

Site Profile: Peace Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Wash.

Stewardship

Part of the Vibrant Congregations Project, a Lilly Foundation grant administered by Luther Seminary

A. Quick Facts

Congregation Name:	Peace Lutheran Church
Location:	Hilltop community of Tacoma, Wash.
Denomination:	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)
Size:	About 130 worshippers each Sunday

B. Context

Peace has been a vital part of Tacoma for over 100 years with a long history of generous and faithful service to the community in which we are planted. Established by German immigrants from the Volga River area in Kolb, Russia, this congregation has witnessed many changing dynamics and challenges of this now diverse (ethnic, age, gender, education, economics, experiences) inner city neighborhood. Poverty, homelessness, gangs and drugs, educational inequities, white flight and families in transition have all impacted our community and our mission and ministry in this place. Many of our members come from other than Lutheran background or with no prior or with painful church experiences. We embrace the beauty and challenge of this wonderful diversity.

C. Current Practices

Current Practice #1: Annual Fall Stewardship Focus



Our annual Fall Stewardship focus began 5 years ago. Except for our capital campaigns that constructed the Peace Community Center, we had not had an intentional focus or education about all that stewardship of God gifts means for our lives as his children.

Each fall—never tied to budget issues—we offer 3-5 week process that begins with Bible study, discovering what God's Word has to

say about the use of our time, talents, and treasure. We see how that relates to our own experiences and practices in our own lives. During the worship services individuals are invited to tell their story of how God has been at work in their lives and why the ministries and mission of Peace are important to them.

We have tried to include a fellowship event for the entire congregation the week prior to Commitment Sunday for the purpose of celebrating and encouraging one another. These have been dessert theater (skits with time for discussion in smaller groups), potlucks, etc. Though this focus is more directed at how we use our treasure and includes asking for financial pledges, we strive not to make this part any more OR any less important than how we consider the wise and God-pleasing ways we use our time and abilities.

Following commitment Sunday, all receive a letter thanking them for their pledge and verifying our understanding of their pledge. A mid-year letter is sent, again to thank and to inform what has been received to date.

Articles in the quarterly newsletter that is mailed to all members and friends include thoughts/experiences/stories about stewardship and always an expression of thanks for the many ways people of the congregation generously serve and contribute their time, abilities and money.



Current Practice #2: Spiritual Gift Classes and Inventories

Spiritual Gifts classes and inventories are offered periodically to help people discover their personal gifts and lead them to service using those gifts. Efforts continue to find ways of offering these classes that will reach the most people.

Current Practice #3: Ministry Fair

Following the Spiritual Gifts classes, the congregation is invited to participate in the Ministry Fair. This is one way for individuals to see how their uniqueness can be vital to the functioning of whole body of Christ. In the past we have set up display/recruitment tables for each ministry of the congregation, providing information about the ministry and inviting them to sign up to serve in some way.

D. Discoveries from Listening Process

Discovery #1: Growing Understanding of Stewardship



We gratefully discovered that the seeds we have been planting and nurturing for the past 4 years are taking root. All that we are and all that we have are from God and all are called to be stewards of all. People are understanding that stewardship is all of life and directly connected to their faith. Talking about our money as well as time and abilities is moving to a comfortable place. We have a good foundation

from which we can continue the journey of joyful stewardship.

Discovery #2: Passion for the Ministries and Mission of the Church

We discovered that many give and serve in our church because they are, first, grateful to God for his gifts, that they believe their giving makes a difference, that they trust the leadership of the congregation and they feel passionate about the ministries and mission of this church. These are key factors that inspire people to become involved and committed to serving God and neighbor in ways that give them joy and meaning.

Discovery #3: Need for Resources about Money Management

We discovered a stated need and desire for resources dealing with money management.



This is important for many of our church who have little discretionary money as well as how all of us make decisions about how we handle our money, our time, and our relationships.

E. Opportunities for Growth

Challenge #1: Holistic Stewardship

One challenge we see is communicating the idea of holistic stewardship, whole person as steward. How do we empower people to use the broad spectrum of gifts in meaningful ways, continually reaffirming the value of gifts of all kinds, of strengthening the faith connection to our money, our time, our abilities, earthkeeping, and causes? “What would Jesus do?”

Challenge #2: Participation

We want to find ways to broaden the base of participation by reaching out to and inviting those who are less involved and on the periphery of the congregation.

Challenge #3: Financial Literacy Skills

A need and a desire for a range of financial literacy skills have been expressed by several. The challenge is to structure one on one financial counseling and possible classes that cover areas from basic budgeting, spending within ones means, to estate and will planning. How do we encourage and help people self-identify as needing/wanting resources? All of these challenges seem to have both technical and adaptive aspects to them. Based on what we currently know and think we understand, we will identify processes and procedures as starting places. However, whatever tool or approach we take must be continually evaluated for its effectiveness based on new learning and observations of those involved. We have to be ready and willing to modify what we do and maybe do nothing until we have listened some more.

F. Paths of Engagement

Path #1: Holistic Stewardship—Whole Person as Steward

The first part of this path is a general focus of what how stewardship concepts are interwoven with other ministries and areas of responsibilities of the congregation and its leadership. We will consult the ELCA year-round stewardship planning calendar to help us lift up stewardship throughout the church seasons.

Three areas have been identified: 1. All we are in our diversity, 2. All of our relationships with God, one another, family, earth and creation, and 3. All we share—time, talents, treasure.

The Vibrant Stewardship Team will develop strategies that look at being faithful stewards of all we have to share.

Our first activity is the Fall Stewardship Series. It will be similar in structure as described above in Our Current Practices. This year we will offer a series of studies based on the Biblical Stewardship Our Duty and Delight by Mark Allan Powell. This will culminate with financial pledges being made on Joy of Giving—Commitment Sunday.

This will be followed with the opportunity for individuals to explore and discover their spiritual gifts. Plans are being made for a Ministry Fair that will hopefully open doors for greater participation and places for people to serve that match their gifts and passions. Each ministry leader is being asked to identify all the ways someone might be involved in that ministry form possibly providing snacks or rides to assuming leadership roles. We will follow this event with pledges of time and talent being made on Joy of Serving—Commitment Sunday.

An increase in the number of pledges being made, participation in the Spiritual Gifts class, numbers who attend the Ministry Fair, and number of time and talent pledges can all indicate fruitfulness of this path.

Path #2: Getting in Where You Fit In



“Getting in where you fit in” is our second path. Our goal is to broaden the spectrum of members to actively engage in the ministries of the congregation. We plan to use a matrix spreadsheet that will help identify current levels of participation of individuals of the congregation, children and youth included. We will challenge ministry leaders to identify 2-3 ministry points of entry in order to offer the

congregation more specific opportunities for service. With information gathered from the Ministry Fair and Joy of Serving Commitments, we will look for ways to invite those less involved to “get in where they fit in.” This will likely involve one on one conversation and invitation over time as relationships are built.

We know that commitment increases when people get involved in ways that have meaning for them and they see that their gifts are valued and needed. We need to empower and encourage the use of all God’s gifted people.

The fruitfulness of following this path will be seen in the number of people moving from the periphery into more participation in the current and possibly the creation of new ministries as giftedness and passions are discovered.

Path #3: Financial Literacy

Financial literacy is our third path. Recognizing the negative stigma associated with having difficulty or not knowing how to manage money, we believe that we need to begin with providing opportunities for one on one counseling for individuals. We hope to develop a network of volunteer financial counselors, perhaps in partnership with neighboring

congregations. We will offer financial literacy counseling to those who have recently received emergency financial assistance from the church, and we will look for ways to help people self-identify as needing and wanting assistance. Then as people become more comfortable with talking about personal financial issues offer we may offer classes/workshops/discussion groups that would cover topics of budgeting, decision making, planning. We will need to be sensitive to individual experiences, backgrounds, and beliefs about money management given the great diversity that is part of who we are at Peace and our community as a whole.

We want to include opportunities for our youth and children to gain financial literacy and how their choices and decisions impact them and their futures.

The Vibrant Stewardship Team is looking at a variety of materials and other resources and possible partnerships with other agencies to support this effort.

This was an identified need in the surveys and interviews. The need is seen in many ways—from the very practical and basic practices of budgeting, banking, saving, prioritizing spending, spending within one's means, sharing, to wills and estate planning.

We hope to connect more people to those who will guide and encourage them to learn ways to effectively manage their income and make wise choices. We hope to see fewer repeat requests for funds from our Emergency Assistance Program as families “learn to fish” so to speak. We look for openness and willingness to participate and share experiences in group settings and to hear a sense of freedom and confidence in managing and sharing our treasures.