

STEWARDSHIP Sunday, January 15, 2012

HWB - *Hymnal Worship Book*, SJ - *Sing the Journey*, SS - *Sing the Story**

Written by Dori Zerbe Cornelsen, staff of Mennonite Foundation of Canada, and Elsie Rempel, staff of Mennonite Church Canada Formation.

These worship resources are designed to assist you in planning worship for Stewardship Sunday. This worship resource focuses on faithfully managing the gifts God has given us, particularly our material goods. It has been prepared for the third Sunday in January, but since the texts have been chosen to suit the theme, this resource can be used at any time of the church year.

Why bother with Stewardship Sunday?

There are over 80,000 registered charities in Canada. Just this sheer number of charities indicates that there is a competitive environment for churches and their agencies in terms of attracting donor dollars. This might sound crass for the introduction for Stewardship Sunday worship materials – but it must be named and acknowledged at the outset.

In a book with the provocative title, *Not Your Parents' Offering Plate*, J. Clif Christopher proposes that rather than see competition as a dirty word, churches embrace the challenge of earning people's time, attention, and money by offering ministry that people can believe in. Christopher asserts that people generally want to be part of something that changes lives. Churches able to articulate and live out their mission as change agents in the world will receive support.

Among some of the practical ideas Christopher offers are the following: build a high expectation culture in all areas of discipleship and stewardship; just before the offering, have weekly testimonies of how attenders have experienced the church at work; offer ongoing, regular classes on finances and faith, helping people organize their material lives around Christian principles; write hand-written thank-you notes to those who contribute finances and time to church ministries; replace line-item budgets with narrative or missional budgets dividing all expenses into categories such as worship, nurture, service, etc.

In closing words to church pastors and leaders, Christopher encourages them not to view stewardship as one more job to add to the "to do" list. Rather, "simply make stewardship the

hallmark of who you are each and every day." While it is good for worship cycles to include particular focus on stewardship, it is also good to be reminded that we make stewardship the hallmark of who we are each and every time we gather.

Texts

Exodus 1:8-2:10, Psalm 138, Mark 8:1-10, Romans 12:1-13

Song suggestions

Gathering:

HWB 28 *Breathe upon us, Holy Spirit*

SJ 10 *Spirit, working in creation*

SS 31 *Jesus, be the center*

Responding:

HWB 304 *There are many gifts*

HWB 392 *Heart and mind, possessions, Lord*

SS 35 *Thou, O Christ, my Lord and King*

Sending/Blessing:

HWB 422 *Bwana awabariki (May God grant you a blessing)*

SJ 78 *Sizohamba naye (We will walk with God)*

SS 57 *Go, my friends, in grace*

SUGGESTED ORDER OF WORSHIP

WE GATHER

Call to Worship

We give you thanks, O Lord, with our whole hearts;
Before the watching world we gather to worship and sing your praises.

We bow down in your holy presence to worship you

We give thanks to your name for

your steadfast love,

your generosity,

and your faithfulness. Amen.

(Adapted from Psalm 18: 1-2)

Confessing/reconciling (based on Psalm 138: 3-8)

God above all gods, who answers our pleas for help, we sing your praises and thank you for your steadfast love and faithfulness. We recognize that our efforts to extend your

* Song book abbreviations match those used for corresponding worship resources in *Leader Magazine*

love and faithfulness to others are often feeble and self-centered. Forgive us, Lord, and increase our strength of soul. Help us to remember that you regard the lowly, and that you are our strength. Help us to choose and do the good.

Words of Assurance

God is steadfast and faithful; eager to forgive us and equip us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, which are holy and acceptable to God. (adapted from Romans 12: 1)

HEARING GOD'S WORD

Children's time

Adapt one of these resources to relate to the Exodus or the Mark texts, or tell the Bible stories from a child's perspective and link them into the theme of the day:

- Generosity is like a potluck lunch
www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1626
- Community is like a potluck
www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1627
- Who Gets the Extra Special Banana Chocolate Chip Muffins? www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1628

Sermon starters

- Use the resource From Grateful to Generous: Stewardship sermons by John H. Neufeld, session 1, "Getting our Bearings." Borrow or download at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/391

He suggests that in Romans 12, Paul begins with an appeal based on God's grace toward all humanity: grace that challenges Christians to respond by offering all that we are and have to God. This is a work of transformation to be done in a community of Christ for which gifts have been given.

- Paul warns that Christians must not be "conformed to this world," but be transformed into stewards. Use the story of the midwives in Exodus 1 as an illustration of what it might mean to resist being conformed to the world.
- John H. Neufeld writes that being a steward is one possible response to what God has been doing. Use the story of the feeding the 4000 in Mark 8 as evidence of Jesus' amazing grace and indiscriminate compassion towards the crowd that had gathered around him.

WE RESPOND

Choose a hymn of response, invite one or more personal stories that reflect the sermon theme, and take the offering.

BLESSING AND SENDING

God, the source of all generosity,
Continues to feed us and provide for our needs.
God, who has called us together as his body on earth,
Provides the courage to confront, and the love we need for
sharing God's generosity.
God sends us now to serve
with generous and joy-filled living. Amen.