

Tip of the Month

FEBRUARY, 2018 – LENT, AN OPPORTUNITY TO MODEL SELF-GIVING

Lent is just around the corner and for many congregations it is an opportunity to encourage members to follow practices of self-denial, self-sacrifice and other practices to more fully follow the example of our Lord Jesus.

At the same time, I have seen changes of emphases with regards to “giving something up” in Lent. While we may still have pancake dinners or fastnachts on “Fat Tuesday,” it is rare that eating and cooking practices change dramatically during Lent, and if you find “hot-crossed buns,” instead of a mere drizzle of icing, it will be nearly fully iced so that the cross is barely recognizable.

Healthy, mission-focused congregations use Lent as an opportunity not only to give sacrificially and with the possibility of self-denial, but also to model those same qualities by choosing special projects in the local or global community that go beyond the congregation’s own budget or its regular support to the synod and ELCA. Here are some of the projects I have seen in bulletins, newsletters, and websites:

- Sunday School classes (either each class or Sunday School as a whole, depending on the size of your SCS) choosing a project from the ELCA Good Gifts catalogue.
- A congregational focus on the local food bank or homeless shelter or other known and respected local agency, or with our partner synod in Tanzania.
- Support for an identified need of one of our Lutheran Charity agencies (the agency can help identify a need within your projected budget). A specific need generates more interest and involvement.

The idea, of course is to give the consistent message that we have enough as individuals to share even more with those in need. And, we have enough as a congregation (even those with financial struggles) to share with those in need. The impact of modeling generosity cannot be overestimated. As you undertake your special offering, don’t forget these basics:

- Clearly identify and strongly publicize the project.
- Keep members informed of progress and thank those who are giving
- If SCS or another group takes on a special project, publicize it and encourage them.
- At the end of Lent – the second Sunday of Easter – CELEBRATE the new life made possible by the generosity of those who gave extra.
- Show the results of their giving with a letter from the organization or better, photo’s of the impact your gifts have made.

Generosity grows as we consistently give messages sufficiency and model generosity personally and congregationally.

Larry Smoose,
Synod Generosity Team