



ILLINOIS Focus

Editorial



JOHN GRYS,
PRESIDENT

As we've entered into the 2024 year, I find it helpful to be reminded that the theme of this issue is perhaps as important today as it has ever been. The tremendous amount of uncertainty carried over like accumulated piles of trash to a dumpster will challenge us. And whatever it is we think we possess, in actuality we merely steward. The origins of all things did not begin with us and it will not end with us. I would like to encourage all of us to steward our influence during this year. The Creator of all things has given us as human beings a capacity for influence. From many places around us will come the voices (and yes, possibly shouts) to utilize that gift of influence in ways counter to the pursuit of God's eternal kingdom. This kingdom (initiated in the coming of Jesus) operates concurrently while we do life in this increasingly anxious and complex age. That ancient prayer of Jesus, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," brings to fore the agency with which humanity has been endowed. In these words, Jesus builds a bridge from the unseen to the seen. "Father, what You are intending and doing and being in Your eternal space, make available and present on this anxious and alienated planet. Show up."

And for reasons that eternity will reveal, God has decided to show up primarily through people. And therefore, as agents of this "showing up God," we are stewarded the gift of influence. And this gift finds its nexus in those most familiar places: Costco lines, parent-teacher conferences, church board meetings, and driving on the Stevenson during rush hour. And this year, I pray it will show up in our national election. I am increasingly convinced that our use of this gift of influence can actually become clearer as we step into the unfamiliar

ever occurred. They entered the fire and found God. In fact, amazingly in that moment before entering, God had not really shown up in a profoundly personal way. They would only meet the Person of God in the fire. And the stewarding of their influence brought them arm-in-arm with the Creator of the universe. Influence stewarded well brought them fire...and God Himself.

So, for 2024, I ask, "How will you steward the gift of influence bestowed on you?" In those "circle of influence," will

Volume 11, Issue 1 - Jan/Feb 2024

Issue Focus

Stewardship

and the uncertain. Those three Hebrew countercultural stewards recognized this. And because of their willingness to steward their influence for the kingdom of God, they received as a reward... fire. And plenty of it!

Yet, that stewarded gift in that moment generated an experience they would never forget (nor will we now). They entered into the depths of those flames and what they found, they could never have imagined. Never in their experience nor in any story they had heard from their children's Sabbath School classes had something like this

you influence toward "resume virtues" or "eulogy virtues?" (Thanks, David Brooks). Or, to go a step further, will we steward influence toward those things that do not last or toward the One who is, and was, and is to come? With the agency provided by the Creator, I pray we will proactively seek to influence those in our circles toward this remarkable God who gave all so all could enter eternity with Him.

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Niños mayordomos: presente y futuro



La mayordomía no es solo una responsabilidad de los adultos. También debe transmitirse a las siguientes generaciones. La mayordomía debe enseñarse y cultivarse en los corazones y en las mentes de los más pequeños. La formación y preparación de niños como mayordomos no solo contribuye en su desarrollo personal, también sienta las bases para futuras generaciones responsables y comprometidas con los aspectos fundamentales de la preservación de todo lo que Dios nos ha dado para administrar.

En este espacio exploraremos la importancia de la mayordomía, enfocándonos en la formación de niños mayordomos.

LA SEMILLA DE FIDELIDAD

La Palabra de Dios dice: “Instruye al niño en su camino, y aun cuando fuere viejo no se apartará de él” (Prov. 22:6). Los judíos tenían el deber de preparar a sus hijos para ser fieles a Dios. Moisés recibió claramente la indicación de Dios para su pueblo, dice la Palabra: “y estas palabras que yo te mando hoy, estarán sobre tu corazón; y las repetirás a tus hijos, y hablarás de ellas estando en tu casa, y andando por el camino, y al acostarte, y cuando te levantes” (Deut. 6:6,7).

Desde una temprana edad los niños deberían aprender sobre la importancia de cuidar lo que se les estaba dando. La semilla de la fidelidad se planta desde muy pequeños. Todo aquello que los padres pongan en el corazón de sus hijos será practicado por sus hijos, si se les enseña con el ejemplo. A medida que los niños crecen van haciendo suyas las enseñanzas de los padres y así se preparan para asumir roles de mayor responsabilidad, serán buenos mayordomos, y líderes donde quiera que vayan.

LA EDUCACIÓN A TRAVÉS DEL EJEMPLO

Los niños aprenden mejor a través del ejemplo, la mayordomía no es una excepción. Por esta razón, los padres y maestros deben ser modelos al vivir las enseñanzas que comparten. Cuando los niños ven a los adultos actuar como fieles mayordomos repetirán sus enseñanzas y las integrarán en sus propias vidas.

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PASTOR LUIS EGUILUZ,
LAKEVIEW HISPANIC SDA CHURCH
HUMBOLDT PARK HISPANIC SDA CHURCH
NORTH HISPANIC SDA CHURCH





A Gift-Oriented Universe

A young Benedictine Monk chafed at having to ask his Abbott for every little thing he needed. Here was one grown man asking another grown man for permission to buy a shirt. It was ridiculous.

The Abbot was trying to teach the lesson that no matter how hard you work, everything you have is by the grace of God. That I can fell a tree, cut it up into lumber, and build my house can make it seem like I have some control over this world. We say things like, “I worked for that car.” Which is to say, “My toil and my gifts earned me the right to buy it.” Statements like these are seductive because they suggest ours is a closed universe defined by supply and demand; a cosmology reduced to market forces.

On the cusp of blessing Israel with the Promised Land, God knew the risk he was taking: “You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth” (Deut. 8:17-19).

The God who had appeared to Moses in the burning bush; who had unleashed plagues on Egypt; who had parted the Red Sea; who had created a river out of a rock, was afraid of being

forgotten. It must have seemed like such a ridiculous fear: Who could ever forget that journey of miracles? Ah, God might say, wasn’t there a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph? So, God feared, there would be an Israelite who knew not God. Prosperity has a tendency to rewrite God out of our stories—casting our moxie and mettle in His place.

Former President Barack Obama took a lot of heat in 2012 when he said, “If you’ve been successful, you didn’t get there on your own.” Obama was reminding the nation that there were no solo success stories. It is truer still when we realize how much we all depend upon God. As our Creator, we are His intellectual property, meaning He has a decisive stake in everything we accomplish. Evolution, then, is collusion around the idea that we got here on our own—a way of defrauding God by—you guessed it—forgetting Him.

The first step of being good stewards is to come clean and acknowledge that this brain and these hands are gifts. Or, as that Benedictine Monk put it, to accept that we live “in a gift-oriented universe.” By all means: buy a house, work hard, and get a good car. But we must remember God by recognizing that all of it—including life itself—is a gift.

PASTOR MATTHEW LUCIO,
PEORIA SDA CHURCH





PASTOR IRA BARTOLOME
DOWNERS GROVE SDA CHURCH

My dad's vegetable garden taught me much about stewardship. Lessons on timing, diligence, hard work, multiplying, and respect of resources gave opportunity for me to mature. Every day there is a task to do, so do it. Much of the work can be physically hard. Don't shy away from it. In fact, lean into it and enjoy it. Following my dad's lead, the work in the garden would have a multiplying effect. Less hard work long term and great produce. The availability of resources was not ideal. What do you do? Work with what you have and know that what you have is enough. However, the biggest revelation about gardening was that I do not have a "green thumb!" This was humbling when I first attempted growing a garden on my own. Yet beyond this humble admission the joys of gardening came to produce many spiritual lessons about stewardship.

I recently came across the North American Division's stewardship website where they offer the 7 T's of Stewardship. They suggest: time, talents, treasure, trust in God, theology, testimony, and temple. This perspective gives a wholistic approach to stewardship. Check it out! There is much there to nurture your stewardship life. But for now, know or be reminded that everything belongs to and is under the authority of a loving God.

"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.

Stewardship From Dad's Garden

All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist," Colossians 1:16-17. It all starts with God and is because of God and really is about God. He is sovereign over all! This is comforting.

We are reminded to "Honor the Lord with your possessions," Proverbs 3:9. They are all His anyway.

"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God," 1 Peter 4:10. Do not make life about yourself, but about the love of others and the grace of God.

Biblical stewardship is rooted in this understanding and how we manage His love and gifts is an act of worship. Reflecting on my time in dad's garden I probably did it because I had to. If I had to do it over or could be back in his garden, I would pull weeds not out of obligation but out of a love and respect for him. My dad has passed away but

there are a few plants I grow each year as a reminder of him. I don't have to have a green thumb. I cannot obsess about the end result of gardening. I just need to let love be the motive for gardening. Gardening was about a relationship with my dad. Similarly, I do not need to be the most successful steward of God's gifts and resources. Worry about the end goal of stewardship is fruitless. I just need to let His love be the motive for stewardship. Stewardship in relationship!

Some of you have already done the winter work for your garden. Others are procrastinating. And still others dream about having a green plant in their home much less a garden. Are there lessons for you in gardening that will help you in being a better steward for God? Here, at the beginning of 2024 nurture your stewardship. Take a humble approach to it. See it as worship to a loving God. And ask the question, how does my stewardship bless God today?



Do I Own or Do I Owe?

We were probably all in a situation where we had mistaken a time for an appointment or some kind of due date. It was a very busy day for me, and I must have had a really puzzled look on my face, when I returned to my parked car, only to see a policeman signing a parking ticket, which he was about to place under my windshield wiper. I immediately cried, "Sir, why?!" I thought I had another 30 minutes before I could no longer park there. Before, when searching for a parking spot, I carefully checked the street signs, and was very happy to find that spot on a busy NYC street. It was my understanding that everything was fine. I could park my car for free for another few hours, so I could go about my business, no problem. Responding to my cry of desperation, the policeman calmly replied, "Sir, today is Wednesday. The only day when you are not allowed to park here." You can guess my feelings...

English is my second language and I have noticed several words which completely change their meaning when you change or mistake just one letter. Think of to "own" and to "owe". They sound very close to my ear yet they have opposite definitions. You wouldn't like anyone who borrowed your money to mistake them, don't you? You want to be sure they understand that they owe you money instead of owning your money. I believe that understanding this difference practically affects our stewardship practices. Although it is quite counterintuitive in culture which places high value on independence and private property, I strongly believe

that the more we "own" the less we tend to relinquish and give. The more we "owe" the more we are ready to share. This is why, when the Israelites were about to cross the Jordan River and for the first time in a generation get a possession of the land, houses, fields, and orchards, God warned them:

"Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God..., lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; ... then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth," Deuteronomy 8:11-13,17-18.

If you are reading this article, it means God gave you another year of life with all its blessings and opportunities. Take them and use them with your best skills and knowledge. Multiple them with His blessing to be a blessing for those around you, remembering Him who OWNS and gives everything. Don't forget how much we OWE Him and give Him glory with everything you do and by who you are in this world. This year, be a grateful and generous Steward!

ARKADIUSZ BOJKO,
STEWARDSHIP DEPARTMENT





JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2023

CHECK THE BAGGAGE

We travel a lot here in the Youth Department. Whether we're heading to Camp Akita for a Pathfinder Camporee, trekking across the country for meetings, or visiting our local churches—we're always on the go, so learning to travel light has become a must. I'll admit this has never come easy for me.

I distinctly remember racing through the HartsfieldJackson Airport in Atlanta trying to catch my connecting flight to Gainesville, with my backpack and my overstuffed carry-on, only for the attendant at the gate to tell me that I had to check my bag because there was no more room onboard. I was frustrated for multiple reasons. First things first, I wanted to save that extra \$30. Checking bags isn't always cheap, so I thought I could stuff everything into this little bag. But I was also frustrated because, had I known I was going to have to check it anyway, I could have checked it from the beginning and saved myself the hassle of hauling this extra weight around this massive airport. The burning sensation in my legs and the lack of oxygen in my lungs wasn't worth the stress of that moment. Reminiscing on that trip, as we stare at the beginning of a new year, makes me wonder what other baggage we need to check this year.

2023, at least for me, was full of moments that I wish I had let go of sooner— situations and circumstances that I didn't need to hold onto that just slowed me down in every way. Moments that, at the end, had me wishing I had let God lead in the first place instead of learning the hard way.

Maybe that's true for you too. I don't believe that God wants us to live that way— burdened and stressed out. In fact, He says so in Hebrews 12 as He reminds us to let go of the weight that holds us down. This new year, my hope for you is that you would let Jesus take some of the pressure off, rather than trying to run through your life with unnecessary heaviness. Give Him some room to show you what living the life He designed for you can look like. His thoughts are so much higher than our own, so trust me when I say He won't steer you wrong. Let Jesus order your steps in 2024, check that baggage right at the start, and in December you'll be grateful you did.

STACEY DEPLUZER,
ASSOCIATE YOUTH DIRECTOR



Pastor Jon Remitera

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "It's not the destination, it's the journey." While our ultimate destination is to be with Jesus Christ forever, life and ministry are about the journey, and God has certainly taken me on quite the journey! I was born in Agana Heights, Guam, but my hometown is Orlando, Florida where I grew up. I had no desire or intention to become a pastor, but God placed a calling on my life that I finally chose to answer in college. He led me to transfer to Southern Adventist University, where I received my BA in Theology. Next, I went to Andrews University where I received my M.Div. For the last 9 years, I've served in the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference as a pastor and church planter, while also receiving a Master's in Biblical Counseling and beginning a Doctorate in Ministry for Media and Communication.

Now God has called me to the Illinois Conference to serve as the pastor of Epic Church. I am humbled to be called and excited to work alongside the leaders and members of Epic to serve the community and share the Good News of Jesus in Chicago! The journey continues and I cannot wait to see what this chapter brings!

WELCOME TO OUR TEAM



Pastor Bill Kasper

I have served in ministry for more than 20 years as a pastor, author, youth director, and ministerial director. My wife, Vania, is a nurse and a diabetes educator and my son, Jonathan, is in his freshman year at Walla Walla University. Our ministry has taken us from small farm towns to large bustling cities and from the desert southwest to the arctic landscapes of Alaska. While in Alaska, God transformed my ministry in a major way: I was deeply convicted to focus my ministry on the importance of having a saving relationship with Jesus. We are excited to see what God has planned as we come to serve and minister to the Hinsdale church family

WELCOME TO OUR TEAM



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Debemos involucrar a los niños en actividades prácticas. Los niños bien preparados serán útiles sirviendo a Dios y al prójimo. Tenemos que prepararlos en las diferentes áreas de la mayordomía. Cuidar su cuerpo, desarrollar sus talentos, administrar sabiamente su tiempo y ser fieles en sus diezmos y ofrendas. También cuidar de nuestro medio ambiente y la proclamación del evangelio.

EL DESARROLLO DE HABILIDADES

Los padres debemos ser conscientes que los hijos son nuestros discípulos y nuestra enseñanza será decisiva en su formación como cristianos en el presente y en el futuro. Si los preparamos para que sean buenos mayordomos del Señor serán felices hijos de Dios. Esto implica el desarrollar sus habilidades prácticas que les permitan cuidar activamente todo aquello que esta en su entorno. Debemos enseñarles a ser organizados, que valoren y aprovechen el tiempo y que tomen decisiones basadas en principios. Si les enseñamos a establecer metas alcanzables y a planificar actividades diarias, tendrán una mentalidad de mayordomos y crecerán como fieles discípulos del Señor.

Elena de White dice: "Tiene que dar lecciones que afecten el carácter y la obra de toda la vida de aquellos a quienes instruye" (MCP, tomo 1, pág. 81)

También tenemos que enseñarles principios financieros básicos como el ahorro y el separar la parte que le entregamos a Dios como el Diezmo y la ofrenda a la iglesia.

IMPACTO PERDURABLE

La mayordomía nos prepara para la vida. Debe ser un estilo de vida. El impacto de un niño fiel es motivador e inspirador y esto nos ayudará a construir mejores hogares, iglesias más fuertes y comunidades más sostenibles. Recordemos, "la primera educación de los jóvenes modela generalmente su carácter para toda la vida" (MCP, tomo 1, pág. 14).

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