

LCMS Stewardship Newsletter Article

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

May 2019 newsletter article



STEWARDSHIP
Time ♦ Talent ♦ Treasure

Stewardship is not just about giving money to the church. It includes this, to be sure, but it is not limited to it. Stewardship involves our whole life – everything we have and everything we are.

Let us not, though, fall into the trap of thinking that because we give of ourselves in one area we can neglect giving in another. Stewardship is not stealing from Peter to pay Paul. It is not a game we play whereby we justify ourselves in not giving a tenth of our income because we have given in some other way. This is why our Lord warns:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” (Matthew 23:23)

We are given to do both – tithe of ourselves and what we have. And so it is that St. Paul makes his appeal to us:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2)

We are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. We are not to have the mind of the world, where we exchange equal weight of this for an equal weight of that, and then think that we have done what God has required.

Our whole life is given over for service in and for the Church of God. This is to be done in thanksgiving for what God in Christ has accomplished for us. This is our spiritual worship, the reasonable response to what He has done for us – not one for the other, but all in all.

But what does this look like? St. Paul never lays down a general principle without also giving us some practical application of what shape that principle is to take concretely. He gives the general principle that our bodies are to be living sacrifices to God, and, after admonishing those who have been given particular gifts of grace to serve the church, St. Paul then speaks generally of what is expected of all. He says:

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”
(Romans 12:9-13)

This is what it looks like to present your bodies as living sacrifices. This is how we live out the grace of God here in time.

Let us then heed the apostle’s teaching. Let us present our bodies – everything that we have and everything that we are – as living sacrifices to God, our reasonable response to what God in Christ Jesus accomplished for us by His death and resurrection.

Through this we have forgiveness of sins, a new life in Christ, and eternal salvation. And through this worship, the grace of God is made manifest in His saints – for the church and the world.

ST. JAMES ENROLLMENT – Enrollment for the 2019-2020 school year has begun. Share this great opportunity with everyone you know. I would love the opportunity to talk with families about our school and how they can become a St. James Eagle! Current St. James families, please return your Current Student Enrollment Form to the school office. Thank you if you have already done so. Principal Landskroener



SCHOOL ACCREDITATION – St. James Lutheran School is in the process of becoming accredited through the National Lutheran School Accreditation. We are currently in a self-study to evaluate the actual conditions that are related to school quality which are evaluated and measured in seven specific areas. This is important for our school and we solicit your prayers and help in completing this process. Please talk to Principal Landskroener for ways you can become involved. Thank you!

LIFE IS SWEET 5K – St. James is hosting a *Life is Sweet 5K Run/Walk* on Saturday, June 29th at 8:00 am. We are looking sponsors and runners/walkers to support this activity along with volunteers to help on race day. Additional information will be upcoming. Call the school office with any questions you may have.

BOXTOPS AND UPC LABELS – Please continue to save General Mills Box Tops, Hy-Vee UPCs and Tyson A+ labels throughout the school year. They help support our school library! Thank you!

ST. JAMES BLOCK PARTY to kick off Dogwood weekend in Quincy will be Friday, May 3rd from 5:30-8 pm. Good food, music and fellowship is on the menu! Please come and joins us for the ribbon cutting at 6:00 pm and have a fun evening!

SCIENCE/SOCIAL STUDIES AND BOOK FAIR is Wednesday, May 8th from 5 – 6:30 pm. Everyone is invited to attend and see the wonderful projects our students have completed.

PANERA – The final fundraiser for the 7th/8th grade Chicago trip will be Wednesday, May 8th from 4-8 pm. Please plan to attend. Thank you for supporting our students!.

EAGLE VISION

EVERYONE deserves our respect

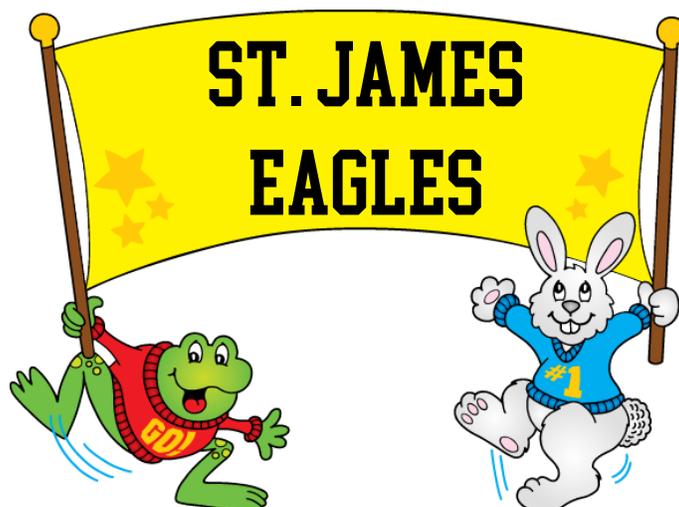
ACT with kindness

GOD'S LOVE is our greatest strength

LOVE one another

EVERY DAY live for Jesus

SHOW OTHERS we are Christian



Caregiving = Burden-Bearing

By Marie K. MacPherson (From Lutherans for Life- Life Date magazine)

Recently, I heard a speaker state that loved ones are *never* burdens. A pro-life champion, I truly believe he meant well, but I have to disagree: caring for those in our midst is *often* a burden. Whether they are your children, parents, church or community members, or some combination of each, it is easy to feel weighed down by numerous responsibilities to those in our charge. Providing food, shelter, transportation, finance, and medical support to our loved ones, short- or long-term, frequently feels like an overwhelming burden!

To be a “burden-bearer,” known in the vernacular as a caregiver, can be a difficult vocation, but the word “burden” in Greek (*baros*) carries the connotation of importance. From eternity, the Lord has planned that *you* would care for another of His children (Ephesians 2:10)! Like a heavy knapsack filled with necessities for an overnight hiking trip, the earthly burden of caring for a loved one is weighty but can contain valuable spiritual lessons, such as patience, gentleness, and selflessness. Caregiving is not only how God serves as a channel of His blessings to others, it is how He shapes *you* into the new creation He means for you to be (Philippians 1:6). Through the “refining fire” of burden-bearing, your faith is tested to honor your Savior, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:7, Romans 8:29).

Like the labor force employed to bear great physical burdens in building the magnificent Temple of Solomon, bearing the burdens of others may prove fraught with struggle. Yet, it contributes to a beautiful ‘bigger picture’ as we share in the sufferings of Christ (1 Kings 5:14-16, 1 Peter 4:12-13). Jesus promises that His disciples will be faced with trials and burdens but adds that He has already overcome those difficulties, inviting us to trade our heavy burdens for His rest (John 16:33, Matthew 11:28). Saint Paul urges New Testament Christians to “**[b]ear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ**” (Galatians 6:2). We serve others not to gain “points” with God or earn our own salvation (as if we ever could!) but rather in humble thanksgiving to Christ and in sanctified living toward our neighbor.

To feel burdened and weighed down with the care of another soul is not in itself a sin. Old Testament leaders Moses and Solomon felt burdened by their vocations (Numbers 11:11-15, Ecclesiastes 1:12-14). Even several books of the minor prophets begin by acknowledging their oracles as “burdens” from the Lord (Nahum, Habakkuk, Malachi – NKJV). However, we can quickly turn selfish at the prospect of the burden of caring for loved ones. We may grumble about sacrifices such as lost time, money, or sleep. Scripture is clear that we should obey God’s commandments and show love to others unselfishly (John 15:12, 1 John 5:2-4), but it even goes so far as to command us to *rejoice* as we pass through trials (James 1:2). Surely, it is easy to see our own depravity when it comes to bearing others’ burdens unselfishly.

Thank God, though, that we have Christ: not only as an example of altruistic giving as He bears our burdens, but also as the actual payment for the burden of our sins as caregivers. On the cross, Christ washed away each and every sin you commit while burden-bearing for others. Heaven is yours, regardless of your wicked thoughts, words, and actions in your vocation. He showers you with this forgiveness as your pastor pronounces it in the Divine Service, as you taste His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, as you remember your Baptism, and as you read His Word. Now forgiven, God graciously gives you the tools of prayer, thanksgiving, and community to point you to your true Strength (Deuteronomy 1:11-13, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Psalm 55:22).

Whether you struggle with impatience, weariness, or selfishness as a “burden-bearer,” God forgives you. He holds you in His almighty hands and uses *you* to be a blessing to those in your midst. On earth, there will be no shortage of burdens to bear as we care for those in need. But one day, these burdens will be lifted from our shoulders in Heaven, where the Lord will see us through the lens of Christ’s perfect sacrifice and will say, “**Well done, good and faithful servant! ... Enter into the joy of your master**” (Matthew 25:21). Rest in His unfailing love.

Mrs. Marie K. MacPherson lives in Mankato, Minnesota, with her husband, Ryan, and their six children whom she homeschools. She is author of The Story of Baby Shalom and Meditations on the Vocation of Motherhood (2018), editor of Mothering Many: Sanity-Saving Strategies from Moms of Four or More (2016), and a certified classical Lutheran educator from the Consortium of Classical Lutheran Educators (CCLE).

Review of The Movie, Unplanned

By Michael W. Salemink, Executive director of Lutherans For Life

Unplanned hit theaters a few weeks ago. It opened strong—the fifth-most popular movie that weekend. Life-affirming individuals, congregations, and groups have been filling the seats and even buying out entire showings. The picture's buzz is flooding social media. Inquiring Lutheran minds want to know: should we see it?

It's based on a bestselling autobiographical book of the same name. *Unplanned* tells the story of Abby Johnson. She volunteered at a Planned Parenthood in Texas during college and then they made her an employee. Soon she ascended to the position of clinic director—the youngest one in PP's history (despite the objections of her parents and her husband). Though she grew up Christian, she underwent two abortions of her own. After encountering "40 Days for Life" demonstrators and participating directly in an abortion procedure, Abby left the industry and the cause. She founded a ministry called "And Then There Were None," which assists abortion workers to abandon the business.

My wife and I enjoyed a private invitation to preview *Unplanned* before its release. (One of the producers also addressed the audience!) I had been looking forward to the movie, as I have read the book and met Abby in person. Her experiences powerfully illustrate the redemption that Jesus brings about even in lives broken by abortion. She testifies to the hope and the joy that the sanctity of life delivers regardless of age, appearance, or ability. And LFL appreciates the Gospel motivation with which her organization operates.

The film is poignant. With unflinching accuracy it captures the high stakes in life issues, accurately portraying that we're dealing with much more than mere political controversies or personal choices. The plot and the characters powerfully depict that real hearts and real hurts are involved, whatever a person's perspectives. Unlike most other popular media, it portrays the compassion with which life-affirming persons (especially our gentle, sidewalk-counseling brothers and sisters) courageously enter the sufferings of their neighbors, even the neighbors who may resent them. It proclaims the irreplaceable blessings that family, faith, and prayer provide in the valley of death's shadow. And it's quite timely, keeping the magnitude of surprise pregnancy and unborn children in the public's consciousness at a moment when the profile of life issues has perhaps never been higher.

However, *Unplanned* applies a little heavier hand than LFL prefers. Its central message emphasizes how bad abortions and the Planned Parenthood corporation are. The MPAA famously assigned the picture an R rating, and this is quite appropriate. Two scenes in particular that occur very near the beginning are as graphic as any horror movie. One shows a computer-recreated ultrasound of a little one being vacuum-aspirated limb by limb into tubes and canisters. The other follows the main character through her gory-and-traumatic chemical-abortion process, and the actress plays them with gut-wrenching authenticity. I want my own sixteen-year-old son to have another year of maturity and security before viewing them.

Most problematically, this show implies the Gospel more than it announces it. In what could be considered the film's central scene (theologically, at least), Abby asks, "How can God ever forgive me?" The actor portraying her husband responds, "He's God. He's merciful." It conspicuously misses the golden opportunity to declare Jesus Christ, who has come, loved, served, died, and risen to deliver unconditional grace and healing in Word and Church. The story does depict a conversion from pro-choice to pro-life, but it doesn't really express the redemption I anticipated—from proud and desperate sinner to forgiven child of God and beloved disciple of Jesus, and from what we intend for evil to what He utilizes for good.

Take these reflections as one person's opinion. Others at LFL have seen the movie and would highly recommend it as a caring and compassionate message, showing the horror and sinfulness of abortion but also pointing people to God. Feel free to see the film yourself, form your own impressions, and share them with us. (Or, for a more cheerful aftertaste that communicates both forceful Law and full-strength Gospel, check out *Bella* or *October Baby*.) It seems to me that if *Unplanned* changes anyone's mind about abortion, it will do so because of its attention to the awfulness of it. But we can gratefully take advantage of the opportunity to proclaim and perform how God creates, redeems, and calls every member of our race to be His own precious treasure forever.

To that end, we offer you an *Unplanned* discussion guide. One of our LCMS District Life Coordinators, Rev. Dr. Craig Meissner, prepared it for us to distribute and use. It appropriately completes the conversation that the movie begins. And remember our Word of Hope crisis care and healing hotline ministry (888-21STORY or 888-217-8679; www.word-of-hope.org). Deaconess Chrissie Gillet will answer, listen, and share God's love and grace in the distinctively Lutheran spirit with every caller for whom viewing the movie triggers grief and guilt. And thank you so much for making this mission possible!