

Objective: The intent of this class is to support congregational stewardship committees.

For those congregations without a Stewardship Committee, my goal is to help you move toward developing one to help your congregations' members grow in faith.

For those congregations that already have a Stewardship Committee, my goal is to help you understand that stewardship encompasses so much more than just the financial aspect. It's all about the "how to" of deepening and broadening your congregation's perspective on growing its faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in a way which may not have been considered previously.

Class 1. January 15, 2023. Where Zion's Stewardship Committee started. What preceded the paradigm shift from financial to encompass so much more.

Class Content

I've been a member of Zion Lutheran - Marinette since 1986 and was unaware that our congregation had a Stewardship Committee until many years later. Pastor Keith Kolstad became Zion's pastor in 1998, the same year our Council established a boiler replacement fund. Articles regarding funding were used in bulletins and newsletters in the months that followed.

By 2000, our Stewardship Committee was brought back to life. I was a member for one year, and we had our very first Stewardship Sunday with a dinner meeting at Schusslers with Robert Langseth as our speaker. From 2001 through 2016 the primary focus was financial giving complete with pledge cards, which the congregation was encouraged to return on Stewardship Sunday at worship. We have through the years, had the pledge cards brought forward during the Offering portion of the worship service and put in a basket placed directly in front of the altar. The congregation was also encouraged to use their time and talents to fulfill God's work. This encouragement came in the form of the written word, pastoral sermons, and short 4-5-minute Temple Talks by congregational members on Time, Talent, and Treasure. At no time were the pledges made used to establish Zion's budget for the next year. Rather, the Council always used the previous year's donations.

In 2001 the committee's emphasis was paying for the heating pipes and the financing of Zion, 2002 concentrated on asking the congregation to try one new thing at Zion, and in 2003 we stated using Temple Talks focused on Time, Talents, and Tithing.

2004 was a year of questions and learning about our community and Zion's relationship with it. We had 15 Pie and Prayer Gatherings where we addressed items such as how can we better minister to ourselves and the unchurched? What were Zion's strengths, weaknesses, gifts, and passions? What was God calling us to do? It was decided without clarity of Zion's vision it would be very hard to inspire growth in giving.

In 2005 we had 8 more **Pie and Prayer** meetings which allowed Pastor Keith to share information he learned as part of his D-Min program. The goal was to clearly define Zion's

mission in the coming year. This led to the formation of the Blueberry Club and the start of trying to ascertain the answer to those questions raised in 2004.



In 2006, the Blueberry Club changed its name to Zion's Missional Planning Group which more closely represented what its goal was. That year the group held eleven gatherings, opening each with the following prayer. "Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that your hand is leading us, and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." That same year, we

also had a Lenten Prayer Journey and a Guided Prayer Journey as we continued to search for divine direction. These gatherings lead the group to develop Zion's Mission Statement "*As God's Children, We Go Where Jesus Leads,*" the Seven Marks of Discipleship (Pray, Worship, Study, Invite, Encourage, Give, and Serve) and Zion's logo. At the time, we had absolutely no idea that these seven marks would play such a huge part in future stewardship drives. We simply felt they were vital to Christian growth.

In May 2007, our pastor, Dr. Rev. Keith Kolstad, received a Doctor of Ministry degree from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota in congregational mission and leadership. The theme of Pastor Kolstad's thesis focused on discerning God's vision in a congregational setting. Ultimately, this thesis led to Zion's Vision Statement based on the Seven Marks of Discipleship, which now guides the life of the congregation and its missions.

(Provide a copy of the Vision Statement)

The 2007 the Stewardship Committee read Charles Lane's book "Ask, Thank, Tell," and our emphasis was the eight **Dessert and Devotion (D&D)** sessions held from October 21st through November 9th. These D&D sessions were based on the highly successful 2005 Lenten Prayer Journey. Many participants thought they were an excellent way to not only connect with one another but to acquire a deeper understanding of the designated scripture. There were desserts, and everyone in the congregation received a bag with an enhanced "Going Where Jesus Leads" logo surrounded by all seven "Marks of Discipleship." These bags contained many items but most memorable among them was a magnet containing one of the seven "Marks of Discipleship" attached to a devotional booklet, as well as "Moon Jars" for the children.

An overview of our stewardship drives between 2008 through 2012 are shown below. We utilized many different methods to get our stewardship message out in an effort to get congregation members to become more intimately invested in Zion and its programming and missions through their financial support.

We tried Cottage Gatherings, Appetizers & Abundant Blessings, and Pie and Prayer. These initiatives were headed by Pastor Keith or congregation members acting as facilitators. Each included food and beverage. The philosophy being: "If you feed them, they will come."

In 2008 the emphasis was six **Appetizer and Abundant Blessing** sessions held in October. At each session we were provided an opportunity to recall those things which God has richly blessed us with not only in our personal lives but through Zion and our community. This examination process was based on a book titled "*Asset Mapping – How a Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*" by Luther Snow. The goal was to link people's blessings together to form new visions of what could happen at Zion when a group of people truly care about something deeply within themselves. The ideas that came forth were interesting and thought provoking.

In 2009, we had five **Dessert and Devotions** in October to introduce the stewardship drive. At each session participants got to view and comment on three short films illustrating "God's Work, Our Hand's", the DAR Boys and Girls Club programming, and the last starring several of our own members who presented their opinions on the need for the DAR programs, the difference the organization makes, and how Zion, holding true to its mission, can help support that ministry.

In 2010, we decided to try something else that wouldn't require the congregation to dedicate time coming to Zion, something informative and yet meaningful to their faith journey. We had congregation members present three Temple Talk on Prayer, Sharing, and Service. We also distributed a booklet titled "*Zion's Participation and Volunteer Opportunities*" along with a letter explaining our financial drive. The booklet had an extensive listing of all of Zion's committees, events, ministries, and ways of participating in the life of the congregation. It opened a lot of congregant eyes to what takes place at Zion to keep everything moving along. We used it as an avenue to increase congregation participation.

In 2011, we used the **Pony Express**; a 3-ring binder brought from house to house by congregation volunteers. This binder contained pictures and personal accounts from Zion members of all ages that served as a testament to the "legacy" we have inherited and how that "legacy" affected the lives of those within and outside of our congregation over the past year. In addition to the visual "legacy" there was also information on the financial drive with the usual letter from the pastor, pledge sheet and a secure envelope to place the pledge in. There were a lot of very positive comments on the use of the pictures in the binder. People loved seeing them and it brought back a lot of meaningful experiences.

In 2012 we thought we came up with a real winner with something called - "Cottage Gatherings." We scheduled ten but held only seven. Each gathering had a facilitator who led the session and kept it on track. Our theme was "**God's Blessings – My Response.**" One of the reasons we wanted to have the gatherings take place in private homes was because of the huge number of blessings we have in our homes. Every facilitator shared a personal story vastly different from one another. Attendees were encouraged to share their blessing story; some did others did not. Some stories made us roar with laughter, some astounded us, others brought tears to our eyes; all were received with open hearts and love for the person who shared. We got to know each other better which was a wonderful blessing in so many ways. While it was a meaningful growing experience for those that attended, the committee was surprised, as we had hoped so many more in the congregation would have attended. As committee chair, I was especially disappointed.

A lot of these stewardship drives were a way for Zion's congregation to grow together, to talk about their personal faith journeys even though Lutherans are notoriously reluctant to share their own faith with others, and to keep the stewardship drive interesting, diversified, and growing in participation.

The following year led the committee to begin to employ a year-round stewardship emphasis. We'll be covering that next week.