

The Exercise of Christian Stewardship in Synodical Work

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- A. Introduction: Our position as children of God and as servants of God
 - 1. Children of God by faith in the redemption
 - 2. Servants of God through the command to bring these truths to others.
- B. Definition of the terms “stewardship” and “synodical work”
 - 1. Stewardship: management or administration of another’s property
 - 2. Synodical work: the building of God’s Kingdom through united effort and through the pooling of resources.
- C. The diversity of gifts for one and the same service.
- D. Faithfulness the chief characteristic sought in a steward.
- E. Proper motivation for faithful stewardship
 - 1. Gratitude for all the blessings of God
 - 2. Love to Him Who first loved us.
- F. Admonition to more faithful stewardship must remain evangelical.
- G. The Application of these truths to our Synodical work and life.

A. Introduction

The subject of Christian stewardship is one that may never be dismissed from the believer’s mind. For in the service of our Lord and Savior we are first and foremost stewards. Believers we are by grace, through faith by the power of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament, and if believers then also children of God, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal.3,26.27. Yea, the Apostle goes further and says: “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” Romans 8, 15-17.

The Scripture spares no words in assuring us of our glorious position as the children and heirs of God. God wants us to have that certainty of our glorious; adoption ever before our mind’s eye. Each and every believer has every right to be certain concerning his position as a child of God that “being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This conviction must be reached first before we can have any conception of that which we wish to study together, the faithful exercise of our Christian Stewardship, especially as it relates to our Synodical work and life.

Every child of God is also called into the service of God. The spiritual blessings, which our God has showered upon us, are meant for all, and our Savior has determined that those who have reached the firm conviction concerning their own salvation by the grace of God, are the ones whom He has chosen to be His witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth.

This, then, calls us into His service. As far as God’s relation to you and me is concerned, we should firmly believe that we are children and heirs. As far as our relation to our neighbor, believer or unbeliever, is concerned, our position is that of a steward, of one who is a servant and has a definite service to perform. From the day of our conversion on we are servants of Christ as well as joint heirs with Him. We are to “show forth the praises of Him Who has called us out of

darkness into His marvelous light.” That is the reason we said that the subject of Christian stewardship is one that may never be dismissed from a believer’s mind. When he rises in the morning he thanks his heavenly Father for having kept him during the night from all harm and danger. Then, grateful to have been permitted to see the light of another day, he prays that his heavenly Father would keep him during this new day also from sin and every evil, that all his doings and life may please Him. And uppermost in that work and life of a child of God is his service, as a steward of God, toward his fellowman. We are the servants of God, called and sent to carry out His will. And His will is simply this that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Bringing this message to men by the use of the means of grace and leading them to Christ, their Savior, is our service in the kingdom of God.

B. Definition

The Greek word *οἰκονομία* is defined by Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament in this way: “the management of a household or of household affairs; specifically the management, oversight, administration of others’ property; the office of a manager or overseer, stewardship; hence the word is transferred by Paul in a theocratic sense to the office (duty) entrusted to him by God (the lord and master) of proclaiming to men the blessings of the Gospel.” This, then, would include the faithful and diligent use of all the spiritual treasures, the gifts and abilities, of time and opportunity, of means and possessions in the Lord’s interest and to His advantage.

To carry this Gospel of the Kingdom as a witness to all nations, to preach the Gospel to all the world, to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever Jesus has commanded them, is the duty and service of all believers. And yet the Lord supplies special gifts and abilities to equip certain members in a special manner for carrying out various phases of this tremendous task. All the gifts needed for the total task God has supplied. Therefore each one is to do his particular part of the total service. It is true that they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word, Acts 8:4, but it is also true that the congregation in Jerusalem chose seven deacons and appointed them over the business of caring for the widows in the daily ministrations. This was done in order that no one might be neglected and that the apostles could give themselves continually to the Word. Thus special gifts bestowed by God for special service were recognized and put to work.

In Acts 13 we read: “As they (the prophets and teachers in Antioch) ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, ‘Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them!’ And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.” Verses 2-4. Here the Lord indicated to them how certain of the duties of the Church can be delegated to certain chosen men with special gifts and abilities for such service, men whom God himself has “called”. (Acts 13, 3.)

A Synod is a banding together of several congregations, in the common task of serving the Lord and their fellowmen with the spiritual treasures committed to their charge. The purpose for uniting is this, that the individuals and congregations might, so to speak, pool their gifts and abilities, and thus be able to serve more effectively and to carry out their task more efficiently.

C. Diversity of Gifts

In the well-known 4th chapter of Ephesians where the Lord, through His Apostle, exhorts us to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, He emphasizes the oneness or unity of the Church. “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Verses 4 to 6. But in this wonderfully unified Church there is a wide diversity of gifts, intended to supply all the needs of the Church. “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men...And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” Eph. 4, 7-8 and 11-16.

The purpose of the diversity of gifts and the service which is rendered the body of Christ by the faithful administration of each of these, is the perfecting of the saints or believers, the edifying or building up of the body of Christ, His Church. In this service we are striving for perfection, though we know that true perfection will be reached only in heaven when we have put off our sinful flesh and have been freed from the last consequences of sin. Still we are to be busy building up the Church. Each one is to supply the service of his gift or gifts in this building program. These gifts have been entrusted to him, and the Lord has need of the faithful employ of these gifts by His stewards. Therefore the Apostle also exhorts us in 1 Peter 4, 10: “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” He then mentions several particular gifts and the great purpose of all our service and of the exercising of our gifts: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Verse 11.

In like manner the Apostle Paul in Romans 12,4 and following emphasizes the diversity of gifts on the one hand and on the other the oneness of purpose in employing these gifts faithfully in the service of the Lord and His Church. “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Thus our risen and ascended Lord, the exalted Prophet, has supplied His church and still supplies His church with the gifts needed for carrying out the service into which He has called us.

D. Faithfulness the First Requisite

How then, are we to exercise these gifts? One word answers this question: “Faithfully!” “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” 1 Cor. 4,2. The word *πίστος* can be rendered trustworthy, faithful, dependable, one who can be relied upon to carry out his service with diligence and devotion.

A servant is of no use to his master if he does not carry out the tasks assigned to him. Trust has been misplaced, confidence betrayed if the servant does not manage well, and to the advantage of his lord, the goods placed under his management. “Thou wicked and slothful servant...Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.” Matthew 25, 26-27. A gift buried in the ground and not employed in the Lord’s service, robs Him of His due gain. A servant who thus falls short of his duty as a steward or manager, has shown he is not worthy of the trust placed in him. He has not been faithful, therefore he must cease to be a steward. His talent is taken away and given to another who has been found faithful. That latter servant is henceforth to manage also his talent. He is given more authority. He is to render greater service, because his lord has found him faithful.

Any study of the Scriptures speaking of our stewardship, of the charge entrusted to us and the gifts which we are to employ in His service, must lead us to a careful, sober self-examination. At once when hearing the parable of the talents each one should ask himself: “Have I been faithful to the Lord and to the charge committed to my care?” Our purpose in any such study is to take stock of ourselves, to repent of our lack of faithfulness and devotion to the Lord’s cause, and to implore Him to make us more faithful and more diligent in His service, that His name may be hallowed, His kingdom come and His will done among us.

E. Proper Motivation

What is the proper motivation for the faithful exercise of Christian stewardship? What should move us to serve our Lord faithfully and diligently, whether that be in our individual lives, our congregational life, or in our service as it relates to the Synod and the many congregations engaged with us in a common service? Gratitude should move us and love for Him who has made us His own and has blessed us immeasurably. He has given us new life and a new outlook on life. Our will and purpose has been made to conform to His will and purpose. We are to praise, honor and glorify Him in all that we are and do. And this is not a command forced upon us. This is a new will, an inner conviction, a spontaneous reaction to the love we have received.

Stewardship is a part of sanctification. The service into which we are called and in which we are to live and labor is a “newness of life.” Our old man, being drowned from day to day, is to die with all sins and evil lusts. Instead a new man is to come forth who is to walk before God in righteousness and purity forever. Like as Christ is raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” Serving our God in a life of faith, love and gratitude, showing forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light, that is our service and that gives us also the proper motivation for this service. In time past we were not a people, but are now the people of God: we had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. 1. Peter 2.

Let us consider the Lord’s will in and through us also on the basis of another passage, Ephesians 2, 10-14. “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Wherefore remember, that ye being in

time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace.” When we stop to realize what we were by nature—strangers, foreigners, aliens, without God and without hope in the world,—and what we are today by His grace and mercy,—fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, fitly framed together into a holy temple in the Lord—who are we that such honor and glory should be bestowed upon us! What are we that such mercy and grace should be extended to us? God’s dear child, a temple of His Holy Spirit, a trusted manager of His spiritual treasures! The love, grace, mercy, and honor bestowed on us, human words cannot adequately express. Yet it is true. That is our position, that is our calling! “Ye are the salt of the earth. Ye are the light of the world: Matthew 5, 13,14.

How can I thank Thee, Lord,
For all Thy loving kindness,
That Thou has patiently
Borne with me in my blindness?
When dead in many sins
And trespasses I lay
I kindled, holy God,
Thine anger every day.

It is Thy work alone
That I am now converted;
O’er Satan’s work in me
Thou hast Thy power asserted.
Thy mercy and Thy grace
That rise afresh each morn
Have turned my stoney heart
Into a heart new-born.

Grant that Thy Spirit’s help
To me be always given
Lest I should fall again
And lose the way to heaven;
That He may give me strength
In mine infirmity
And e’er renew my heart
To serve Thee willingly.

The Lutheran Hymnal Hymn 417, 1.2.5.

Such a God, Who has done all this for me, deserves to be glorified among men! His praises must be shown forth before all mankind! “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.” Psalm 116, 13-14.

Let us consider that but for the grace of God and His gracious election unto salvation, we would still be sitting in heathen darkness and the shadow of death. We would be worshipping wood and stone, or honoring the creature as we should honor only the Creator. We would be captivated by human wisdom, philosophy, intellect, cunning craftiness, and would be despising that which is the power of God unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. But for His gracious guidance we would be wasting our lives in crime and shame. It makes one shudder and tremble with fear, to contemplate what would be one's position but for the love and mercy of our God.

Therefore love and gratitude toward Him, and love in turn to those whom He would still reach through us, must motivate all our life and action. To serve Him, Who has humbled Himself to serve us, must be our constant goal and aim in life. "We love Him, because He first loved us." 1. John 4.19.

F. Admonition Must Remain Evangelical

What can further this growth in sanctification in us? Sanctification can be furthered only by the means of grace. All admonitions and exhortations toward more faithful exercise of our Christian stewardship, also in Synodical work, must remain evangelical. The law serving as a mirror can indeed show us our shortcomings also in this field of our life, but only the means of grace can give new life and further us in this phase of our sanctification. Oh that we would constantly keep this before our mind's eye! It is so easy for us, and we are by nature so prone to fall into a spirit of legalism. It is so easy for us to judge another and to condemn him. But are we thereby edifying him, building him up in Christ? Will we in this way further his life of service as a faithful steward of God's manifold blessings? Will we not rather make a bad situation worse?

Even when we admonish one another with regard to our Christian stewardship, using for example the parable of the talents, are we not then speaking a warning in love from the Word, pointing out ingratitude and unfaithfulness, and exhorting to gratitude and faithful service by pointing to the love and mercy of God Who has granted us the privilege of being His stewards, entrusted with His treasures? Only the means of grace can further our sanctification. All admonition toward more faithful exercise of our Christian stewardship must remain evangelical throughout. To employ any other means, such as pride, honor before men, a spirit of rivalry, seeking only to excel, does not serve God.

G. Application to our Synodical Work

How can we relate these basic truths and principles to our Synodical work and life? Here we must consider again our position over against one another. The Lord has called us into a fellowship of believers, has banded us together through a common faith and confession into a larger body of believers who recognize each other as brethren in the faith and in the service of a common Lord and Master. As members of a Synod we are not so many individuals, but we are a unit, a body, composed of many parts, all related to each other, all intended to serve one another.

Each one must then be faithful in the service which his Lord requires of him. Pastors and teachers, the called servants of the Word, must be faithful in the administration of that Word. They must rightly divide the Word of truth, giving each member the right instruction, guidance, exhortation, encouragement, rebuke, reproof, comfort, or assurance just when he needs it. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." Matthew 24, 45.46. When we consider the price Christ paid for each of the souls

entrusted to our care, we fear and tremble at the responsibility that lies upon us. Therefore we cannot do otherwise but diligently search the Word daily for instruction. We cannot but pray the Lord to send His Holy Spirit to give us the right word at the right time. We must daily implore Him to open our lips that our mouth may show forth His praise.

We will, therefore, also value every opportunity to search and study that Word in the company of others. Our conferences and conventions ought to afford us the opportunity of sharing the gifts the Lord has given to individuals. He wants them employed for the benefit of the whole body. Only an act of God or a serious conflict of duties should cause us to absent ourselves from conferences. We will value these gatherings also for mutual encouragement, for opportunities to consult with one another on difficult problems. We will value these conferences for the joy that the reports from the various fields of service afford us. We will be thankful for the new fields of service that are thus brought to our attention.

Faithful exercise of Christian Stewardship in Synodical work requires also this that we accept and perform to the best of our ability any special service which the Lord through His Church may lay upon us. This may be as an officer of a conference, a district, or the Joint Synod. It may be in the form of a conference assignment, a paper to be prepared, or a study to be made by a committee on which we are to serve as member. Here again let us remember whom we are asked to serve, whose glory to show forth in our service. Whose love for souls are we to proclaim among men? Let us think of these souls and their precious ransom. Then we will be more ready to accept assignments and to carry them out. Let us always remember that we are servants and stewards, and not lords and masters. We should always be ready to reply when the Lord calls and to say, "Here am I, send me, send me!"

On the other hand we must guard against wasting our time and strength on things that do not serve our Lord and Master, and which do not edify His Church. We may be kept ever so busy by these matters, but if by pursuing them we neglect our real work and become unfaithful in our prime calling, then we are not exercising good stewardship. Hobbies, avocations, and recreation can easily be overdone and turned into unfaithfulness and neglect of duty. Remember the many souls still waiting for the Word of life. Would you not be more faithful in seeking them out, than in indulging in time-consuming hobbies? Remember that the Lord has not spoken to the heathen telling them to seek out the preacher of the Gospel. He has commanded His preacher and witness to seek out the heathen and to go to them with the Gospel of salvation.

And this is, of course, not done in order to gain any distinction for ourselves nor glory for our Synod. We are not amassing figures or statistics but are reaching out to save souls. Our missionary calls and pastoral visits are never to be made in order to present a satisfactory report to the Mission Board, but because we are seeking those whom the Lord would bless through our ministry. Our service dare never be the minimum that will be accepted, but the maximum that we can render, the very best of which we are capable.

The very fact that these things are mentioned, calls attention to another service that we are to render in our Synodical work: we are to be our brother's and one another's keepers. This includes the laymen in the congregation as well. They also are to watch over doctrine and practice, to search the Scriptures to see whether these things preached to them are so. Yes, also our laymen are to judge doctrine on the basis of God's Word.

This requires also that we search the Word diligently. We dare not say as has so often been said: "Doctrine is a matter for pastors, professors, and theologians, but not for laymen". Doctrine is every man's concern. We ought to spend more time studying the doctrines of the Word.

Another matter that is of vital concern to all pastors and laymen alike is the duty of brotherly admonition. This service of stewardship, employing the Lord's gifts in the furtherance of His Kingdom among us in this manner, has been all too sadly neglected. And again admonition is not only the pastor's duty. It is the duty of all members including all laymen. To them also is spoken the Savior's admonition: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." Christian admonition and discipline, carried on in the spirit of love, will benefit not only the individual, but the entire Church body. Let us practice more of it. The Savior charges us with this service to His Church and to one another.

The course of least resistance and the action or inaction prompted by our flesh is to avoid burning one's fingers, to avoid stepping on some one's toes. But that line of action is not a service of love. It does not employ the gifts entrusted to us for the benefit of our neighbor, our fellow-believer, nor for the whole Church and Body of Christ. How vastly better would we serve the Lord and build His Church if we practiced Christian admonition more faithfully. Faults would be corrected, neglect would be avoided. God's honor would be furthered and His name glorified in our midst if we would help each other to correct our faults and make up our shortcomings. Here we dare not take the attitude of "Let George do it!" You and I are God's servants and stewards. He has a right to expect this service from us. Let us take stock of ourselves and pray the Lord for an extra measure of love and humility in order that we may exercise also this phase of our stewardship to His glory.

For the edifying of His Church and the extending of His Kingdom the Lord has supplied special knowledge, abilities, and aptitudes to certain of His servants. These abilities and aptitudes are to be employed in His service. There are those who have a greater aptitude to teach and to impart knowledge than do others. Some of us can acquire a great store of knowledge and of facts, but often there is lacking the ability to impart knowledge to others and to direct them in the way of wisdom, the using and applying of facts to the best advantage of all concerned. When men with the special ability to impart knowledge are found among us and the Lord of the Church calls them through His Church, for example, to teach at one of our academies, colleges, or seminaries, helping in the training of workers for the Church, we ought to recognize that the Lord is showing us that He has need of those gifts in a special field of the Gospel ministry. Brethren who know of such a man's outstanding gifts, should advise him to accept the call and to use his gifts in this special service in the Lord's Kingdom. Using God's special gifts to the greatest advantage is also good Christian stewardship. Congregations usually recognize these matters quite readily and are willing to bid their pastor or teacher God-speed in his new field of service.

There are those who possess special gifts as missionaries. They have the special ability to approach people and to gain their confidence and their attention for the message they bring. Their manner is friendly and inspires confidence. They are free from any mannerism or habit which would tend to discourage people or even to prejudice them from the outset against the caller's message. Men of such special make-up ought to be recognized as possessing outstanding qualifications for a missionary who is asked to establish a new mission, for example, in a fast growing suburb of one of our larger cities. Good stewardship would require that we carefully weigh the qualifications of the men whom we propose or nominate for consideration on the list of such a field.

The Church also has business affairs to conduct. The acquiring of properties for mission congregations, the erection of buildings at our educational institutions, the management and maintenance of the physical plants at our various colleges and seminaries, the conduct of the

financial end of our Synod's work, all these require special skills and knowledge. They require experience, good sound judgment, often the wisdom that comes only with age and long service. Such gifts the Lord has also supplied to this Church and He wants us to use them to the best advantage. Those who possess such valuable judgment, wisdom, maturity, skills, and special technical ability, ought to be ready and eager to serve the Lord and His Church when called upon to do so. Let us recognize that these special gifts are bestowed upon us and given over to our management, in order that we might use them to His glory and the welfare of precious souls. When called upon to serve, let us not refuse, but let us be faithful in the performance of our duties according to the ability which God giveth.

We have spoken a great deal about those who are called, elected, or appointed to special service in the Lord's Kingdom. By this we do not wish in any way to give the impression that these are the most important services in the Church and in our Synodical life. If that were the case, the vast majority of us would have no part in the important phases of the building of the Church. Every service, whether it attracts attention or not, which is however rendered for the glory of God and the welfare of immortal souls, is important. It is valuable, yea, even precious in the sight of the Lord.

There is another phase of Christian stewardship in which practically every believer can take part. All of us, young and old, rich and poor, men and women, have received a trust from the Lord, a portion of this world's goods according to the will of God. This we are to manage faithfully and wisely to His glory. Once we have recognized that all we have comes from the Lord and belongs still to Him, our first great lesson in faithful Christian stewardship has been learned. Then it will be easier, also, to place His gift into His service.

Nearly all the other phases of synodical work and activity in the Lord's service consist of delegated services. Many men, with varying gifts and abilities, have been called into special service in the Synod. They serve us, the members of the Synod, in doing the work which the Lord has laid upon His Church as such, but for the carrying out of which He has equipped certain men and charged them with this duty.

Ought the rest of us then not recognize that the professors at our institutions of learning are doing our work? Ought we not recognize and admit that the men in Apacheland, in our Spanish mission, in Japan, Germany, Nigeria, and Northern Rhodesia as well as in the home mission fields of our country are doing our mission work for us? They have gone to these distant places and people to carry out the command which Jesus has addressed to you and to me. They are seeking out these souls and telling them of the love of their God and Savior for them. They, having been sent by the Lord and His Church, are preaching the Word; the people are hearing; by this hearing comes faith; through faith they may confess Jesus as their Savior and have eternal life. This ought to make us rejoice! It causes our hearts to fill with gratitude to God for permitting us to take part in this glorious work of proclaiming salvation to men both near and far. Those mission fields and mission congregations are ours. Those souls that come to believe in Jesus even in darkest Africa were brought in part by your gifts and prayers.

Thus every member of Synod must speak who stops to consider what a privilege is his that he is a child and heir of God and an ambassador for Christ. He is a manager and administrator over treasures which the Lord wants used in His service. Will we use them thus? Will we place His own goods into His service for the saving of men's souls, or must He take them from us and place them in the care of some more faithful steward?

Think seriously of the truths expressed in this hymn:

We give Thee but Thine own
Whate'er the gift may be.
All that we have is Thine alone
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.

May we Thy bounties thus
As stewards true receive
And gladly, as Thou blessest us,
To Thee our first-fruits give!

Oh, hearts are bruised and dead
And homes are bare and cold,
And lambs for whom the Savior bled
Are straying from the fold.

To comfort and to bless,
To find a balm for woe,
To tend the lone and fatherless,
Is angels' work below.

The captive to release,
To God the lost to bring,
To teach the way of life and peace,
It is a Christlike thing.

And we believe Thy Word,
Though dim our faith may be:
Whate'er for Thine we do, O Lord,
We do it unto Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal Hymn 441, 1-6.

We shall let the Lord speak to us from His Holy Word and listen also to grateful expressions and vows of those who had tasted and seen that the Lord is good:

“What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people.” Psalm 116, 12-14.

“If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.” Gen. 28, 20-22.

“Lord, I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.” Gen. 32, 10.

“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before His presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with

thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations.” Psalm 100.

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” Malachi 3, 10.

“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.” 1. Cor. 16,2.

“Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” Matthew 25,40.

“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith He unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.” Matthew 9, 35-38.

My dear brethren in the Wisconsin Synod: Did you notice any mention of a minimum amount that is required in the Lord’s work? Was any quota mentioned? Was any comparison made with what others have done? Does the Savior set a minimum amount? Does he place any limits upon our gratitude and service? Do the Scriptures not rather point to the bountiful goodness and mercy of our God and do they not exhort us to give in return as the Lord has prospered us? Not quotas, not averages, nor the performance of others, but rather the boundless love and mercy of our God and Savior in accepting you and me as His children, in calling us into His service, and in making us stewards or managers of His great blessings,—this ought to determine the extent of our service and the amount of our giving. Our love and gratitude should measure our offerings. Where this is done in honest recognition of God’s grace and bounty, there will be meat in God’s house and there will be blessings poured out upon us until there will not be room enough to receive them.

May our gracious Lord and Savior lead us to acknowledge the great spiritual and material wealth which He has placed at our disposal, and may He lead us to become ever more grateful and more faithful in the exercise of our Christian stewardship in our Synodical work. Amen!