

November/December 2009, *Equipping #101*

Stewardship Sunday

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Introduction: Why Stewardship Sunday?

These resources for worship are designed to assist you in planning for Stewardship Sunday, one of the Special Days promoted by MC Canada and MC USA to support significant events or ministries in the life of the church. Stewardship Sunday was moved to January in 2006 to coincide with the beginning of the new fiscal year in the church, making a clear connection between faith and finances. The focus is to emphasize stewardship as the believers' joyful response to God's action in their lives.

There are many good reasons to observe Stewardship Sunday in January: for individuals and congregations, a new calendar year is often a time for setting ministry goals for the future; when Prayer Week is observed by congregations in January, Stewardship Sunday provides an opportunity to align even our material lives with God's mission; the season of Epiphany invites us to participate in making Jesus known to the world including by our financial decisions.

We invite and encourage you to observe Stewardship Sunday in your congregation, on this Sunday in January, or on another Sunday. Celebrating generosity received and given need not be limited to one Sunday per calendar year! For more ideas on connecting faith and finances in your congregation, feel free to contact the Resource Centre of MC Canada (www.mennonitechurch.ca/resources) or contact the Mennonite Foundation of Canada Stewardship Consultant nearest you (www.mennofoundation.ca).

Worship Theme: 150 Gallons of Generosity

Texts: Psalm 36: 5 -10, John 2: 1-11, 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

Hymn Suggestions:

STJ 5 *Come and be light for our eyes*
HWB 397 *God loves all his many people*
HWB 57 *Come and give thanks to the Giver*
STS 107 *Fill now our life, O Lord*
HWB 97 *From the hands*
STJ 29 *You are all we have*

HWB: Hymnal: A Worship Book
STS: Sing the Story
STJ: Sing the Journey

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:11

STS 91 *Star of the morning*
HWB 304 *There are many gifts*
HWB 383 *God, whose giving*
STJ 44 *The love of God*
HWB 392 *Heart and mind, possessions, Lord*
HWB 95 *Praise God, the Source of life*
Generous God, Bryan Moyer Suderman's CD, My money talks -
www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/809

Call to Worship: (from Psalm 36:5-10)

One: Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

Many: Your righteousness is like the mighty mountain; your judgments are like the great deep;

One: How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

Many: They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

One: For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

Many: O, continue your steadfast love to those who know you and your salvation to the upright of heart!

All: Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

Confession: STJ 152 or HWB 699 and HWB 706
(These prayers belong together as confessing and reconciling)

Ministry with Children:

Invite the children to come and see what will happen in the children's story time. Thank them for gathering and invite them become quiet, way down where they can feel God is near. After a sense of holy expectation has grown, show them the scripture text in your Bible, briefly summarize its contents and connect it to one of the children's time options, listed below.

- Read the children's book *Guess How Much I Love You*, by Sam McBratney and illustrated by Anita Jeram, (©1995 Candlewick Press), to illustrate God's love for us.
- Reflect together about birthday gifts – what do parents remind you to say when you receive a gift? (Thank you.) What are some gifts we get from God that we can say thank you for? (parents, friends, sunny days, snow, love, etc.) Finish the children's time with a round of "thank-you" prayers with the children: "Thank you, God, for ..."
- Read John 2:7-8 to the children, and then use baking soda and vinegar to illustrate the surprise of Jesus changing water into wine – which Jesus does to show that God's generosity to us is extravagant and overflows.
- Download and tell the children's story based on John 2:1-11 from www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1167

Sermon Starters:

In Epiphany we see how Jesus is revealed and whom he reveals. The texts for today show Jesus as a generous saviour sent to us from our generous God.

The worship theme for the day comes from the Gospel text (John 2:1-11). In an article entitled “*More than Enough*” (Christian Century, July 25, 2006), Charles Hoffman writes that abundance is a theme throughout the fourth Gospel. For instance:

- Jesus is the Word from whose fullness we have all received grace upon grace (1:16)
- the first sign in Cana results in a profusion of wine (2:6-7)
- in conversation with a woman at a well Jesus describes living water gushing up to eternal life (4:14)
- an extravagant abundance of food for 5000 people from a boy’s five loaves and two fish (6:13)

Hoffman writes, “Whether it is wine at a wedding ... or picnic food, there is always more than enough, a prodigious supply.” Dan Clendenin in his Journey with Jesus blog (Jan 8, 2007 post) writes, “The God that Jesus revealed is a God of lavish liberality, generosity and extravagance.” (Both references are from www.textweek.com.)

This same generous God is celebrated in Psalm 36, which uses several superlatives in phrases like “extends to the heavens” and “to the clouds.” God’s refuge is available to “all people” and there is abundance on which to feast in God’s house. The NIV translates the first phrase of verse 7 as, “How priceless is your unfailing love!”

God’s generosity through Christ is also made known to us in the gifts given by the Spirit

(1 Corinthians 12:1-11). This text provides us with the link between God’s generosity and our responsibility, that we give out of the gifts we have been given and that all are necessary for the common good.

Offering prayer: STJ 147

Affirmation of Faith:

Use the MC Canada Statement of Identity and Purpose as included here.
(For translations of this document, see www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/116)

God calls, equips and sends the church to engage the world
with the reconciling Gospel of Jesus Christ
We are a community of disciples of Jesus,
A part of the Body of Christ,
Covenanted together as congregations, area churches, and a national church body.
Gratefully responding to God’s initiatives
And empowered by the Holy Spirit,
We commit our resources to calling, equipping and sending
The church to engage the world with the reconciling Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pastoral Prayer:

The Calls to Intercession in *Take our Moments and Our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book*, (© 2007, Herald Press), week 1, Tuesday morning, p 51-52, and week 4, Monday morning, pp. 298-300 are very suitable. Available at the Resource Centre - www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1162

Benediction:

Now to God, who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly far more
than all we can ask or imagine,
be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

Alternative Ideas:

- Invite the youth in your congregation to prepare for Stewardship Sunday worship reflecting from their experience on what it means to be generous, to receive and to give. Check Youth Worship Sourcebook - www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1163 -in your planning.
- Prepare for offering in a similar way to which you might prepare for communion by a time of confession and reconciling. The poem “Life-Giving Water”, by Vicki Roeder Martin, as printed in *Reveling in God’s Love: Praying with Psalm 36 – A Season of Prayer* by Sue C. Steiner, p55, www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1164, is useful for such an approach;
- Pray for and affirm all gifts, large and small, financial, and volunteer.
- Invite givers to come forward with their offerings. With advance preparation, (make paper and pens available) all can participate with written or drawn commitments of what they can give that Sunday (a hug, a smile, a word of encouragement, a financial pledge, etc.).
- Have one or more people give testimony to generosity received in their lives or have people turn to their neighbours in groups of 2 – 4 and share stories of generosity.



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