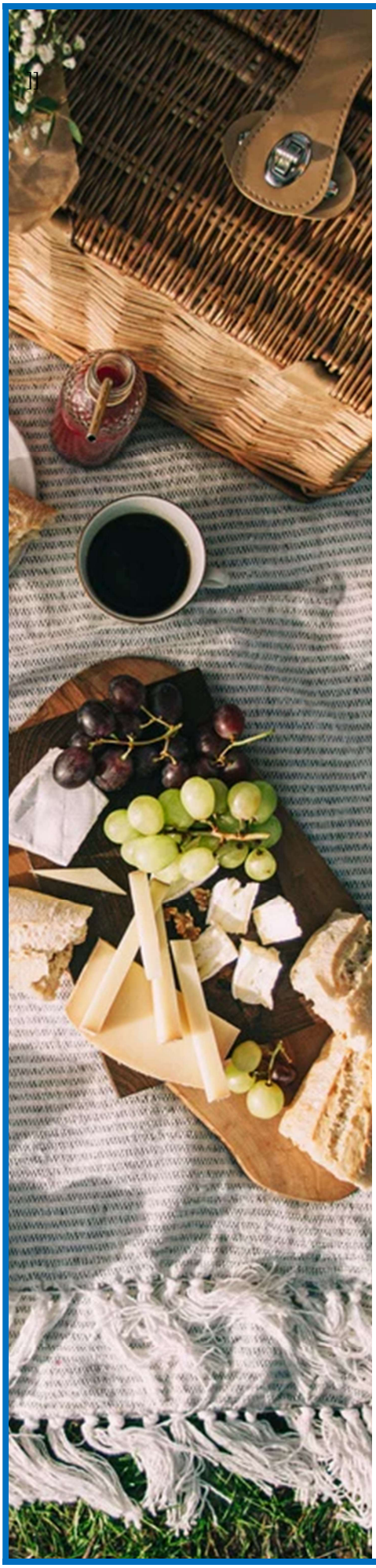
3 - 30 AUGUST
gather & share
SERVING A GOD OF ABUNDANCE
ANGLICAN PARISH OF LOWER HUTT

stewardship

/ˈstjuːədʃɪp/

A biblical doctrine of stewardship defines one's relationship to God. It identifies God as the owner and humans as managers. It is the recognition that we do not own our lives, our money, our talents; instead, they are "on loan" from God to be used for His purposes.



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week one

BRING A PLATE

You are invited to a picnic.

At our AGM, Annette painted the picture of stewardship within our parish through the image of a picnic. This is a picnic where everyone is welcome, no one person brings everything, and no one compares baskets. Abundance comes from showing up and sharing what we can.

Stewardship works the same: many come together within the community, bringing with them whatever 'plate' they have to share. It's not just about financial contributions; some people bring their time, skills, expertise, or passions. There is no pressure or comparison between contributions. Some people may bring snacks, and some people may bring platters, but all gifts are received with gratitude and recognised as valuable contributions.

READING

"LIKE GOOD STEWARDS OF THE MANIFOLD GRACE OF GOD, SERVE ONE ANOTHER WITH WHATEVER GIFT EACH OF YOU HAS RECEIVED."

1 PETER 4:10

We are currently operating within a reality where many parishes are facing significant financial pressure – and, therefore, significant financial anxiety. This is not a problem that is unique to our community. However, expanding our understanding of stewardship invites us to transform our understanding of meaningful gifts, reframe resourcing challenges as opportunities, and to trust fully in God's providence.

WATCH:

BIBLEPROJECT – GENEROSITY BIBLICAL THEME

bibleproject.com/videos/generosity

ACTIVITY:

Pair up with someone else in your study group. Spend a prayerful minute, asking God to reveal the gifts, talents, or passions that He has blessed this person with. When the minute is up, share what God has revealed with the other person, and perhaps even share with the group.

If you are partaking in this activity solo, spend a minute with God asking Him to reveal to you a person who needs to be encouraged to step into the authority of their gifts.

READING

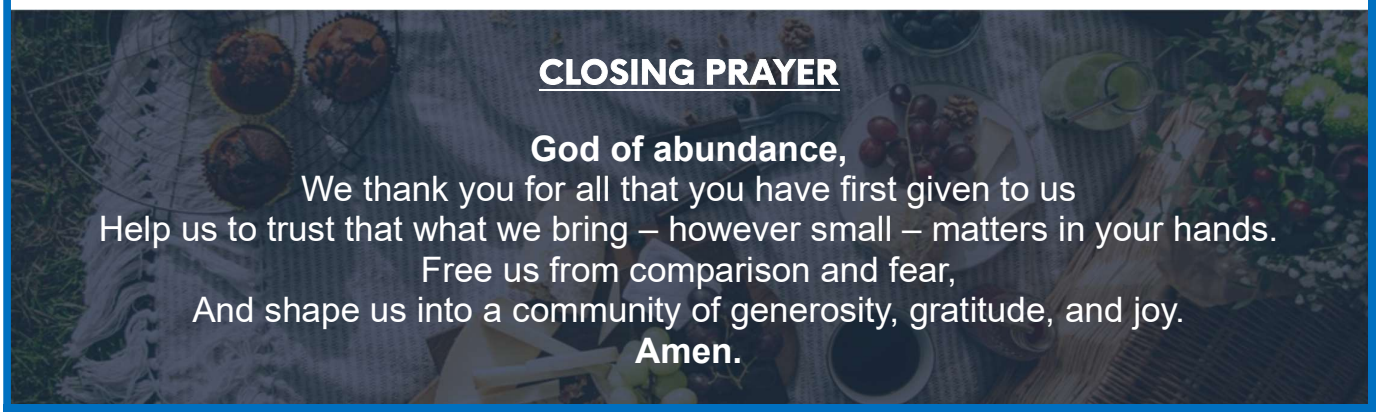
"EACH OF YOU MUST GIVE AS YOU HAVE MADE UP YOUR MIND, NOT REGRETFULLY OR UNDER COMPULSION, FOR GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER"

2 CORINTHIANS 9:7

Gratitude and trust are the necessary ground for engaging in good stewardship, as all gifts that we have to share are first given to us by God. This then means that stewardship is not about what we do with those gifts, but rather about understanding who God is; God is a generous host, and we are His guests in a world of abundance! By trusting in God's providence, we are free of the lie of scarcity.

Reflective Questions:

- ★ How do we speak about giving as a parish? Is giving is spoken about openly, theologically, and joyfully, or reluctantly and apologetically?
- ★ How can we better honour time and skills as forms of giving alongside money?
- ★ How does trusting in God's generosity change your perspective on your own generosity?



CLOSING PRAYER

God of abundance,
We thank you for all that you have first given to us
Help us to trust that what we bring – however small – matters in your hands.
Free us from comparison and fear,
And shape us into a community of generosity, gratitude, and joy.
Amen.

week two

HOLDING IT LIGHTLY

We serve a God of generosity.

Like a picnic, stewardship assumes shared responsibility because everyone is invited to bring something. Nobody owns the picnic and everybody eats. The gifts we bring are just that—gifts. We come together not to gain influence or control, but to share what God has first entrusted to us.

The foundation upon which we build our stewardship practises is the understanding that God owns everything and we are entrusted with his resources to do good. God blesses us not to have more, but to give more. We do not own the resources and gifts we have, but we hold it in trust on behalf of the true owner.

READING

"DO NOT SAY TO YOURSELF, 'MY POWER AND THE MIGHT OF MY OWN HAND HAVE GOTTEN ME THIS WEALTH.' BUT REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD, FOR IT IS HE WHO GIVES YOU POWER TO GET WEALTH,"

DEUTERONOMY 8:17-18A

Our role is that of stewards and not owners. We are merely caretakers entrusted with God's resources to do good – and this shift in identity can mean everything to how we operate as a parish and a community. Because money, time, skills, and talents are held in trust by God, these gifts can become a source of injustice if treated as private wealth. Fortunately, the Bible teaches us that the antidote to this is found in radical generosity.

WATCH:

PRACTICING THE WAY – GENEROSITY: ALL WE HAVE BELONGS TO GOD

https://youtu.be/_K5sdN341rk

ACTIVITY:

Place a basket in the centre of the group. On separate slips of paper, write: one thing you possess, one skill you're proud of, and one ministry or role you hold. Offer these into the basket as a sign that they belong first to God, then pray together that they would be used for God's mission.

READING

"THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S AND ALL THAT IS IN IT, THE WORLD, AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN IT."

PSALM 24:1

Sometimes generosity comes with strings attached. We may find ourselves wanting our gift to secure influence, determine priorities, or leave a visible legacy. Yet stewardship invites us to trust the wider discernment of the church. Once a gift is given, it is no longer ours to control. Like every dish at the picnic, it becomes part of a shared meal.

The same temptation exists in our service. We may begin volunteering out of love, but over time our ministry can become "our" ministry. We can become protective of our routines, resistant to change, or convinced that only we know how things should be done. Stewardship reminds us that our ministries are gifts entrusted to us for a season. We serve the Church; we do not possess it.

Reflective Questions:

- ★ What am I most tempted to treat as "mine" rather than God's?
- ★ Have I ever expected my giving or my service to give me greater influence or control?
- ★ What would it look like for me to hold my gifts, my ministry, and my resources more lightly this week?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord of all creation,
We confess that we sometimes hold tightly what you have entrusted to us loosely. We have sometimes called 'ours' what belongs to you. Give us the courage to be true caretakers: accountable to you, attentive to our neighbours, and free from the lie of scarcity.
Amen.

week three

THE GIVING IS THE GIFT

Vision makes generosity joyful.

When talking about stewardship and stewarding resources wisely, we tend to make one key mistake: we start the conversation with money, rather than with God. When we begin conversations about stewardship with money, we can lose sight of the thing we are actually gathering to do. Money is a means to achieve a vision, not the vision itself.

We are not gathering resources simply to keep the picnic running. We are gathering because we believe the feast is worth sharing. A parish with no vision can still have a budget. It can have a bustling service, a full ministry team, and keep the lights on. However, a budget alone cannot tell us why the picnic is worth attending. Vision gives our generosity somewhere to go.

READING

"THE EYE IS THE LAMP OF THE BODY. SO, IF YOUR EYE IS HEALTHY, YOUR WHOLE BODY WILL BE FULL OF LIGHT"

MATTHEW 6:22

Money has a peculiar ability to make itself look like the most important thing in the room. It can help make ministry possible, but it can also distort our vision when it becomes the first (or only) thing we see. We should give our time, skills, knowledge, and money not because we are being pressured to keep an institution alive, but because we have seen something beautiful and want to be part of it.

WATCH:

PRACTICING THE WAY – THERE IS MORE JOY IN GIVING THAN RECEIVING

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIjinmjf5DU

ACTIVITY:

Take a moment to silently reflect. Individually, write down some specific visions or dreams you have for the future of our parish – the more specific the better! Then, share your vision or dream with the group, and work together to come up with a 'shopping list' of the skills, knowledge, and resources required to bring this vision to life. Finally, take a moment again to reflect individually on the shopping list, considering what needs would bring you genuine joy to fill.

READING

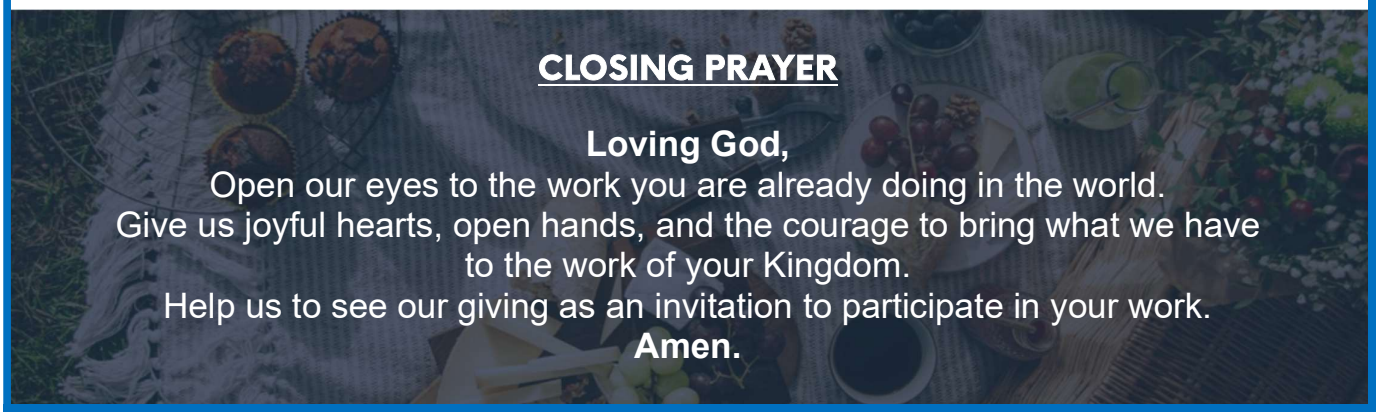
"A GENEROUS PERSON WILL BE ENRICHED, AND ONE WHO GIVES WATER WILL GET WATER."

PROVERBS 11:25

Generosity is not simply a means to an end. It forms us into people who participate in the generous life of God. We do not give first because the Church has a need and *'oh I suppose that ought to be addressed'*. We give because God has given us a vision of what the world can become, and we want to participate in making that vision real.

Reflective Questions:

- ★ How would we know if our giving was genuinely joyful rather than driven by guilt, fear, or obligation?
- ★ What would you love to see our parish make possible in the future? What would we need to bring together to make it happen?
- ★ How might we know that our giving is helping us participate in God's Kingdom, rather than simply funding an organisation?



CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God,
Open our eyes to the work you are already doing in the world.
Give us joyful hearts, open hands, and the courage to bring what we have to the work of your Kingdom.
Help us to see our giving as an invitation to participate in your work.
Amen.

week four

PREPARED TO SHARE

The picnic is ready.

A picnic doesn't happen because someone has a good idea for a picnic. At some point, someone has to pack the sandwiches. Someone has to bring the fruit. Nobody brings everything by themselves. The picnic works because people bring what they can.

Over the last three weeks, we've explored stewardship as a way of participating in God's abundant life. We have considered the gifts we have received, the things we are tempted to hold too tightly, and the vision that makes generosity joyful. Now we arrive at the practical question: What will you bring to the picnic?

READING

"FOR ALL THINGS COME FROM YOU, AND OF YOUR OWN HAVE WE GIVEN YOU."

1 CHRONICLES 29:14B

But if we are able to bring something, then we are invited to do so deliberately. That might mean making a financial commitment. It might mean offering time, skills, or expertise. It may also mean an offer of your network within the parish.

As generosity is a community-focused activity, it is often more fulfilling when done in community – for example, a homegroup may take on cleaning a space or running a fundraiser together. It also allows our parish to be enriched though collaboration, such as working together to bring extra groceries for the foodbank or sponsor a church consumable, such as candles, wafers, or children's ministry supplies.

WATCH:

BIBLEPROJECT – MATTHEW 6:19-23: TRUE WEALTH AND GENEROSITY

https://bibleproject.com/videos/matthew-619-23-true-wealth-and-generosity/

ACTIVITY:

Take a pledge card and write down one resource you can offer to the parish – this can be time, skills, financial resources, or expertise. Write down what you can comfortably and joyfully give and place the card in the 'picnic basket'.

READING

"THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF GIFTS, BUT THE SAME SPIRIT DISTRIBUTES THEM. THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SERVICE, BUT THE SAME LORD. THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF WORKING, BUT IN ALL OF THEM AND IN EVERYONE IT IS THE SAME GOD AT WORK."

2 CORINTHIANS 12:4-6

We have a large parish, and sometimes it can seem that providing for all is an utterly insurmountable task. However, even small contributions, given joyfully and faithfully, can have incredible power. We have 160 people on our electoral roll, but 450 people on our pastoral roll. Just taking the electoral roll, small contributions can make a huge difference:

- If 160 people each gave $5 every week, that would add up to $41,600 over a year.
- If 160 people each gave $10 per week, that would add up to $83,200 over a year.
- And a contribution doesn't have to be financial to be real. At a living wage of approximately $30 an hour, 20 minutes of service represents around $10 of value.

The point isn't that everyone needs to bring the same thing. The point is that the feast becomes possible because people bring what they can. Abundance comes from everyone participating, and when every contribution is set together, it far surpasses what any one person could provide.

The picnic is already underway. The blanket has been laid. The invitation is open. What will you bring?

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father and provider,
You have welcomed us into a feast we did not prepare. Give us the courage to notice what is needed, the imagination to see what we can offer, and the willingness to take our place among those who serve,
Amen.

ways to hold our parish in prayer

IF SPONTANEOUS WORDS AREN'T YOUR THING, YOU CAN PRAY THE FOLLOWING COLLECT:

Generous God,
All that we have comes from you.
Teach us to receive your gifts with gratitude,
to hold them with open hands, and to share them with joy.
Guide us as we gather, shape us as we serve,
and make us faithful stewards of your abundant love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

PLEASE ALSO FEEL FREE TO BRING AND SHARE ANY WORDS, IMAGES, CREATIONS, OR STORIES THAT COME FROM YOUR PRAYER PRACTICES.