

South Carolina Synod Video “Like Good Stewards”

I. Introduction

We are blessed by the partnership we share with you and our brothers and sisters across the synod as, together, we live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in our various locations. This devotion is a gift from the South Carolina Synod Office of the Bishop. We hope each of our congregational councils will take time at your February and/or March and April Council meeting to share in this devotion together. You are also invited to share any part or all of this video and devotions with any groups within your congregation.

We are very interested in what our congregations are experiencing and would like to know how we can pray for or support the ministry of your congregation. Please send us your specific prayer requests and feedback from your devotion time using the contact information provided. May God bless all that we do together in the name of Jesus.

“Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” (I Peter 4:10) This verse from I Peter invites us to consider the gifts we receive from God and the ways we steward our gifts to serve and support one another. This year the Synod Mission Video stories seek to focus our attention on the pathways to leadership, the supportive work of Lutheran Disaster Response in the Carolinas and ways congregational partnerships are strengthening ministry in community. You may use this video in a variety of ways, but I encourage you to take the stories one at a time and sit with them to consider the gifts that make this ministry possible. I also encourage you to share with one another how the story inspires you, and what questions it leads you to ponder about your own context and ministry.

Story #1 - Like good stewards... pathways to leadership

(Images and stories: through congregations, Lutheran Church Youth, Campus Ministries, Candidacy Committees and Seminary Education)

To some God gives the ability to teach, the gift of faith, or the gift of inspired preaching. God gives these gifts to strengthen the Christian community. We recognize Jesus, the life-giving Word of God as our greatest gift, and we know that in Holy Baptism we are called to the stewardship of the gospel.

Some are set apart for the gospel ministry. We call them pastors, ministers of Word and Sacrament and we call them, deacons, ministers of Word and Service.

My own call to Word and Sacrament ministry came through the support and encouragement from my home congregation where I was active in youth ministry, from Campus Ministry connections and from work as a Youth Staffer for the Lutheran Church in America and the Southeastern Synod. I always find it interesting to hear the call stories from our Deacons and Pastors. I hope you will listen for those stories too.

Have you ever wondered how people become pastors and deacons? God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, calls in many and various ways and there is no one-way God calls, but in the experience of the church, we have observed some dynamic pathways to leadership and rostered ministry.

At the end of this segment, ask your Rostered Minister to share their call story. Who helped them hear the call? Who supported them in their discernment? Then share with one another how you could support and encourage a person in the Candidacy process? How does your congregation, or how could your congregation support Youth and College Students? Pray together for the whole church to raise up faithful leaders. Pray for the youth and young adults in our communities and for the ministries that support and encourage them in their faith and life. Pray for all Candidates and for the South Carolina Candidacy Committee. Pray for your Pastor and Deacon, and for all leaders of the church.

Story #2 - Like good stewards....Lutheran Disaster Response.

(Images and stories from The Rev. Ray and The Rev. Ruth Sipes)

In 1989, just four days after I was ordained, Hurricane Hugo hit the Charleston area and carved a path of destruction through SC and NC leaving images and stories of survival in the hearts and on the minds of many of us even until today. Just four days after that hurricane passed the ELCA sent in Lutheran Disaster Response leaders to give those of us serving in the low country support and guidance. The work of recovery took years and LDR was with us through it all. Fellow Lutherans came from all over the country to lend a hand and help with cleanup efforts. I learned so much about being the church together that year, and the experience of disaster recovery has had an impact on my life and my ministry ever since.

We often love God best by sharing love and serving our neighbor. This is especially true for people who are in crisis and undergoing trauma in their lives. Lutheran Disaster Response gives congregations and the synod ways to respond to persons who are suffering a disaster. Because of your Mission Support, Lutheran Disaster Response is enabled to direct 100% of each dollar given to disaster victims.

At the end of this segment, share with one another an experience you have had when someone came to assist you in a time of crisis, or a time when you felt called to reach out and help another in need. Does your congregation have a plan in case of a disaster? Are you aware of the resources that are being offered by Pastors Sipe such as the Book Study, "A Ready Hope," or Preparedness mini-grants for congregations, and opportunities to participate in recovery efforts in the Carolinas? Take a moment to share anything you heard in this story from Pastor Ruth Ann or Pastor Ray that intrigues you and makes you want to learn more. Then pray for all those who are affected by natural disasters and for those who come to assist in recovery efforts.

Story #3 - Like good stewards.... Partnerships in Congregations and Communities

(Images and story of Christ Community, North Charleston and St. Michael, Moncks Corner, outreach to veterans in providing housing and partnership with South Carolina Lutheran Men in Mission)

Partnerships are one way the church works together. Congregations are in partnership with the Synod and the Churchwide Organization as well as with local groups and organizations. Other partnerships are with one congregation yoking themselves together to another congregation to do ministry.

Since being elected bishop I have been walking with several congregational councils in exploring and forming partnerships for mission and ministry. It is challenging for some to see the opportunity in these partnerships at first, but I am convinced that we are stronger together and when our partnerships focus on mission we have every opportunity to soar.

Partnerships are one way to grow in service to others and in some cases, a way to grow in numbers. But it is not about numbers only, it's a step toward strength and vitality. The gifts of the people are shared, each receives energy from the other and the community is strengthened for God's mission in the places where the congregations serve.

At the end of this segment, share with one another a time when someone given you a gift of grace? In what ways does your congregation express gratitude for God's grace? What inspires you in this story from the partnership in North Charleston and Moncks Corner, and what might you like to know more about? Pray together for the partnerships you already share in your community, and for God to show you the places that need your partnership now. Pray for our work together in Conferences and across the Synod and for ways we can partner more closely with one another in the name of Jesus.

Finally, After showing the whole video series ask the following questions:

- *Which of these stories inspires you enough that you would want to share it with others?*
- *In the video Bishop Virginia Aebischer talked about several ways a congregation can take a step toward tithing or increasing their Mission Support? Please take the time to share with one another which of these ways applies best to your context at this time.*
 - (A) *Give 10% of Regular Giving by Members or*
 - (B) *Taking a step toward tithing by adding 10% to the dollars given last year.*

Thank you...

In 2024 we celebrate the 200th Anniversary of the formation of the South Carolina Synod. We have been blessed by those who served and shared and formed us, and we are blessed to have the opportunity to continue together today in this Mission, in Jesus' name. Thank You for your partnership with us in the Mission and Ministry of the South Carolina Synod and for your Mission Support dollars that makes what we do possible.

Last year 63 of our congregations were growing in their generosity to the Synod. I hope you will be among those who are growing in 2024. We are grateful to each of you for your faithful deliberation about what Mission Support you can share for our work together. If you are not able to give a tithe of your offerings, we pray you will consider increasing your Support by 10% of what you gave last year.

Together we are called to be good stewards of God's grace and gifts. Thank you for your faithful Stewardship.

+Bishop Ginny

II. Technical Information

Preparation: Test the video link or flash drive well in advance of your meeting. Secure a laptop computer to show the video. Make sure sound, projector or TV are working well in advance. The video is available on YouTube:

English: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBp_MxmBhvE

Spanish (subtitles): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_hRzEIhXXQ

III. Prayer Requests

Please have one person summarize your requests for prayer and support.

What are some of the prayer requests that the bishop and the synod staff can be praying for your congregation?

What are some of the ways the SC Synod can support the ministry of your congregation this year?

Please email this to:

Bishop Virginia S. Aebischer
Email: ginny@scsynod.com

or

Rev. Ozzie Herlong, Director for Stewardship
Email: ovherlong@aol.com