

Three last-minute stewardship ideas for 2023

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Hold a “Harvest of Blessings Sunday 2023”

It’s always a good idea to have one Sunday in the fall to remember the harvest – the season when we gather the produce from the farms, fields and orchards. We remember God’s providence for us, and how the seasons of the year provide us with God’s blessings. For liturgies and celebrations, type “harvest liturgy” into a search engine and you will find prayers, suggested hymns and Scripture readings.

Make the “Harvest of Blessings Sunday” especially important by including a component on financial stewardship – symbolically gathering in the “harvest” from the congregation in the form of estimate-of-giving or pledge cards.

To run the event:

- ♦ Select an appropriate Sunday.
- ♦ Plan and publicize the event in your congregation newsletter, website and Facebook page. Invite people to reflect on the “Harvest of Blessings” that God gives them in their lives. Remind them of the really important gifts from God – family, friends, love, church community, health, wellbeing, etc.
- ♦ Identify in advance congregational members who have a good “stewardship story” to tell. Why do they give cheerfully, generously, faithfully, etc. Line up one of these members up every Sunday to share their story with the congregation at some point in the service, such as before the service begins or before the offering.
- ♦ For two weeks running up to the event, include a flyer in the Sunday bulletin reminding folks of the event.
- ♦ On Harvest of Blessings Sunday, include envelopes and pledge cards in the Sunday bulletin.
- ♦ For at least one of the day’s Scripture, select a passage that speaks of God’s bounty. Invite the pastor to preach a harvest sermon that uses themes of financial stewardship. We enjoy the harvest of God’s blessings in our lives. In return we give from our harvest.
- ♦ Collect the pledge cards with the offering.
- ♦ Be sure to thank everybody in the following Sundays and in the newsletter. If appropriate, list the totals of money pledged.

VARIATION: Rather than simply collect and count the pledges, send the cards back to the members at a later church date. Invite those present to seal the envelopes and write their names and addresses on the front. Mail the cards back to the members as a reminder at some significant point in the church year, such as Epiphany Sunday, Easter Sunday, Feast of the Pentecost or Christ the King Sunday.

Thanksgiving Sunday – Nov. 26, 2023

Thankfulness is a key idea in stewardship. We give because we are thankful to God for what God has given us. It's a gratitude response.

This year, designate Nov. 26 as Thanksgiving Sunday and dedicate the service to thanking God for all that God has given us. Use the Sundays leading up to Nov. 26 to encourage people to focus on what they are grateful for. Tell them in advance that on Nov. 26 they are going to be invited to respond by pledging or providing an estimate of giving card.

How it works:

- ♦ Announce Thanksgiving Sunday in your congregation's. Put the information on your congregation's website and Facebook page as well.
- ♦ In early November, mail to all congregants pledge cards and information about the church finances. Invite them to bring the cards to church on Nov. 26.
- ♦ At some time at worship during the Sundays leading up to the event – perhaps at announcements, or maybe before the offering – invite the congregation to say what they are thankful for that day. Provide a card or piece of paper in the bulletin on which people can write a “Thank You” list for God. They can put the list in the offering plate.
- ♦ Create a “Thank You Board” in some prominent place in church, such as the narthex, sanctuary or main room of the parish hall, by hanging posterboard or a big sheet of rolled paper. In the Sundays leading up to Thanksgiving Sunday Invite the congregation to write down what they are thankful for.
- ♦ Invite your members who are on Facebook to post every day what they are thankful for. Get them thinking about gratitude and the abundance of God's blessings in their lives.
- ♦ On Thanksgiving Sunday, include envelopes and pledge cards in the Narthex or other prominent place for those who may have left theirs at home or who didn't get them.
- ♦ For at least one of the day's Scripture, select a passage that speaks of thanksgiving for all God gives us. Invite the pastor to preach a thanksgiving sermon that uses themes of financial stewardship.
- ♦ Collect the pledge cards with the offering.
- ♦ Be sure to thank everybody in the following Sundays and in the newsletter. If appropriate, list the totals of money pledged.

VARIATION: Rather than simply collect and count the pledges, send the cards back to the members at a later date. Invite those present to seal the envelopes and write their names and addresses on the front. Mail the cards back to the members as a reminder at some significant point in the church year, such as Epiphany Sunday, Easter Sunday, Feast of the Pentecost or Christ the King Sunday.

Advent-to-Christmas Stewardship Plan, 2023

OK, so you don't have time to plan for the fall, then why not make your stewardship time from Advent to Christmas, or to Epiphany. Invite people to fill out "estimate of giving" or "pledge" cards at a designated service -- Christmas Eve would be a good one, since it is often the best-attended service of the year. Or, how about the first Sunday in Christmas?

How it works:

- ♦ Announce your emphasis in your November newsletter, which can be posted on your congregation website, stating your congregation's intention to hold a stewardship emphasis during Advent, which begins Dec. 3. Be sure to tell everyone when the drive ends – which day you have designated – and how the pledge cards or estimates of giving will be collected. Will you put them in the offering plate, or have a special basket next to the Creche (if you have one) or Advent wreath, so that people may leave their gifts at the baby Jesus' feet.
- ♦ Invite your members to use the time of Advent to reflect on the gifts that God has given them in family, health, security, love, church, etc. The usual "gift-buying frenzy" that attends the run-up to Christmas may provide ample contrast for people to meditate on the gifts from God.
- ♦ Continue with the theme with another article in the December newsletter.
- ♦ Identify in advance congregational members who have a good "stewardship story" to tell. Why do they give cheerfully, generously, faithfully, etc. Line up one of these members up every Sunday to share their story with the congregation at some point in the service, such as before the service begins or before the offering.
- ♦ Prepare bulletin inserts for each of the four Sundays in of Advent, each with a scripture reading from the week and providing a stewardship reflection on the text or the theme of the week. Write or adapt the prayers you say as you light the Advent wreath candles to reflect the stewardship emphasis.
 - Week 1: Hope
 - Week 2: Love,
 - Week 3: Joy.
 - Week 4: Peace
- ♦ On the designated day for your gathering, distribute cards and envelopes. Invite members to fill them out and either place them in the offering plate or leave them in the special basket near the crèche or Advent wreath.
- ♦ Be sure to thank everybody in the following Sundays and in the newsletter. If appropriate, list the totals of money pledged.

VARIATION: Rather than simply collect and count the pledges, send the cards back to the members at a later date. Invite those present to seal the envelopes and write their names and addresses on the front. Mail the cards back to the members as a reminder at some significant point in the church year, such as Epiphany Sunday, Easter Sunday, Feast of the Pentecost or Christ the King Sunday.