

## **Class 2. January 30, 2023. Zion's Stewardship Metamorphosis.**

This class will look at Zion's transition from stewardship and its being all about money to what it has now become; a year-round emphasis on stewardship and generosity encompassing Zion's Seven Marks of Discipleship – Pray, Worship, Study, Invite, Encourage, Give, and Serve. We'll share with you what was discovered over the last six years - what worked and what didn't.

### **Class Content**

2013 was the year the committee resolved to have a year-round stewardship emphasis, but I can honestly tell you, we weren't sure how to go about it. And so began Zion's Stewardship Corner; newsletter articles with a goal to inform and uplift God's people about the true definition of stewardship. The articles covered a variety of topics including handling of personal finances, vocations, and utilization of skills and talents in daily life and so much more.

In 2014, we were searching for something different. We found it in a book titled "New Consecration Sunday" by Herb Miller. **(Hold up the two books)** This initiative "teaches stewardship on the basis of the need of the giver to give for his or her own spiritual benefit rather than on the basis of the need of the church to receive to balance its budget." (This was something we very much believed in.) The book focused on tithing and percentage giving. It provided a very detailed approach, with a warning from the author "to study the instruction steps carefully and accomplish its details to the letter." It also involved quite a few people – a good thing – as it gave them a vested interest in the outcome. We were provided numerous letters, scripts for calling parishioners, a format for a financial document in step format about the congregations giving and a percentage-based giving chart. On **Consecration Sunday**, we had a seven-minute commitment session at the close of the worship service and when they were ready entire families could go forward and place their commitments in the basket at the front of the sanctuary. Following the worship service, we had a catered luncheon for everyone in attendance. This program formed the basis of our final direction, that **giving is all about growth in faith**. The irony was that even though this was such an emphasis in the book, we felt it was too much about the money and not enough about growth in faith.

In 2015 Zion's Fall Stewardship Drive was called "Going Where Jesus Leads." Tithing and percentage giving were emphasized. Members of the congregation were invited to grow one step in their giving in 2016 by emphasizing spiritual growth; a way to live by faith, a way to participate in God's generosity and abundance, a way to move beyond oneself and connect to one another. The Steps in Giving and the Percentage Growth documents were updated and provided along with the usual letter from pastor, the pledge card, and a return envelope for the pledge.

2016 brought Zion's "Growing in Faith" stewardship drive. The committee pondered how to let the congregation know that stewardship is about so much more than money which had been the primary focus for most of their lifetimes. We thought we could reinforce that by concentrating on each mark individually and asking for written commitments to grow in that mark. Temple Talks for each of the Seven Marks were presented in September and October. "Tried and True" ways to grow in faith through the marks were handed out along with a commitment card for each mark. In addition, online or electronic giving through Vanco were introduced to the congregation. Pastor's letter and monetary pledge cards were distributed and collected. Everyone who made a pledge received a handwritten thank you note as Chick Lane's book, "Ask, Thank, Tell" suggested needs to be done without fail. This was also the year the committee decided to change its name to the Stewardship and Generosity Committee largely because stewardship arises out of generosity.

As I said last week, in 2007 the Stewardship Committee read "Ask, Thank, Tell" by Charles (Chick) Lane. In the very first chapter of that book, he suggests that every Stewardship Committee should have a ministry goal and he suggested one. Our committee adopted it as our own in 2017 and has used it to begin every report and newsletter article since then. *"The goal of Zion's stewardship ministry is to help God's people grow in their relationship with Jesus through the use of the time, talents, and finances God has entrusted to them."*

In 2017 on the three Sundays prior to Seven Marks Sunday, Pastor Keith had a sermon series covering all the marks, with Tried-and-True Ways to grow in each mark provided. The worship service format was changed to accommodate our Seven Marks Sunday program. Unlike 2016, all seven marks were handled in one Sunday with only one pledge sheet. For each mark Pastor said a prayer, a text was read, a candle was lit, and time was allotted to fill out the mark commitment sheet. The service continued like this until all seven marks were handled. During the "Give" portion, families were instructed to fill out their 2018 Pledge Cards in the pew and bring them forward to the altar when ready.

2017 was also the year we asked six congregation members of different genders and ages four questions on the Stewardship Drive and how to improve or change it. Preparing for this class, I found the documents and read those comments again. I was surprised at what I read and will be sharing this information with my committee as I'm sure we will be able to once again utilize the information contained. **Read a couple questions from that survey.**

In 2018 we continued our quest to link the Stewardship Drive to the Seven Marks of Discipleship to remind the congregation that stewardship is more than just giving money, that each mark is important in our relationship with God. Based on the 2017 survey comments, we included the congregation youth in the drive. Over several weeks, the SPARK teachers taught about and provided each child with one commitment sheet per mark along with a youth version of the tried & true ways to grow in faith. **(Show Tried & True Sheets for Youth)**. Like their parents they were asked to fill out the commitment sheets, take them home, and work to meet the goals they set for themselves. Based on very positive survey comments, in the four weeks prior to **Seven Marks Sunday**, seven Temple Talks were given. We were told personal stories and the connections made to the marks were significant and extremely well received, and they wanted them to continue. Thank you, cards were mailed to, adults and children alike.

*Growing in Faith* was the theme for Zion's stewardship drive for 2019. For the fifth year, we followed the Seven Marks of Discipleship (Pray, Worship, Study, Invite, Encourage, Give and Serve) to guide the congregation towards growth in faith through each mark. Over three-weeks, seven Temple Talks were presented. Commitment cards were handed out each week on the marks covered in the Temple Talks. Once filled out, they were put in a colored envelope and sealed. The congregant placed the envelope in the offering basket at the front of the altar. The committee intended to return these envelopes with the pledges inside to the congregation mid-year so they could evaluate how they did individually BUT, we ran into a real logistics problem. Not everyone attends worship every week, and while the committee tried valiantly to get the missed information out week after week, in the end it proved too much. We had also planned to mail the unopened congregant commitment envelopes mid-year, but again, this proved to be too much. In the end, the envelopes were handed out at a worship service. This did not work as well as planned. It simply became totally unmanageable, and we won't be doing it this way again.

2020 we dealt with the COVID pandemic. Zion was blessed to have a progressive pastor who made use of modern technology using Zoom for Council meetings, SPARK and Confirmation classes and a live feed to Facebook for worship. On November 8<sup>th</sup>, the Stewardship Drive was kicked off during the Facebook Live Worship Service. Pastor Keith notified the attendees how the Stewardship Drive would progress; every active household was mailed a letter, two informational inserts, and instructions on giving electronically. There was also an excellent prerecorded message on giving titled "*My Journey in Faith*" presentation by John Radloff. As was the case for the past seven-years, the monthly newsletter articles continued to focus on stewardship and generosity through the lens of the Seven Marks of Discipleship. We didn't have the congregation make commitments on the seven marks because in-person worship was not taking place.

2021. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented the committee from having our typical Stewardship Drive. While the typical was not possible, over the course of several weeks, videos were posted on Facebook, Zion's website, and emailed to congregation members for the DAR, Northland Retirement Community, Northern Great Lakes Synod and the ELCA. All are ministries which Zion's congregation supports through financial contributions.

In September, in-person worship resumed in Zion's sanctuary. Hallelujah! Congregation members were provided stewardship drive information and asked to return it by November 15<sup>th</sup>; however, written commitments by the congregation to the Seven Marks were not utilized.

2020 and 2021 we reverted to concentrating on the "Give" or financial aspects of Stewardship simply because the congregation was scattered thanks to COVID and no in-person worship.

At the next class we'll wrap this up with a quick overview of what the Stewardship Committee did for 2022. We'll also re-examine the why, what seems to have worked and what was a dismal failure for Zion at the time we did it.