



Grace-Full Living



*Many women are motivated to act by a fairly simple type of value:
a hope to leave the world better than they found it.
This idea is sometimes described as giving back based on a
woman's blessings, particularly to help those who have less,
or as a sense of stewardship for God's creation. ...
making choices that create a better world is integral to their faith.*

Amy Caiazza, *The Ties That Bind: Women's Public Vision
for Politics, Religion, and Civil Society*,
Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2005.

Did you know?

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You may not think of yourself as a stewardship leader, but we all have the capacity to model financial wellness. This section will help you become a stewardship model.

Introduction

Women, money and faith — what would happen if these were brought together?

Helen LaKelly Hunt, founder of the Sister Fund

We women are guided by common values

as we work together with a shared vision of acting boldly on our faith. It is our ability to give back and our desire for transformation that give us the hope that we are leaving the world better than we found it.

With this resource, Women of the ELCA continues to focus on women's health in all its many facets. If we wish to look at our complete and total health holistically, doesn't it make sense to include our financial health in that picture? When we consider our health in mind, body, and spirit, do we ponder how giving is integral to our wellbeing?

Our giving demonstrates our confidence in the ministry of the church, and that generosity contributes to a more balanced life. The nature and motivations of our giving are integral to our faith because they connect us with one another and with God's means of grace in order that we may truly embrace the notion of *grace-full living*.

How to Use This Resource

This resource is divided into three parts. It can be used in its entirety all at once, or you can divide it up over a longer period of time. For example, you may prefer to have three separate sessions spread over three evenings, or you might hold one mini-retreat, allowing approximately 60 minutes per section. This resource can be used in a congregational setting, as a conference event, or as a workshop during a synodical convention. The format accommodates groups of any number. We hope that you will feel free to tailor it to your needs.

Money Memoir

A BIBLICAL REFLECTION

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Romans 12:9–13

When we hear scripture passages, they often call up memories of people and events in our lives, or other things from our past.

Reading this passage from Romans, we may be reminded of a grandmother handing out food to men and women traveling along the old railroad tracks behind the farm fields. We may remember being taught to carry coins in a handkerchief for the Sunday school offering, or gathering clothes and food to donate to the church rummage sale and pantry.

The stewardship and hospitality shown by our family and friends were truly extensions of their faith and ultimately of our own. And for many of us, those memories from decades ago may still be fresh in our minds today.

Why? Our feelings today about the role of money and the other valuable resources in our lives are intimately connected to what we were taught or shown in the past by our parents, families, partners, and friends. Looking back can help us determine how we have come to

certain conclusions about our money and how that relates to our relationship with God.

Helen LaKelly Hunt writes that we must make that connection with our own history and tradition in order to move forward: “We [should] reflect and draw on the faith traditions of our parents and grandparents. When we sever ourselves from our tradition, we cut ourselves off from what is vital and living in our souls. ... To ignore our tradition is to reject the prayers and wishes that our mothers and grandmothers held in their hearts for us” (*Faith and Feminism: A Holy Alliance*, Atria Books, 2004).

We can weave an important connection between our individual stories as women of faith and those of the community as a whole. Looking back at our history and the scriptural texts that guide us can give us better insight into the current needs of our society and how our faith-filled acts of stewardship can help solve them.

Small Group Discussion

This exercise, which helps you create an autobiography of your history with stewardship, has been used throughout the ELCA. It can be very helpful to you in discerning why you have come to certain conclusions about money and stewardship in your life today. Please disclose only what you feel comfortable sharing with others.

Are you comfortable discussing money? Have you ever discussed your feelings about money with others?

Describe an early experience with money. Did it involve church? Something else?

What was your first paying job? Did you spend the money you earned? Save it?

What about society's relationship with money? Do you talk about the state of the economy and your place in the greater economy with your spouse or children?

Did your family openly discuss issues of family finances? Why or why not?

How do you and your unit demonstrate stewardship on behalf of Women of the ELCA?

When you were a child, how did your family express generosity? How do you and your family express generosity today?

What encourages you to give?

Are your current family finances openly discussed?

What, if anything, hinders your giving?

Money Matters

A BIBLICAL REFLECTION

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

Money matters ... it's a matter of faith! Our spiritual calling affects how we decide to use what we have, and the effects of our faith-filled generosity can be seen in our communities of faith.

Paul stresses to us that we can be transformed, and that from that transformation, we can do good in our church, society, and world. The will of God most certainly means that we are called as people of faith to take care of one another and to live in peace with one another.

The transformation Paul mentions is a powerful idea. Through our giving, we have the capacity not only to

change as individuals but to bring about great change around us. And when we accept our responsibility to do good in society, we find that we have a multitude of options for where, how, and with what resources this renewal can take place.

We all make decisions, large and small, about how and where to direct our financial resources. As women, we have particular motivations that stand behind these decisions. We ask ourselves: What matters to me? How can I make a difference?

Small Group Discussion

We are a part of a global church and live in a global economy. Our stewardship choices can be far-reaching. It's important to discuss the whys and hows of our giving.

In 2005, the Internal Revenue Service reported that 3.4 million, or 46.3%, of the nation's top wealth holders were women. These women have a combined net worth of \$6.291 trillion. Moreover, because women live longer than men, it is women who will have the responsibility for passing on this wealth to the next generation. Research conducted by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University indicates that single women are significantly more likely than single men to make a philanthropic gift. The center's research further indicates that women's drive to give influences the philanthropic habits of their partners (see www.philanthropy.iupui.edu).

What do women do with their financial resources, and why do they do what they do? The Women's Philanthropy Institute at Indiana University conducted some research to discover the key motivations behind women's giving. Six words, all beginning with the letter C, describe the primary triggers of women's desire to give. Without turning the page, what do you think are these key words?

C _____

C _____

C _____

C _____

C _____

C _____

The Six C's: Women's Motivations for Giving

Create

Women give to create solutions to problems.

What solutions have been created through your giving?

Commit

Women commit to organizations and institutions whose vision they share and often to organizations for which they have volunteered.

When was the first time you financially supported Women of the ELCA? What was your initial motivation?

Change

Women give to make a difference.

How have you made a difference? How would you like to make a difference?

Collaborate

Women prefer to work with others as part of a larger effort.

Do you feel you are a part of a larger effort when giving to Women of the ELCA? How?

Connect

Women prefer to see the human face of their gifts.

Does a connection to the recipients encourage you to give? Why?

Celebrate

Women celebrate their accomplishments, have fun together, and enjoy the deeper meaning and satisfaction of their philanthropy.

Do you celebrate your giving? How?

The Six C's of Giving was created by Sondra Shaw-Hardy & Martha Taylor of the Women's Philanthropy Institute at The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University.

Money Model

A BIBLICAL REFLECTION

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Romans 12:4-8

In grace-full living we are changed by God’s grace, and that same grace makes our gifts more valuable to others. The biblical reflection for this section asks us to thoughtfully consider our place in the church so that we may model the gifts and skills we have been given. Perhaps in your own grace-full living, you have not thought of yourself as “the giver” as described in this scriptural passage. Yet we all show generosity toward others not only in how we use our financial resources, but also in how we spend the resources of our time and energy. Such generosity is truly a wonderful expression of God’s grace.

So how can we all model such generosity for others? It is not only what we give but the emotion behind our giving. Giving willingly and with the optimism that our gifts will be used toward God’s work is how we model that grace-full generosity. Giving in celebration rather than in competition with others leads to the fullest support of important opportunities and ministries, as we are all one in the body of Christ. Paul’s letter asks us, the many members of one body, to consider our individual gifts. Do you see yourself as “the giver”? How so? Our genuine modeling of financial wellness to others comes when we fully embrace “the giver” in ourselves.

Small Group Discussion

Modeling Financial Wellness

A Definition: A financially healthy person lives a value-rooted financial life that is sustainable for self, family, community, and globe. The values that guide her decisions are intentional, chosen, and discernable in the life she lives.

What’s working well in your financial life?

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being low and 5 being high:
How confident do you feel about the state of your financial health?

How content?

What has been your biggest challenge or challenges?

How joyful?

Now survey your group. What were the results?

Markers of Financial Wellness

In your small group, review each marker of financial wellness and circle yes or no as indicated. Discuss your responses and reactions with your group.

A basic level of financial literacy means:

- I understand the financial planning cycle, budgeting, credit, how benefits work (like health and retirement benefits), saving and investing, and insurance
and
- I have read something about personal finance in the last three months.

I have a basic level of financial literacy. **Yes / No**

Ongoing attention to and awareness of my financial life means:

- I know where I currently stand financially (net worth, cash flow, debt)
and
- I have a list of financial goals.

I pay attention to and am aware of my financial life.
Yes / No

Effective sharing of financial decisions with significant others means:

- My financial partner and I agree on the shape of our financial life together
and
- My financial partner and I meet regularly to make financial decisions.

I effectively share financial decisions with significant others. **Yes / No**

Having spending, saving, and giving goals that influence/govern my financial behavior means:

- I have a budget or spending plan that I follow
and
- I make decisions ahead of time about how much I will save and give.

I have spending, saving, and giving goals that influence my financial behavior. **Yes / No**

Balancing my financial activity among short-term, mid-term, and long-term needs means:

- I have savings earmarked for emergencies
and
- I am saving for retirement.

I balance my short-, mid-, and long-term needs.
Yes / No

Moderating risk through insurance, savings, and manageable debt means:

- I know what the appropriate amounts of life, property, and liability insurance are for me, and have purchased policies
and
- My household asset-to-debt ratio is .36 or less.

I moderate my risk through insurance, savings, and manageable debt. **Yes / No**

Suitable employment, housing, and transportation means:

- My employment meets my vocational, financial, and emotional needs
and
- My housing is safe and sustainable
and
- My means of transportation balance my needs with the common good.

My current employment, housing, and transportation are suitable and satisfactory. **Yes / No**

Having a documented and regularly reviewed estate plan means:

- I have a will or other legally appropriate way of distributing my assets at my death
and
- My beneficiary forms are up to date.

I have documented and periodically review my estate plan. **Yes / No**

Being resilient in the face of unforeseen circumstances means:

- I have worked through emergency scenarios (job loss, death of financial partner, health crisis, natural disaster, etc.) and know what my contingency plans are
and
- I could live on less than I currently do.

I am prepared for unforeseen circumstances. **Yes / No**

Showing generosity of all kinds means:

- I make decisions about giving time and money when I'm budgeting my life, as opposed to giving what is left over
and
- I enjoy giving time and money.

I show generosity of all kinds. **Yes / No**

Follow-up

After going over these wellness markers, do you feel that you are living a financially well life? In what ways could your life be healthier?

Your plan to be a financially well woman: Write at least one thing you can do in the next month to improve your financial wellness.

Final Thoughts

Part of our purpose as women of faith is to connect with one another in our stewardship. In doing so, we discern the will of God. We all have the ability to be God's voice to the faith community, connecting with others and giving encouragement to be good stewards. It is truly part of our calling as women of faith to teach others what we know. If you were asked to offer advice about stewardship and finances to other women, what would you tell them? What do you wish someone had told you?

As women, we are unique in our capacity to shape the world around us because of what we were taught about stewardship and our motivations for it. We are in a unique position to be sound role models of generosity and stewardship. Grace-full living means that we can all benefit from our acting on our ability to identify our resources and opportunities for stewardship and service. We have a common vision as women of faith to seek renewal and transformation, not just for ourselves but for the greater community.

By bringing together ideas about interconnectedness, compassion, stewardship, and dignity, the public vision of women ... recognizes that the individual welfare, worth, and dignity of each of us affect us all.

Because we are connected, and because our lives are embedded in relationships with each other and our broader communities, we all benefit from the well-being of others.

Amy Caiazza, *The Ties That Bind: Women's Public Vision for Politics, Religion, and Civil Society*,
Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2005.