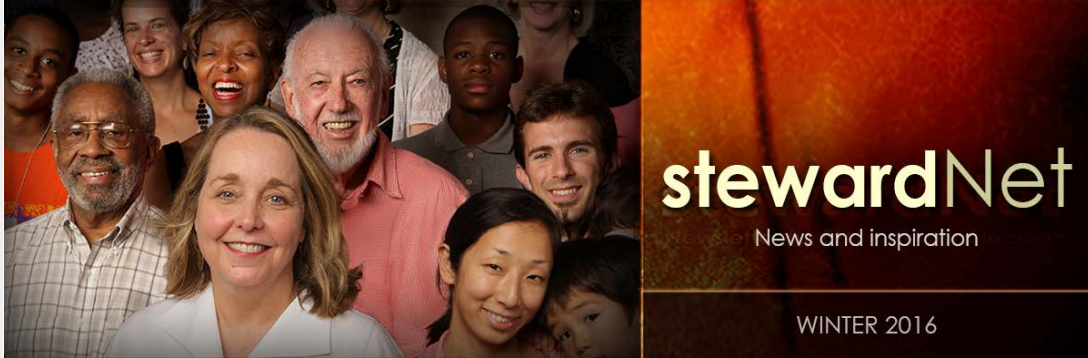


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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

You're receiving this email because you or your congregation indicated you are a stewardship leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). If you'd prefer to unsubscribe from this newsletter, please [let us know](#).

Dear friend in Christ,

Do you think that God's desire for us and the world is just an incremental alleviation of misery and suffering (to fix what is broken), or does God want something better – like to see lives and communities that flourish, thrive, and are teeming with possibility? Asked another way, is God only interested in helping people move from a -6 to -2 on a hypothetical well-being scale, or does God also desire growth from say +2 to +6?

It's interesting to me that a nascent branch of psychology – called positive psychology – is now asking a similar question: Is psychology's only offering to help mitigate dysfunction, or can psychology help multiply what makes life good and worth living?

Whether we are talking about psychology or theology, the distinction between framing everything as broken and a problem to be solved, as opposed to goodness that can be nurtured and multiplied, seems intriguing and worth exploring. It turns out that factors for whole-hearted living identified by positive psychology have significant overlap with themes from stewardship, discipleship, faith and religion. Are you surprised that love, hope, gratitude, generosity, compassion, forgiveness, justice and humility do wonders to germinate goodness in life? Was it just a coincidence that Jesus emphasized these same things when he talked about the kingdom of God?

God's love, goodness and blessing have been part of all creation from the very beginning and flow through it abundantly, including each one of us. While stewardship practices can be understood as a response to those blessings, I think it can be inspiring to also see those practices as ways that God invites us into a life that truly is life, so we can be multipliers of that goodness and trusted partners and co-creators with God of a better world.

We are a church that is energized by lively engagement in our faith and life. Thank you for doing God's work with a faithful, generous heart!

Faithfully,

Steve Oelschlager
Stewardship Program Coordinator
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Understanding how God made us

Being aware of our strengths

One finding from positive psychology is that "authentic happiness comes from identifying and cultivating your most fundamental strengths and using them every day in work, love, play and parenting." Another way of saying this is that God gave us all unique talents and abilities, and when we find meaningful and creative ways to use those gifts, we are at our best for God's plan for our lives.



What insights do you have about yourself? Do you know what your strengths are? Would you say your life is full of purpose and meaning, love and gratitude? Here are some online tools to help you explore these questions more deeply.

- [Questionnaires at AuthenticHappiness.org \(free\)](#)
- [Clifton StrengthsFinder Assessment \(\\$15\)](#)
- [Myers-Briggs Personality Profile \(free\)](#)
- [ELCA Spiritual Gifts Assessment \(free\)](#)

ELCA research funded by the Lilly Endowment

Finances and well-being

Typically, a variety of factors make up our overall well-being; these include physical, spiritual, career and social health. Financial health is also considered to be one of the foundational dimensions of overall well-being.



The Lilly Endowment has raised the issue of financial health in ministry and is funding research in the ELCA and other denominations to investigate and address this issue, particularly as it affects a pastoral leader's ability to effectively lead congregations. The ELCA grant program is called Resourceful Servants; it focuses on addressing issues of financial wellness and literacy among pastoral leaders and congregations.

The grant team is in the process of gathering information about the current state of financial practices in congregations. You can help us better understand our congregations by providing feedback through this [questionnaire](#).

If you would like to know more about the Resourceful Servants grant program, please email [Adam DeHoek](#), ELCA Research and Evaluation.

Also, check out research being done at Notre Dame around [flourishing in ministry](#).

'Jesus talked about money...why don't you?'

Recent videos on stewardship

Watch [Mike Ward](#) present thought-provoking ideas about stewardship at the Siebert Foundation's "Change or Die" conference in October. Ward is a Lutheran pastor as well

as a certified fundraising executive and is a partner in the consulting firm GSB. According to Ward, we need to learn how to inform, motivate, ask and thank people in order to lead them to glad and generous hearts. If Jesus is correct that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6.21), then Ward says we must not have the hearts of the majority of our members.

Also, [view](#) Pacifica Synod Bishop Andy Taylor tell how he learned to give generously from a very young age and a later lesson he was taught, to give his first and best to God.



Measuring congregational well-being

The Congregational Vitality Project

Have you ever sat in a congregation council meeting wondering why more people aren't coming to church or how you will raise enough funds to sustain important ministries? How often does that conversation spiral into frustration with much hand-wringing and few useful suggestions? For many congregations, this conversation happens often and goes nowhere.

What if, instead of talking about the symptoms, you began to identify the causes? [Watch this webinar](#) to learn more about the Congregational Vitality Project, or check out this [page of resources](#).



Flourishing disciples and ministries

Mission interpreter news

Mission interpreter coordinators witnessed the many benefits of discipleship at their recent annual conference at Joy Ranch, Florence, S.D., in August. Jesus is leading so many people in this area to make our world a better place!

Don Johnson, director for Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, shared stories of the benefits of discipleship in keeping 130 outdoor ministry sites viable. Places that reach out to more than 175,000 summer campers and 275,000 fall/winter/spring campers and those seeking a place for a spiritual retreat.



We heard stories about caring for creation from Phoebe Morad of Lutherans Restoring Creation, where the focus is to care for the environment that God entrusted to us, making a better world for future generations.

The benefits of discipleship are easy to see in the South Dakota Synod with missions like the Pine Ridge Retreat Center, which accompanies the American Indian population of the area; Campus Ministry, which is growing the faith of our young adults; Westside Ministry, a New Start congregation; Table of Grace, an ecumenical partnership with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); and Church on the Street, a ministry that meets people where they are.

[Click here](#) if you'd like to learn more about these ministries. If you'd like to learn more about the Mission Interpreter Ministry of our ELCA, telling stories of how God is making a difference in the world, please contact [Denise Ballou](#).

Other items of interest

Publications, interviews, e-newsletters and more

- [Download](#) the new 2016 publication Stories of Faith in Action and related resources to share how important your weekly offering in your congregation is in sustaining and growing God's mission.
 - StewardTalk is an interview series from the ELCA with authors and thought leaders on stewardship related topics. [Listen to past recordings](#).
 - For periodic ideas and inspiration on stewardship delivered to your inbox, check out [Voices on Stewardship](#) from Vanco Financial Services and [Stewardship](#) from Luther Seminary's Center for Stewardship Leaders.
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Sayings, quotes, thoughts

"Anonymous," from "Authentic Happiness" by Martin Seligman

If you want to be happy...

- ... for an hour, take a nap.
 - ... for a day, go fishing.
 - ... for a month, get married.
 - ... for a year, get an inheritance.
 - ... for a lifetime, help someone.
-

Biblical foundations

Psalm 104:31-34

May the glory of the Lord continue forever.
May the Lord be happy with what he has made.
When he looks at the earth, it trembles.
When he touches the mountains, they pour out smoke.
I will sing to the Lord all my life.
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
May these thoughts of mine please him.
I find my joy in the Lord.

Upcoming events (watch the [calendar file](#) for details)

Nov. 17

StewardTalk with Dr. Adam Copeland on crowdsource fundraising,
3 p.m. Central at 877-820-7831 and participant code 6314685#.

Feb. 14-17, 2017

Norfolk, Va.

Association of Lutheran Development Executives

March 4

StewardCast web event on stewardship "bright spots" in the ELCA.

April 25-27, 2017
Washington, D.C.
Generosity Now: Stewardship Fusion II
Featuring author J. Clif Christopher

[Full calendar](#) | Subscribe to [Our Calendar File](#)

Get connected !Find [ELCA stewardship resources online](#)



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