff person Sharron Blezard.

**-General Resource Websites:** – These are places you can go for great ideas!

**-Consultation and Coaching:** – Did you know there are experts willing to meet with your congregation?

## Stewardship Snippets

*Copy and paste into your bulletin!*

*Source: Rob Blezard*

### Stewardship Snippet

**Feb. 3, 2019** (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C)

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7** – Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

*This passage provides a good roadmap of how to be good stewards of our loving relationships. Read this over again, memorize it, print it out. Live it!*

### **Stewardship Snippet**

**Feb. 10, 2019** (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C)

**Luke 5:5,6** – Simon answered Jesus, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.

*Jesus's instructions make no sense to Simon, but following them leads him to make an enormous catch of fish. Steward/disciples often find that God's guidance leads to greater abundance. When have you seen this in your life?*

### **Stewardship Snippet**

**Feb. 17, 2019** (6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C)

**Luke 6:20** – Then Jesus looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

*Why are the poor "blessed" and entranced into the kingdom of God? Emphasizing how wealth can be an obstacle to discipleship, Luke's gospel challenges us to rethink our relationship to money. What does this passage say to you?*

### **Stewardship Snippet**

**Feb. 24, 2019** (7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C)

**Genesis 45:15** – And Joseph kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

*Meeting them years after they had sold him into slavery, Joseph now greets his brothers with love, forgiveness, assistance and restoration. A great model for loving relationships! What loving relationships need your forgiveness and restoration?*

## **Newsletter article**

Select the one below, or from the [Toolkit Newsletter Article Archive](#). Reprint permission is granted for local congregational use. Just copy and paste into your newsletter! Please include the copyright notice. Other uses please inquire: [rblezard@lss-elca.org](mailto:rblezard@lss-elca.org).

## **Stewardship of loving relationships**

*Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." – Mark 12:31b*

*Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." -- Matthew 5:43b*

Red hearts, roses and chocolates are everywhere, so it must be February – the month of love! There’s certainly nothing wrong with celebrating romance between you and a special someone, or love among family members, or best friends who are always there for one another.

But our inner-circle folks represent only a sliver of the people Jesus calls us to love. And let’s face it: they’re the *easy* ones to love. Jesus calls us to a higher plane of love; to love everyone. This means not just the people about whom we are ambivalent, but our actual enemies and those who persecute us.

Such love is a tall order, especially today, when hatred and demonization is rampant. Our political, media and social cultures encourage us to demean everybody with whom we disagree or who is different from us. Though it may be impossible to reach Jesus’ ideal, as stewards and disciples of Jesus, we can do better.

- Turn from hate. It may be too much to love our enemies, but we can start by turning from hatred. When negative feelings arise, refuse to marinate in them. Pray for guidance and strength.
- Remember that loving your enemy doesn’t mean approving of who they are, what they do, or letting them escape responsibility for their actions. It also does not mean you cannot protect yourself or others from harm.
- Imagine them as a broken, imperfect child of God (just like you!), who needs God’s love and mercy.
- Pray for them. Ask God to lead them, guide them, fill their lives with healing. Ask God to give them the kind of loving heart that you are hoping to develop in yourself.

If you do these things consistently, with God’s help you will have transformed your heart, your life and our world.

--*Rob Blezard*

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## Links to resources

### The “think it” resource

[Pope Francis: To love your enemies, prayer is a game-changer](#). In the tradition of Jesus and the prophets, as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s Martin Luther King Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gandhi, Pope Francis speaks prophetically about the power of love to heal – ourselves, our relationships and our world. This brief report of a sermon he gave to a parish in Rome speaks volumes. What parts resonate with you?

(<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-to-love-your-enemies-prayer-is-a-game-changer-72770>)

### **The “teach it” resource**

[Ten Bible verses about love](#). Go the source, the Bible. There are hundreds of verses about God’s love for humankind and our love for God and neighbor. Exploring them all would take many hours, but this resource can get you started. After reviewing it, invite class participants to find other Bible verses about love that speak to them.

(<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/10-bible-verses-you-need-to-know-about-love.html>)

### **The “do it” resource**

[Love: A choice](#). It’s probably the hardest thing anyone in our culture can do to be a close follower of Jesus— develop a heart of love for everyone and all things. But like a lot of big challenges that our God presents before us, we can do our best. This article from Alban at Duke Divinity suggests questions that will help us to discern wiser choices.

(<https://alban.org/archive/love-a-choice/>)

### **The “preach it” resource**

[Weekly Lectionary Stewardship Reflection](#). Sharron Bleazard, Lower Susquehanna Synod assistant to the bishop and pastor, looks at stewardship implications in the week’s Revised Common Lectionary lessons.

([www.stewardshipoflife.org](http://www.stewardshipoflife.org))

## **General Stewardship Resource Websites**

[ELCA Stewardship Resources](#)— Our denomination’s deep well of materials. ([elca.org/stewardship](http://elca.org/stewardship))

[Stewardship of Life Institute](#)— Headquartered at United Lutheran Seminary, this site has a trove of resources in areas of congregational and personal stewardship. ([www.stewardshipoflife.org](http://www.stewardshipoflife.org))

[Center for Steward Leadership](#) — Luther Seminary’s excellent website. ([www.luthersem.edu/stewardship/](http://www.luthersem.edu/stewardship/))

[The ELCA Foundation](#) a ministry of our denomination. ([www.elca.org/give/elca-foundation](http://www.elca.org/give/elca-foundation))

[Lower Susquehanna Synod Stewardship](#) — Select free or low-cost resources. ([www.lss-elca.org/faith-formation/stewardship/](http://www.lss-elca.org/faith-formation/stewardship/))

## **Comments? Suggestions?**

### **Sign up to have the monthly toolkit sent to you directly?**

Drop me a note! Love to hear from you!

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