Tip of the Month

# February, 2019 “Hospitality: The Warm Heart of Generosity”

ELCA staff member Steve Oelschlager writes in the most recent issue of *Stewardnet*, “How might our life together regularly teach and encourage people to want to be part of something bigger than themselves, sacrificing self for the benefit of others?   
  
I think the answer has everything to do with creating remarkable cultures in which hospitality is revered, emphasized and practiced. At the center of this culture is an awareness of what we want for people, not just what we want from them. Hospitality involves food, love, empathy, warmth and caring. It means helping people to feel that they belong, they matter, they are noticed and heard. It is the most reliable source of social capital within congregations and beyond for better lives and a better world. It also happens to be the way of Jesus.”

I think Oelschlager is correct, and it is often an over-looked area of stewardship – our relationships with others. At a time when politics is polarized and people are increasingly suspicious of those who are different from themselves, we desperately need a place where hospitality is evidence of God’s love and acceptance of all people. And, not surprisingly, congregations that exhibit these qualities are most likely to increase their membership. And, while most congregations are getting older on average, believe it or not, some are growing young.

In that same *Stewardnet* issue, the book [*Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*](https://community.elca.org/page.redir?target=https%3a%2f%2fwww.amazon.com%2fdp%2fB01L9IVGCM&srcid=192256&srctid=1&erid=697c06be-595d-4697-9a71-ea6b3622c121&trid=697c06be-595d-4697-9a71-ea6b3622c121) explores what those congregations are doing. It turns out that cool music and programs are not nearly as crucial as authentic relationships, warmth, and hospitality. “In our analyses of the terms young people and adults use to describe their own churches or parishes, we noticed repeated words such as welcoming, accepting, belonging, authentic, hospitable, and caring. We began to call this the warmth cluster. Across the board in statistical analyses, the warmth cluster emerged as a stronger variable than any one program.

So, during these cold months of winter, why not begin a conversation in your congregation on increasing the warmth of hospitality as part of our stewardship of relationships? And, if you want to download this latest issue of *Stewardnet* and to be placed on the list to receive it regularly, email your request to: constituent.care@elca.org.

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