Practical Stewardship
September – October 2018

Why Would I Want To?

Jerry Keucher

A mother says to her teenage son, “You should take Latin next year.”

The young man replies, “Why would I want to do that?”

Like most parents, religious leaders are fluent in the language of obligation — have to, ought to, must, should, God is calling you to…

This is unfortunate, because the point of the Christian life is not about following the rules. People are always motivated by desire. The point of the Christian life is to put us in touch with our deepest desires and to move us to aim our misdirected desires straight toward God’s heart of love. The Christian life is about healing the will, so we come to do the right thing because we want to.

The language of obligation and control

The people in churches today are there only because they want to be. There is no social cachet or economic advancement to be found there. They are looking for a spiritual connection. They want a relationship with God. They have not come to hear the clergy and lay leaders tell them what they should do or to communicate their own anxiety.

The language of obligation goes hand in hand with a need to control. Before Christian leaders can begin to speak in the language of desire, many of them need to deal with their own control needs. This would be a good thing anyway, because the Christian life is not about controlling others.

I realized years ago that telling people what they should do is simply ineffective. It isn’t wrong or bad, it just doesn’t work. What works is being able to explain why anyone would want to do what we’re talking about. There are plenty of things that might motivate a high-schooler to want to study Latin; there are other things that might motivate Christians to want to move more deeply into the mystery of God.
Yet church leaders constantly use the language of obligation as if it were sufficient, while the congregation, like the young man, wants to know why they would want to do what we’re telling them they must do.

Money and obligation

The problem is especially acute when we talk about money. Once, after giving a sermon and demonstration on proportional giving, a woman in her eighties said to me, “Thank you. That was the first sermon I’ve ever heard about money that didn’t make me mad.” I thanked her and we chatted, but later I thought, “This woman has been in church every Sunday for eighty years. That’s more than 4,000 Sundays. She has heard hundreds of sermons about money, and they have all made her mad.”

When we communicate guilt, obligation, anxiety and budget need in our talk about money, it makes our hearers resistant and sullen, if not downright angry.

Scrub obligation from your giving language

The language of obligation is often shorthand for the language of desire. In an emergency, it might be appropriate to yell at a child about to step into a busy street, but in church, we need to unpack the language of obligation. We need to find the desire underneath and talk about that. We need to explain why people might want to give.

Look to your own experience, and scrub obligation completely out of your language. Why do you do what you do for the Church? Why do you give? Why are you here? It may take a while to get under the layers and layers of obligation and duty that have been laid on us, but dig until you can say how your giving and your Church involvement are helping align your will with God’s and helping you grow closer to God.

That includes what I call the passive-aggressive obligation language of “God is calling you to….” Be very careful about telling others what you think God is calling them to do. If you ever say that, make sure that you aren’t just trying to lay your own preferences onto others. For example, God is probably not calling people to increase their giving so you can balance the budget. In that situation, God is probably calling the leadership to identify new revenue streams and to outline a compelling vision that the congregation will want to support.

You will have to think carefully about what you want to say, and you will probably need to write it out. We slip so easily into the language of obligation that you can’t trust yourself to speak extemporaneously until the language of desire becomes your mother tongue.

And then you will be able to tell others something that may inspire them to want to do the same.

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This article was made possible by the Lilly Endowment grant. For more information on ECF's Lilly Endowment Initiative, visit our website here.

Resources:

- The Giving Connection by Anne Ditzler, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 6, 2011
- Stewardship: Gratitude or Obligation? by Mark Beckwith, Vestry Papers, September 2015
- Preaching About Money an ECF webinar by Scott Gunn, September 26, 2017
- Why We Give by Nancy Davidge, Vestry Papers, September 2016

Five Positive Ways to Ask for Money

Arik Thormahlen

I was sixteen and sitting in my grandmother's living room when I received my first real lesson in stewardship. Out of nowhere, she said "so I stopped tipping the paperboy," and then, almost to herself, "he never says thank you." The service had not changed. She still loved the paper—and the crossword, but she was frustrated that she was not recognized.

Since that early lesson, I have learned that stewardship is more than saying thanks; it's how we involve our community in the life of our organization. There is a wonderful saying in fundraising—*Nobody wants to cut stone, but everybody wants to build a church.* Asking people to give without engaging them in the mission of your organization is asking them to cut stone. It might work for smaller gifts, but true philanthropic investment requires connecting donors to the overall impact of their gift.

Donors are giving more than ever to causes that provided meaningful engagement. According to Giving USA, more than $410 billion was donated to charity in 2017, with nearly one third of the total to religious causes. When you build relationships with your donors, you connect them to the difference they want to make in the world.

Use your solicitations to learn more about your donors and extend their connection with your organization. A well-planned solicitation should be a rewarding experience for everyone and a time to explore new opportunities, share exciting ideas and learn what matters most to the people who are deeply committed to your organization. To build a positive solicitation experience you should:

1. Be upfront. Set yourself up for success when setting the meeting by letting the donor know you are coming to discuss a gift. Donors don't want to be ambushed, and nobody likes meetings with ulterior motives. Make it clear at the outset: “I would like to meet to share our plans and see where they might align with your philanthropic interests.” When everyone at the meeting is on the same page, the conversation will be more productive.

2. Be inspiring. Share your vision. Explain how your project is changing the world / improving the community / strengthening the Church and why the person you are meeting with is in a unique position to help effect that change. Engage visionaries within your organization like program coordinators, clergy, laity and program beneficiaries to help tell the story. Their passion for a project is infectious.

3. Be specific. You’ve discussed philanthropy and shared your vision. Now it’s time for an ask. Make sure to ask for a specific dollar amount. Donors want to know what is expected of them and what is required financially to make a program successful. Ask amounts should be based on program costs and set at a level the donor can meet. “Launching this program will cost $10,000 and I would like you to consider championing our efforts with a gift of $5,000.”

4. Be silent. You’ve provided a lot of information to think about and asked for a specific dollar amount. Respect your donors. Give them the time they need to process your request without interruption.

5. Be grateful. Regardless of outcome, there is always a way to say thank you. Thank them for the gift, thank them for sharing their time, thank them for listening, you can even thank them for letting you know that this is not the right project for them at this time.

Your donors are drawn to the influence you have on their life, their family, their community and the world. When creating communications, providing volunteer opportunities and soliciting gifts, clearly connect their actions to your mission. Make your donors partners in building your church.

Arik Thormahlen *has worked with numerous nonprofits, including Habitat for Humanity of New Orleans, Tompkins Cortland Community College, Columbia University, University of California, Berkeley, Mount Sinai Health System, and The Hospital for Special Surgery in a fundraising career spanning nearly 20 years. He has extensive frontline fundraising experience working on capital campaigns and transformational gifts up to $10 million.*

As a board member for AFP's New York City chapter and Chair for Fundraising Day in New York 2019, Arik is deeply committed to learning and sharing best practices in fundraising and promoting the growth of the overall philanthropic sector.

Resources:

- Planning and Recruiting for Stewardship an ECF webinar by Erin Weber-Johnson, May 6, 2015
- Four Lessons in Speaking About Money by Brendan O’Sullivan-Hale, Vestry Papers, March 2018
- Fundraising and Fellowship by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, November 3, 2016

- 10 Common Mistakes in Fundraising for Congregations by Erin Weber-Johnson, Vestry Papers, September 2017
- All Saints' Mad-lib Pledge Card an ECF Vital Practices tool submitted by Beau Surratt

Mindful Stewardship

Lisa Fischbeck

I wonder what it would be like for each of us to see all our so-called possessions—fossil fuels and trees, farms and churches, our talent, skills, bodies, minds and money—as things we have been given to tend for God's purpose, even those we worked hard to gain. I wonder what it would be like truly to share what we have with a sense of gratitude and abundance, holding it all lightly.

Especially money. Because God knows money matters. It does. God knows that what we say, do and believe about money, affects what we say, do and believe about others in the world around us. It affects what we say, do and believe about ourselves. And about God.

Money and faith

It's all interrelated, all co-mingled. Every time we give or spend or save or borrow a dollar, it is an expression of faith, an expression of what we value, of what we believe to be true.

Jesus and the Gospels teach us to hold money lightly, to give of it generously, that it shows where our treasure and our hearts are. Life with God is about abundance and about abundant generosity. *Sell all you have*, Jesus tells the rich young ruler who wants to follow him. *It's easier for a camel to get through the narrow eye of the needle gate than it is for a rich person to live in God's Kingdom. Look at the birds of the air—if God looks after them and provides them with all they need, surely you don't need to worry about your financial security….*

Oh, really?

It isn't easy. Because we live in a culture that lures us into thinking that we *need* more than we've got, we *want* more than we've got. And unless we are extremely wealthy, most of us can look around and see other people with a whole lot more stuff and resources than we have. It's tempting to want more. It's hard to know how much money is enough. Especially when we want to pay for education or live without debt or provide for our children or avoid burdening them as we age or retire without anxiety about finances or enjoy some of the incredible things and places that this world of God's has to offer.

The church's mission and ours

The mission of the church offers a good lens for assessing the way we use God's stuff. The church's mission, according to the Book of Common Prayer, is to restore all people to unity with God and with our fellow human creatures in Christ (p. 855). This is helpful.

Before I do something or give something or spend, keep or borrow something, I can ask myself, Does this thing I am about to do, this money I am about to spend, give, save or borrow, help in that great restoration project of God's? Or does it break things down further? It's a good question, and it gets at the heart of what we might call 'mindful stewardship.'

What is mindful stewardship?

Mindful stewardship involves careful attention to:

- How we spend our time and how we use our resources, including, perhaps especially, our money—all the dollars we spend, save, give and borrow.
- What corrupts, destroys or offends the people of God, what sets us at odds.
- What restores us and others to God and to one another, what brings us together, what pulls us apart, what puts a burden on us or others and what gives us or others more freedom.

Mindful stewardship asks us to:

- Pause and to think before we act.
- Strike a balance between the convenience of individually wrapped portions of our cereal bars or nuts, and the potential for less waste if we were to buy in bulk, or at least in a larger package.
- Consider not only how much time we spend surfing social media, but the tone and content of what we post.
- Sleep in an extra hour or take the stairs instead of the elevator (if we are able) in order to honor the gift of our bodies.
- Pause to appreciate the craftsmanship and subtle flavors of a dish or beverage before consuming it with gusto.
- Consider the percentage point gained on our investment over and against the employment practices and investments of the corporation that provides our credit card or that percentage point of interest.
- Give, freely and abundantly, a measurable portion of our resources to those institutions, individuals and organizations that make known the loving, liberating and life-giving way of Jesus, because we realize that we actually have enough to share.

What we soon discover when we practice mindful stewardship is that this way of being, spending and giving, is itself loving, liberating and life-giving, restoring us to God and to our fellow human beings in the Spirit of Christ.

The world of faith and life and love expands. And it is good.

***The Rev. Lisa G. Fischbeck** is the founding Vicar of the Episcopal Church of The Advocate, a 21st century mission in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, known for its engaging liturgy, the Pee Wee Homes (a model for church-hosted affordable housing), The Piedmont Patch Collaborative (restoring native flora and fauna to the Piedmont, one patch at a time), and its transplanted and restored 19th century chapel. Fischbeck is particularly interested in how the church can participate in the restoration of the world around us in new and collaborative ways.*

Resources:

- Christian Stewardship by Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, September 2017
- Stewardship for the New Millennium an ECF webinar by Terri Mathes and Erin Weber-Johnson, September 10, 2013
- Simple Giving by Lisa Meeder Turnbull, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 7, 2011
- Generations Walking the Way an ECF webinar by Angela Emerson and J. R. Lander, September 24, 2014
- Wholehearted Stewardship by Erin Weber-Johnson, Vestry Papers, September 2013

Because God Always Gives

Rhonda Rogers

How would I answer the question, *why do I give to the church?* There are plenty of references in the Bible about the generosity of our God. James 1:17 and Psalm 145, especially verses 13c-18, come readily to mind. Part of my answer is that giving is my response to God's grace and mercy, because God always gives. It is also because people in my life showed me the privilege of giving and generosity in action.

It began with my grandparents

I view giving to the church a privilege because of my maternal grandparents. As a child, I would spend most weekends with my grandmother and step-grandfather. On Sunday mornings we would attend St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Atlantic City. The preparation for church included laying out our clothes, setting our hair and polishing our shoes. My grandfather didn't have any hair to set, but polishing our shoes was his forte.

There was one more thing they always did. They would get their boxes of envelopes and choose the one for the upcoming Sunday. The envelopes were printed with a number that meant the envelope was theirs. They placed bills inside and sealed them. Grandmom's went in her purse; Grandpop's went in the inner pocket of his jacket.

Sunday morning, as the plate was passed, they would give their envelopes to the church. I would put in my coins but I wanted an envelope too. I didn't understand tithing or stewardship yet. But watching their intentionality and the dutiful way they gave each week made giving seem a privilege. I still feel that way.

Love of neighbor in action

When I was about 10 years old, my mom had hernia surgery. My neighbor came to tell me there was a woman looking for my mom. It was one of my mom's coworkers. She was standing by her car with the trunk opened. Inside were paper bags filled with groceries and household goods. There were two more cars with paper bags in their trunks as well.

I took the woman into my mom's room and went to help bring the bags in. When we were finished, I returned to my mom's room. She was crying and hugging the woman. On the bed was an envelope filled with bills.

There was no disability insurance in those days. There would be no paycheck for my mom for the six weeks she would be out of work. Her coworkers knew this even though I didn't. Parents didn't talk with their children about stuff like that back then. My mom's coworkers made sure we had food and that my mom had some cash to take care of what was needed. Generosity in action; love your neighbor in practice.

Lessons in giving

Those experiences taught me about giving. I saw that one of the responsibilities as a member of a Christian community was to give from what we have been given. I saw my grandparents and my mom's coworkers giving with a grateful and joyful heart. I didn't realize it at the time, but those examples touched me deeply.

I witnessed the work of the church, the people of the church, as we cared for the homeless in our midst, the homebound in our congregation, new parents and even the buildings and grounds. It was done with the same intentionality and duty as my grandparents' giving when I was a child.

There were times when I struggled to make ends meet and my giving was meager. Friends passed along hand-me-downs, shared meals and prayed for me. By God's grace and the generosity of others, I managed to keep us fed and a roof over our heads.

I give because of God's grace and the experience of seeing what happens when you give what you can. I give because it is a privilege to share what's been given to me. I give because loving your neighbor includes generosity in action. I give because God always gives.

***Rhonda Rogers** is a senior in the IONA School of Ministry in the Diocese of Texas. She completed Education for Ministry (EfM) in 2003 and served as an EfM mentor. She became a parishioner at Trinity, Houston, TX after moving from Rochester, NY in 2010. Rhonda sits on the Rev. John Dublin Epps Chapter UBE board and is a member of the Commission on Black Ministry. An Associate with the Order of St. Helena and a member of Daughters of the King, Rhonda worked as a chemical engineer for Mobil and ExxonMobil for over 38 years before retiring in 2016.*

Resources:

- Year Round Stewardship: Talking About Money an ECF webinar presented by Chris Harris, February 11, 2014
- New Heights by Jeanie Sablatura and Terry Nathan, Vestry Papers, September 2011
- Creating a Culture of Giving by Angela Emerson, ECF Vital Practices blog, January 27, 2012
- Stewardship Presence-Making: A Parable by Charles LaFond, Vestry Papers, September 2012

Porque Dios siempre da

Rhonda Rogers

¿Cómo contestaría la pregunta *por qué doy a la iglesia?* Hay muchas menciones en la Biblia sobre la generosidad de nuestro Dios. Santiago 1:17 y el Salmo 145, especialmente los versículos 13c a 18, me vienen a la mente. Parte de mi respuesta es que dar es mi reacción a la gracia y misericordia de Dios, porque Dios siempre da. También es porque gente en mi vida me mostró el privilegio de dar y la generosidad en acción.

Empezó por mis abuelos

Considero que dar a la iglesia es un privilegio gracias a mis abuelos maternos. De niña pasaba casi todos los fines de semana con mi abuela y mi abuelastro. Los domingos por la mañana asistíamos a la Iglesia Episcopal St. Augustine's en Atlantic City. La preparación para la iglesia era dejar lista nuestra ropa, arreglarnos el cabello y lustrarnos los zapatos. Mi abuelo no tenía mucho cabello que arreglarse, pero lustrar sus zapatos era su punto fuerte.

Había una cosa más que siempre hacíamos. Ellos abrían sus cajas de sobres y escogían uno para el próximo domingo. Los sobres estaban impresos con un número que significaba que el sobre era de ellos. Ponían billetes adentro y los sellaban. Abuela sacaba dinero de su cartera, abuelo del bolsillo interior de su chaqueta.

Los domingos por la mañana, cuando se pasaba el plato entregaban sus sobres a la iglesia. Yo ponía mis monedas, pero anhelaba tener mi propio sobre. Todavía no entendía el diezmo ni la mayordomía. Pero observar su intencionalidad y sentido del deber al realizar sus donativos todas las semanas causó que pensara que donar era un privilegio. Y todavía me siento así.

Amor de vecinos en acción

Cuando yo tenía unos 10 años de edad, operaron a mi mami de la hernia. Mi vecina vino a decirme que había una mujer buscando a mi mami. Era una de las compañeras de trabajo de mami. Estaba parada junto a su carro con el baúl abierto. Adentro había bolsas de papel llenas de comestibles y productos para la casa. También había otros dos carros con bolsas de papel en el baúl.

Llevé a la mujer a la habitación de mami y salí a ayudar a entrar las bolsas. Cuando terminamos, regresé a la habitación de mami. Ella estaba llorando y abrazando a la mujer. Sobre la cama había un sobre lleno de billetes.

En ese entonces no había seguro de discapacitación. No habría cheques de sueldo para mi mami correspondientes a las seis semanas que no podría trabajar. Sus compañeros de trabajo lo sabían, pero yo no. Cuando yo era niña los padres no hablaban con sus hijos/as sobre ese tipo de cosas. Los/as compañeros/as de trabajo de mi mami aseguraron que tuviéramos comida y que mi mami tuviera un poco de dinero para las cosas que se necesitaran. Generosidad en acción, amar al prójimo en la práctica.

Lecciones de dar

Esas experiencias me enseñaron sobre dar. Vi que una de mis responsabilidades como miembro de una comunidad cristiana era dar de lo que se nos había dado. Vi a mis abuelos y a los/as compañeros/as de trabajo de mi mami dar con un corazón agradecido y jubiloso. En ese momento no lo noté, pero esos ejemplos me tocaron el alma.

Observé la labor de la iglesia, la gente de la iglesia cuando nos ocupábamos de los/as sin hogar en nuestro entorno, de los/as confinados/as en sus casas en nuestra feligresía, de los nuevos padres y hasta de los edificios y el terreno. Se hacía con la misma intencionalidad y sentido del deber con que mis abuelos donaban cuando era niña.

Hubo ocasiones en que luché para llegar a fin de mes y mis ofrendas eran escasas. Mis amigos/as me daban ropa y objetos usados, compartíamos comidas y oraban por mí. Por la gracia de Dios y la generosidad de otros logré mantenernos alimentados y con un techo sobre nuestras cabezas.

Doy por la gracia de Dios y la experiencia de ver lo que ocurre cuando uno da lo que puede. Doy porque es un privilegio compartir lo que se me ha dado. Doy porque amar al prójimo incluye generosidad en acción. Doy porque Dios siempre da.

Rhonda Rogers *cursa el último año de la Escuela de Ministerio IONA en la Diócesis de Texas. Finalizó su Educación para Ministerio en 2003 y fue mentora en dicha institución. Después de mudarse de Rochester, NY, en 2010, se unió a la Iglesia Trinity, en Houston, Texas. Rhonda integra la junta directiva del Capítulo Rev. John Dublin Epps de la Unión de Episcopales Negros y es miembro de la Comisión del Ministerio Negro. Está asociada a la Orden de Sta. Helena y es miembro de Las Hijas del Rey. Rhonda se desempeñó como ingeniera química en Mobil y ExxonMobil por 38 años antes de jubilarse en 2016.*

Recursos:

- Nuevas Alturas de Jeanie Sablatura and Terry Nathan, Vestry Papers, septiembre de 2011
- Vivir la mayordomía un webinario de ECF de Sandra Montes, augusto 22, 2017
- Estudio Bíblico para la Mayordomía una herramienta de ECF Vital Practices
- La mayordomía Cristiana de Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, septiembre de 2017

Three ways to Perk Up Year-round Stewardship

Linda Buskirk

Stewardship is often considered a routine activity that percolates once a year. Messages for bulletins and pulpits are put into the pot, letters and envelopes are poured in, and up perks financial commitments to support the church for another year. The brew might be weak or strong, but at least it’s over and done with by December.

If that's your view, then the idea of year-round stewardship might sound a bit over-caffeinated. Who has the energy to steep messages and responses all year long?

Get a cup of decaf, relax and take a few minutes – or an entire Stewardship Committee meeting in January – to consider the word "ministry" as part of stewardship. Ministry seems to be an obvious fit with Worship, Christian Formation, or Outreach. These activities minister to people. They inspire and deepen our faith. They embolden us to be Jesus to each other and to the world.

There are many opportunities for Stewardship to do likewise. In fact, there are so many, that you should take care that you don't burn out your committee with a plan for engagement 12 months a year. To begin, consider these three ways to perk up a year-round stewardship ministry:

1. Express Gratitude to God. Celebrate what God has provided, without focusing on bank accounts. God's abundance is not about accumulated wealth. It's about love, salvation and providing what we need. Activities and messages rooted in scripture will move people to closer relationship with Jesus – a marvelous outcome for any Christian ministry.

- Idea: Celebrate diversity by utilizing ways other faith traditions and cultures thank God for creating and sustaining us. For instance, beautiful Jewish prayers can be found in Rabbi Shawn Israel Zevit's book, Offerings of the Heart: Money and Values in Faith Communities.
- Idea: Celebrate Earth Day with a neighborhood walk or planting trees or flowers in neighbors' yards (with their permission!)

2. Communicate creatively and transparently. As the Earth Day idea demonstrates, stewardship activities can be creative and fun, encouraging learning and participation.

Of course, you could present a lecture on three types of giving, such as: "Annual giving is regular financial support to sustain the ongoing ministry of our congregation"; "Planned giving involves including the church in your estate plans"; and "capital giving is extraordinary giving in addition to annual giving for special growth or property needs of our church". But wouldn't these ideas be way more fun if we:

- Celebrate volunteers by adding up the hours given to make a typical Sunday happen. During a service, have someone hold an offering plate while folks come forward to place symbols of each type of service in the plate while announcing the associated number of hours given – an usher badge, a candle for the acolytes, a linen purificator for Altar Guild, a bulletin for those who fold them faithfully each week, crayons for Sunday School teachers. The plate will be overflowing and the congregation will be delighted with this expression of gratitude.
- Hold a Legacy Celebration to recognize those who have remembered the church in their estate plans (include a workshop about planned giving during coffee hour).
- Distribute red hots candies with bulletins one Sunday to celebrate the new furnace.
- Before the annual campaign begins, publish a narrative booklet that explains how annual gifts/pledges are being spent. Include stories about impact and photos. (Do NOT include a boring line-item budget)

3. Get personal. "Ministry" implies personal service to others. How much ministry is there in a template letter that goes to everyone, using the same language to remind all of their "duty" to give to the church? Not much.

The Stewardship Ministry of St. John's Episcopal Church in Grand Haven, Michigan, got a bit more personal. They fashioned different letters for people from different generations (Why Do You Give to the Church? – July 23, 2018).

They didn't stop there. St. John's Stewardship Chair John Harberts said the experience of communicating differently with people in distinct groupings made their task more personal. Committee members committed to stay in touch with a number of parishioners throughout the entire year. They divided the parish list into smaller lists, at first based on those they knew best. Eventually, they added people they had not met.

One of the first communications was a short note that each committee member sent to those on his/her list in the spring. John Harberts says the basic message was, "Just staying in touch. Let me know if I can help you in any way." Then a phone call later in the year.

"Suddenly, we all liked our [stewardship] jobs!" John explains. Families that were unacquainted prior to the effort formed relationships. Some folks became social friends, meeting each other for dinner.

John adds that getting personal made the next annual campaign much easier. "We weren't making 'cold calls' anymore. We were just continuing conversations and check-ins with our friends in the parish."

Year -round stewardship is not about asking people for money twelve months a year. It's a ministry that invites people to deeper faith and helps transform church membership into discipleship. Keep it percolating all year 'round with plenty of gratitude, creative and transparent communications and building relationships.

***Linda Buskirk** is an ECF consultant based in Fort Wayne, Indiana. In addition to the many successful Episcopal Church capital campaigns she has led for ECF, she brings extensive experience from her own consulting practice specializing in strategic planning, fundraising and board governance for not-for-profit organizations. Linda is also a contributing author for ECF's Vital Practices/Vital Posts blog. Linda enjoys journeying with clients to help identify where they are being called to serve as a faith community and implementing a plan to ensure their capacity to achieve their goals. Linda is active in her home parish and diocese serving on committees responsible for clergy formation, endowment, stewardship and many other ministries. Linda holds a master's degree in Public Affairs from Indiana University and is a graduate of the Congregational Development Institute of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Indiana.*

Resources:

- Rethinking the Pledge, Part I: It's Not Stewardship by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices Blog, October 9, 2013

- Why Would I Want To? by Jerry Keucher, Vestry Papers, September 2018
- Annual Stewardship Calendars Q&A, an ECF Webinar presented by Chris Harris, November 16, 2017

We're Building a Mission Here

Greg Syler

Often in ministry, I'm reminded of a scene from Roland Joffe's 1986 film, *The Mission*. It comes early in the movie, contrasting Fr. Gabriel (played by Jeremy Irons), an 18th century Jesuit missionary, and Rodrigo Mendoza (Robert De Niro), whom we first meet as a slave trader. High atop the falls, the priest confronts the human trafficker:

> Gabriel: So, you're hunting above the falls now, Captain
> Mendoza. We're building a mission here. We're going to make Christians of these people.
> Mendoza: If you have the time.

In spite of the beautiful scenery – the greatest few hours of pure cinematography I've ever seen – *The Mission* isn't an easy film. Jesus' good news, the film asserts, re-shapes human communities and gives them power. Jesus' good news literally changes the world. At the same time, however, the world always asserts its own power. And power sets history. So, which power?

Building a mission in the 21st century

Far removed from 18th century geopolitics, I am an American priest serving a few remarkable communities of faith in a beautiful part of the country. The two Episcopal congregations I serve as rector benefit from core strengths and have many advantages, both internal and contextual. Life and ministry in this context is marked by opportunities.

Still, we know we're not the same communities of faith that blossomed in the halcyon years of the Baby Boom. Most leaders in most Christian communities would say the same thing, but saying it doesn't make it easier to deal with. Not a day goes by in ministry in which I don't deal with it. Yesterday's conversation was about lawn maintenance (turns out we don't have as many volunteer gardeners as we once had). Tomorrow's will be about another symptom. You pick.

That's why it matters where you look. While the Episcopal Church's numerical decline will surely continue, it's beginning to abate and, more importantly, taking with it some of that institution-centered thinking. Nowadays, the questions my communities wonder about have less to do with sustainability – our talking points 8-10 years ago – and more to do with ministry, relationships, community, neighbors. As institutional capacity has diminished, an appetite for creativity has emerged. Experimentation is becoming a core value among dedicated leadership. Like Fr. Gabriel said, high atop the falls: "We are building a mission here."

The stewardship challenge

In part, that's what makes stewardship season such a challenge. I don't think it's because we don't like to do the work, even though a well-coordinated pledge campaign marked by hope and generosity is a lot of work. Nor do I think it's that we have yet to find the perfect stewardship system. I've experimented plenty with pledge drives. For what it's worth, I've come to believe that the customary approach is more than enough. Preach about generosity; have key leaders give talks on select Sundays; send solicitation and thank you letters; and ask for a targeted response – an increase in giving or a pledge card or both. That's a great system. Use the amazing resources of The Episcopal Network for Stewardship. You don't need to reinvent the wheel. There are so many more important things to pursue – ministries that change lives, missions shaped around human hopes, hurts and healings.

What makes stewardship season such a challenge is that it is, for many, a forced retreat into the old economy. The need to raise sufficient resources to fund the old business model is a distraction and an artificial choice. Choose, that is, between cultivating the new, fledgling mission work that's emerging under your very feet or take care of what economist Richard Florida calls "the old Fordist order and the very way of life it had engendered." Adding to that, this happens *at the very time* in the calendar year in which energy around re-connecting is high.

Begin with questions

Consider these questions, then, as practical next steps – an invitation to uncover new ways that are already emerging in your Christian community.

1. What are the deeply-held, guiding values of your community?
2. What old, nagging worries no longer line up with our common values? Sure, we can't get rid of those worries, but can we put them in the 'parking lot' for a season?
3. What are we, as leaders, willing to put on the line, not as a challenge but an invitation?
4. How much of our stewardship language sounds like a challenge ('give more money, or else…') or commitment ('we need you to commit more')? Why doesn't our stewardship language sound invitational, hopeful, more focused on God's beloved community?
5. Is our business model shaped around our people as God has currently gathered us, or around preconceived ideas or past practices?
6. What if the pledge drive doesn't bring in the funds we need to raise? It's an honest question; ask it honestly. What then?
7. What if stewardship season stopped telling us what we can't do or what we're no longer capable of doing and started showing us where to go?

The two congregations I serve did a remarkable thing. They allowed stewardship seasons in back-to-back years to tell them what's no longer working. They learned that the old way of business no longer works. In the new preface to his 2012 revision of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, economist Richard Florida writes:

The old order has failed; attempts to bail it out, to breathe new life into it or to somehow prop it back up are doomed to history's dustbin. A new global economic order is taking shape, but it is still confined within the brittle carapace of the old, with all of the outmoded, wasteful, oil-dependent, sprawling, unsustainable ways of life that went along with it.

A new model for today

The two congregations I serve learned for themselves that it's better to partner together because, in the end, there's little that can be done to bail out the inherited 20th century business model. At the same time, they looked more deeply into the annual drill of pledge fundraising in an effort to understand present patterns and develop future invitations. They showed us that God has been laying a lot on the hearts of God's people, but we've been so busy shoring up the institution that we haven't taken the time to ask or invite them to talk about that. New ministries, new relationships, new invitations, new energy, new questions began to emerge, mostly because leadership stopped looking for old answers. Again, Richard Florida: "Still, that new order will not simply or automatically assert itself into existence. It will require new institutions, a new social compact, and a new way of life to bring it into being. We must turn our attention … to a shared and sustainable prosperity that lifts human well-being and happiness across the board."

Gathering the energy to do another pledge drive might sound awfully daunting but, in fact, it is *the precise moment* to cultivate something new, to plant new networks of transformative ministry. No one has ever contended against the powers of evil by worshipping or hiding behind the statues of the old order. Instead, they "build missions here."

***Greg Syler** is the rector of Ascension & St. George's, two neighbor Episcopal congregations in St. Mary's County, Maryland (Episcopal Diocese of Washington). While both churches remain separate and distinct parishes, they've uncovered profound economies of scale and cost savings and, most importantly, they share most ministries as well as core staff and leadership teams. Greg is married to Iman, who serves as the Episcopal Missioner for Discipleship & Faith Formation in southern Maryland. Together with their daughter, Carter, the Sylers enjoy cooking, reading, spending time with family and getting away for hikes in the North Carolina mountains.*

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Stewardship Is Key in Latin America and the Dominican Republic

Robert Stevens and Julio Holguín

Stewardship is critical to the dignity and sustainability of the church in Latin America and the Dominican Republic. It is so important that the members of every mission and congregation should offer a tithe or pledge to support their local and diocesan mission. Likewise, every mission and congregation needs a stewardship committee to conduct an annual campaign and help its members understand stewardship.

In the Latin American Roman Catholic culture parishioners have been conditioned to offer only alms. In the Episcopal Church the offering is used in the maintenance of the church, to pay clergy salaries, and to assist the needy. These tithes and financial offerings are important to the daily operation of the Church.

The low level of stewardship in our churches in the 9th Province is linked to the model of dependence brought to Latin America by the first Episcopal missionaries. Because the people were so poor, missionaries thought that the Episcopal Church would need to provide everything necessary to create local congregations. That early model established a culture of dependence, and even now there are priests who say, “Our people are poor, so they cannot give.”

For the integrity of the Episcopal Church in Latin America and its financial sustainability, it is imperative that everyone, starting with the priest, practice tithing. There is no better way to improve the financial support of the church and the missionary work of the diocese.

A church that does not practice stewardship and receives only alms is a church that must always depend on external support. Stewardship, which recognizes that the life of the church relies on each of us, is an important step towards personal and institutional dignity, and a step toward ending dependence.

The diocese of the Dominican Republic emphasizes stewardship in all its congregations. All parishes and priests, even those located in poor areas, emphasize that all parishioners have a responsibility to tithe. The diocesan stewardship committee conducts workshops throughout the year at the archdeacon and congregational levels.

Local self-sustainability and support for the diocese vary according to the canonical status of the congregation. In the Dominican Republic for example, with the expansion of the church and a greater emphasis on stewardship, contributions to the diocese have increased more than seven times (720% between 1991 and 2000), and they continue to rise. In Honduras new congregations are not allowed to become members of the diocese unless they can be self-sustaining.

As for personal stewardship, we must recognize that it is a learned practice that grows over time. Most of us do not promise to tithe at first, but in time, we begin with a small amount and each year tend to give more to the work of the Lord. The diocese should encourage everyone in their personal commitment to stewardship, including priests, who should be the first to tithe. While it is not required that priests report their gifts to the church, it should be very clear that they contribute to its maintenance so that they can serve as role models.

Since its founding in 1913, the faithful of the Episcopal Church in the Dominican Republic have contributed their gifts to support missionary work. Those gifts, however, were not sufficient to sustain the church, nor for its growth and expansion at the national level. For that reason, a series of steps were taken, beginning in 1991, to develop a strategic plan that would reduce our economic dependence on the Episcopal Church and facilitate the growth of the 22 existing congregations, increase the number of clergy – in those days, 15 – and at the same time, initiate a process to open new missions in different communities around the country.

This strategic plan can be summarized in the following steps:

1. We conducted a series of retreats for the clergy, seminarians and lay leaders that generated spiritual renewal and a new vision of the mission of the church. We rediscovered that the mission of the church is evangelization and service.

2. We initiated a program for the development of lay leaders in matters such as content and use of the Bible, evangelization and Christian education.

3. Thanks to renewal and a missionary spirit, most of our congregations have grown through prayer groups and Bible studies, both in church and at home, and the interest in starting new missions (congregations) has awakened. In 2017 the diocese went from 22 congregations to more than 60, and the number of clergy tripled.

4. The number of donors in the congregations has increased. Most of the parishioners already fill out pledge cards and fulfill their promises.

5. In 1998, the Dominican Development Group was created, which has become one of the most solid supports for the construction of new spaces of worship, educational centers, vicariates and centers for retreats and conferences.

6. One of the most important service programs is education. In the Diocese of the Dominican Republic, we went from seven educational centers to 28, and most of them contribute to the financial sustainability of the local congregation and the diocesan budget.

7. A main objective was the creation of the Self-Sufficiency Capital Fund, which has served as one of the pillars of the financial sustainability and drives the missionary work of the Episcopal Church in the Dominican Republic. In 1991, financial dependence on the Episcopal Church was at about 84%. With the current level of individual contributions, that figure is now around 8% and the diocesan budget is five times greater than that of 1991. In fact, the Dominican Episcopal Church is fully self-sufficient.

Today the Diocese of the Dominican Republic maintains its active missionary spirit through its clergy and lay leaders, its seminary to train clergy, Cursillo, Daughters of the King, Episcopal Church Women, its youth and Episcopal men.

In his retirement, ***Dr. Robert Stevens*** *serves as volunteer Executive Director of the Province IX Development Group, on the cutting edge supporting Latin American dioceses along their path towards development and self-sustainability. Previously he was the founding Executive Director of the Dominican Development Group and worked closely with the Rt. Rev. Julio Holguín in the Diocese of the Dominican Republic's dynamic growth to self-sustainability. Dr. Stevens lives in St. Petersburg, FL and is married to Dr. Vickie Stevens and has four children and 10 grandchildren.*

Julio Cesar Holguín Khoury *was born in the Dominican Republic. He and his wife Milagros Hernández have two sons and a daughter and one grandson and one granddaughter. He studied sociology and was ordained to the priesthood in 1977. He was diocesan bishop of the diocese of the*

Dominican Republic from 1991 until his retirement in 2017. He has held many positions including being a member of Executive Council, being President of the IX Province, of the Commission of Theological Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (CETALC) and of the Latin American Council of Churches. He is an honorary president for the World Council of Religions for Peace.

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La mayordomía es clave en América Latina y la República Dominicana

Dr. Robert Stevens y el Rvdmo. Julio Holguín

La mayordomía personal es una parte importante de la autosostenibilidad de la Iglesia y de su propia dignidad en américa latina y la República Dominicana. La mayordomía es tan importante que cada feligrés de cada misión y parroquia debe diezmar y ofrendar para apoyar la obra misionera local y diocesana. Asimismo, cada parroquia y misión necesita un Comité de Mayordomía que realice una campaña anual de mayordomía y que ayude a sus miembros a comprender más sobre la mayordomía.

En la cultura católica romana de América Latina los feligreses se les enseñó a ofrendar "limosnas." En la Iglesia Episcopal la ofrenda se emplea en el mantenimiento de la Iglesia, incluyendo los sueldos del clero, otros gastos de la Iglesia, un aporte a la diócesis y asistencia a los necesitados. Los diezmos y las ofrendas son importantes para la vida cotidiana de la Iglesia Episcopal.

El bajo nivel de mayordomía en nuestras iglesias de la Provincia IX está vinculado al modelo misionero de dependencia que los primeros misioneros trajeron al crear la Iglesia Episcopal en América Latina. Porque el pueblo era tan pobre los misioneros pensaron que la Iglesia Episcopal proporcionaría todo lo necesario para crear la Iglesia local. Ese modelo antiguo estableció una cultura de dependencia, e incluso hoy en día hay sacerdotes que dicen "nuestra gente es pobre, así que no puede ofrendar".

Para la integridad de la Iglesia Episcopal en América Latina y su autosostentibilidad financiera, es imprescindible que todas las personas, empezando con el/la sacerdote, practiquen el diezmo. No hay mejor manera de mejorar el sostén financiero de la Iglesia y apoyar la obra misionera de su diócesis.

Una Iglesia que no practica la mayordomía y recibe sólo limosnas, es una Iglesia siempre dependiente del apoyo externo. La mayordomía, que reconoce que la vida de la iglesia depende de cada persona en ella, es un paso importante hacia la dignidad personal e institucional, y un paso hacia la eliminación de la dependencia.

La diócesis de la República Dominicana enfatiza la mayordomía en todas sus feligresías. Aunque estén ubicadas en zonas pobres, todas las feligresías y sus sacerdotes recalcan que cada persona en las feligresías tiene la responsabilidad de diezmar a la Iglesia. El comité diocesano de mayordomía dicta talleres durante el año a los niveles de arcedianato y congregacional.

La autosostenibilidad local y el apoyo local a la diócesis varían según el estatus canónigo de la congregación. En la República Dominicana, por ejemplo, con la expansión de la Iglesia y el mayor énfasis en la mayordomía, los aportes a la diócesis desde las misiones aumentaron más de 7 veces, o sea 720% entre 1991 y 2000, y siguen aumentando. En Honduras no se permite que una nueva congregación sea miembro de la diócesis sin la expectativa de que sea autosostenible.

En cuanto a la mayordomía personal, hay que reconocer que es una práctica aprendida que crece con el tiempo. La mayoría de nosotros no empezamos con una promesa de diezmar, sino con una cantidad menor y cada año damos más a la obra del Señor hasta que llegamos al diezmo.
La diócesis debe animar a la gente en su compromiso de mayordomía personal, incluyendo a sus sacerdotes, quienes deben ser los/as primeros/as en diezmar. Si bien no están obligados/as las/los sacerdotes a reportar su ofrenda a la iglesia, debe quedar muy claro que ellos/as contribuyen a su mantenimiento para que puedan servir como modelos/as a seguir.

Desde su establecimiento en 1913, los/as fieles de la Iglesia Episcopal en la República Dominicana contribuyeron con sus ofrendas para apoyar la obra misionera. Esos aportes, sin embargo, no bastaban para mantener la iglesia, ni para su crecimiento y expansión a nivel nacional. Es por ello que a partir de 1991 se tomaron una serie de medidas para elaborar un plan estratégico que redujera nuestra dependencia económica de la Iglesia Episcopal y facilitara el crecimiento de las 22 congregaciones existentes, incrementara el número del clero -- entonces eran 15-- y a la vez iniciara un proceso de abrir nuevas misiones en diferentes comunidades del país.

Ese plan estratégico se puede resumir en los siguientes pasos:

1. Realizamos una serie de retiros espirituales para el clero, los/las seminaristas y líderes laicos/as, que generaron renovación espiritual y una nueva visión de nuestra misión como Iglesia. Redescubrimos que la misión de la iglesia es la evangelización y el servicio.

2. Iniciamos un programa para la formación de líderes laicos/as en materias como contenido y manejo de la Biblia, evangelización y educación cristiana.

3. Gracias a la renovación y al espíritu misionero, la mayoría de nuestras congregaciones comenzaron a crecer por medio de grupos de oración y estudios bíblicos, tanto en el templo como en los hogares y se despertó el interés por comenzar nuevas misiones (congregaciones). En 2017 la diócesis había pasado de tener 22 congregaciones a más de 60 y el número de clero se triplicó.

4. El número de donantes en las congregaciones está en aumento. La mayoría de los/las fieles llenan sus tarjetas de promesas y las cumplen.

5. En 1998 se creó el Grupo de Desarrollo Dominicano, que resultó ser uno de los apoyos más sólidos para la construcción de nuevos templos, centros educativos, vicarías y centros de retiros y conferencias, entre otros.

6. Uno de los programas de servicios más importantes fue el de educación. De 7 centros educativos pasamos a tener 28 y la mayoría de ellos contribuye a la sostenibilidad financiera de la congregación local y al presupuesto diocesano.

7. Uno de los objetivos principales fue la creación del Fondo Capital de Autosuficiencia (FOCA), que ha servido como uno de los pilares de la sostenibilidad financiera que impulsa la obra misionera de la Iglesia Episcopal en la República Dominicana. En 1991, nuestra dependencia financiera de la Iglesia Episcopal era de alrededor del 84%. Con el nivel actual de las contribuciones individuales, ahora es alrededor del 8%, y el presupuesto diocesano es 5 veces mayor que el de 1991. De hecho, la Iglesia Episcopal Dominicana es plenamente autosuficiente.

En este momento la Diócesis de la República Dominicana mantiene su espíritu misionero muy activo por medio de su clero y los/las líderes laicos/as, su seminario para la formación del clero, Cursillo, las Hijas del Rey, la Organización de las Mujeres Episcopales (ECW), su juventud, y los hombres episcopales.

*Ya jubilado, el **Dr. Robert Stevens** sirve como director ejecutivo voluntario del Grupo de Desarrollo de la IX Provincia, el cual apoya a las diócesis de América Latina en sus caminos hacia el desarrollo y la autosostenibilidad. Antes fue director ejecutivo fundador del Grupo de Desarrollo de Dominicana y trabajó muy de cerca con el Rvdmo. Julio Holguín en el crecimiento hacia la autosostenibilidad de la diócesis de la República Dominicana. El Dr. Stevens vive en St. Petersburg, Florida con su esposa Dr. Vickie Stevens y tiene cuatro hijos y 10 nietos.*

***Julio Cesar Holguín Khoury** nació en la República Dominicana. Su esposa Milagros Hernández y él tienen dos hijos y una hija y un nieto y una nieta. Estudió sociología y fue ordenado como presbítero en 1977. Fue obispo diocesano de la diócesis de la República Dominicana desde el año 1991 hasta su retiro en 2017. Ha tenido muchos cargos incluyendo ser miembro del Concilio Ejecutivo, ser Presidente de la IX Provincia, de la Comisión de Educación Teológica para América Latina y el Caribe (CETALC) y del Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias. Es uno de los presidentes honorarios de la Organización Mundial de Religiones por la Paz.*

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Financial Transparency

James Jordan

Transparency is a “buzzword” in many situations. It means many things to many people, but generally elicits a positive response in most minds – transparency is a good thing.

When applied to the church as a whole and to a local parish, school or other church organization in particular, it begs the question, “transparency of what?” There are basically two sides to that equation – pastoral and temporal. Pastoral transparency may or may not be a good thing depending upon the situation. Making known the rector’s openness and accessibility for pastoral concerns at any time is inviting and a good thing. Making the confession of a parishioner available is not. For the purposes of this article, we will leave pastoral transparency to the discretion of the priest and vestry. Temporal transparency, on the other hand, is generally misunderstood, ill-defined and poorly implemented throughout the church; probably not by design, but because of a lack of focus and the failure to understand its importance.

What is Transparency?

It is important that we first start with a clear definition when speaking of transparency. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines transparent:

> 2a: free from pretense or deceit: frank
> b: easily detected or seen through: obvious
> c: readily understood
> d: characterized by visibility or accessibility of information especially concerning business practices

When thinking of your parish and its dealings with money, is it secretive? Do you regard the clergy discretionary account as a secret, not to be seen by anyone other than the clergy? Do parishioners have an easy way to learn how the vestry spends and allocates money? Are the current income and financial stability of the parish clearly communicated in multiple media outlets? Is there a plan to be financially transparent? Why is it that greater transparency often leads to greater giving, greater trust and greater investment in the church’s mission? Let us examine some of the inhibitors of transparency in churches, and conversely, the enablers.

Inhibitors: What hinders transparency?

It all starts with the leadership of the parish – clergy and vestry. The rector, priest-in-charge, interim or vicar is the top clerical leader. If the tone at the top reflects indifference, unwillingness to get involved in the church’s temporal affairs, disbelief in transparency or the like, the congregation will view transparency as unimportant.

If there is a lack of internal control with regard to money – separation of duties, checks and balances – parishioners and other donors will feel less comfortable contributing. In more severe cases, mistrust regarding donations is detrimental to the financial vitality of an organization.

Often, lack of communication or the wrong communication inhibits transparency. Maybe there is no monthly financial reporting to the congregation. Perhaps the vestry minutes are not published and there is discomfort when speaking of money in the church. Sometimes money accumulates outside the oversight of the vestry, as in a thrift store or men's club, and there are side checking accounts. These things foment rumors and distrust. "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (NRSV, 2 Corinthians 9:7).

Enablers: What creates transparency?

It is important to examine all parts of the organization and ensure they are working in concert to enable transparency – its people, processes, technology, and the organizational structure itself.

We turn back to leadership for the people part. Attitudes that foster transparency in financial matters – and other daily activities of the church, for that matter – begin with the attitudes and opinions of the bishop and diocesan officers and the parish clergy, staff and vestry. These must be stated and shared openly.

Processes for handling money must be sound and free from the opportunity for fraud. If just one or two people count the offering, post the books, and reconcile accounts, there is a serious lack of separation of duties. The congregation knows that, whether one realizes it or not. If a parishioner sees only one person taking the collection plate to an out-of-sight place, it is natural to question the safety of the donation just made.

Title I, Canon 7 of the Episcopal Church Constitution and Canons requires that every organization in the Episcopal Church is required to keep adequate records and have them audited each year. The technology used should be appropriate for church accounting and appropriately implemented. Fund accounting packages designed for churches include products from ACS Technologies and Blackbaud. The use of accounting software that cannot accommodate fund accounting (e.g., QuickBooks) can be problematic in achieving efficient and effective accounting.

Organizational structure is an enabler when roles are clearly defined. For example, the vestry is fiduciarily liable for the money of the church. It is in the vestry's best interest – and its role – to deliberately design and approve the internal control processes that are implemented by the church. It is also their role to inspect and provide oversight for those processes. It is the lead clergy's responsibility to implement those controls on a daily basis with staff and volunteers. When there are procedures in place for handling and processing financial transactions, a part of the congregation will also be involved in carrying out those procedures. The transparency of the internal control will become apparent and actionable by the parishioner.

Transparency leads to growth and healthy stewardship

While I know of no academic study of the effects of transparency, in my work with hundreds of churches, I have seen that churches that are transparent in their operations and financial matters are in better shape than those that are not. People join and contribute to organizations they consider to be successful. Healthy stewardship thrives where transparency instills the desire to join, contribute and participate in the organization's success. And, if the church is in need of revitalization, being transparent about the need and keeping the parishioners informed and engaged in the journey, demonstrates an organization that is working towards its goals and its future mission.

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