

Pastors' Academy Enhances Leadership and Drives Stewardship

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When I received the invitation to participate in the *Pastors' Academy for Stewardship Formation*, I looked at it as an opportunity to address a concern I had in ministry for a number of years. I have found it difficult to help members grow in their giving to the church.

As a long time tither, I felt that the answer was to encourage people to see the importance of tithing. If they could only understand the blessings received as a result of this practice, they would certainly want to move towards the goal of tithing. In addition to the individual benefiting, the congregation's income would increase and so would its ability to do ministry. In my way of thinking, tithing was the solution. Individuals would grow spiritually and congregations would grow financially.

It really is not that simple! I had discovered many years ago that there are several factors which motivate an individual to give. I viewed the opportunity to participate in the *Pastors' Academy for Stewardship Formation* as a way of discovering those and to become more effective in communicating as to encourage others to grow in their giving.

While I did accomplish those goals through my participation in the program, I discovered much more. It clarified the difference between fundraising and stewardship. Simply put, fundraising is using those approaches to funding ministry that are used by other non-profit organizations. Stewardship, however, is rooted in our theology. It is based on who we perceive God to be and who we are as God's people. Stewardship is a response to what God has done for us. It is not limited to a special season or emphasis of the church year.

As I began the *Pastors' Academy for Stewardship Formation*, I did not know that my congregation would experience a drastic decrease in income. This was a result of life changes for our two top givers. The project part of the course gave me the opportunity to develop a plan to help our congregation navigate through this challenge. I was able to use resources from our readings, notes, and discussions which enabled me practically and theologically to lead my congregation.

I discovered along the way that a congregation will follow the example of their pastor in regards to stewardship. The pastor brings personal attitudes and experiences regarding money and stewardship to their leadership. We spent some time exploring these within the course of our time together.

The *Pastors' Academy for Stewardship Formation* helped me to recognize not only how my attitudes and experiences regarding finances and giving impact the congregation but that the leadership of the church does the same. The organization models stewardship. When resources are used responsibly and this is creatively communicated to the congregation, people will grow in their personal stewardship.

In addition to the learning I experienced through the curriculum and the implementation of my project, I also benefited from the community developed over the time spent together in the *Pastors' Academy for Stewardship Formation*. In some cases, relationships were strengthened with colleagues I had known before the program began. There were other who I had only met briefly prior to the academy. I learned from each of its members not only regarding the topic of stewardship but also as we fellowshiped together at the events. These relationships have positively impacted my ministry.

I found the *Pastors' Academy for Stewardship Formation* to be a valuable experience. I would encourage anyone, who has the opportunity to participate in this program to do so.