



**uniting
church**
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

CHURCH COUNCIL

Stewardship Devotion



Seeds of Growth

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

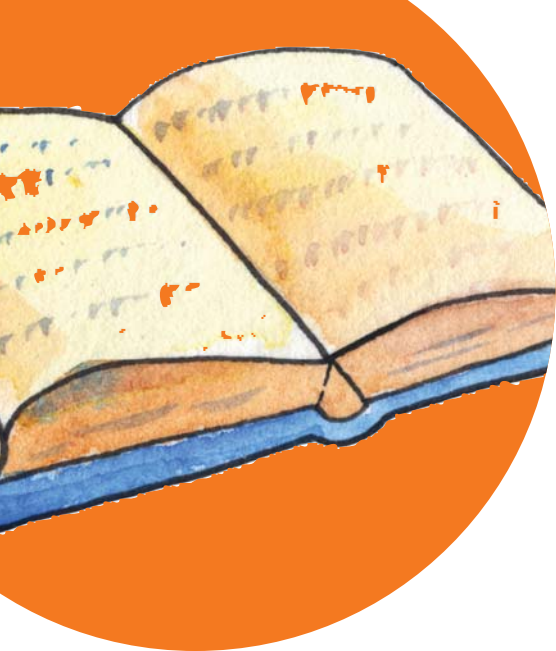
The following devotional resource is provided to assist Church Councils as they reflect upon the change in our Church's stewardship program from *Living is Giving* to *Seeds of Growth*. We hope that you find this resource supportive of your ministry and enlivening of your conversations on stewardship.

In the Uniting Church there is wonderful diversity in our congregations and faith communities. Mindful of this diversity, we offer this compilation of resources to assist your devotion planning. You may find it helpful to utilise one of the choices from each of the headings below to assist in creating a devotion for your Church Council meeting. There is also a *Seeds of Growth* reflection that is offered to assist with your group discussion and future praying and planning.

CHURCH COUNCIL
Stewardship Devotion

Scriptural focus resources _____ 4
Opening prayer resources _____ 5
Seeds of Growth reflection _____ 7
Other resources _____ 9
Concluding blessing resources _____ 11





Scriptural Focus

RESOURCES

1. “He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. **He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”** (Luke 21:1-4)
2. “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, “He scatters abroad, He gives to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.” He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. **You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us;** for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.” (2 Cor. 9:7-12)
3. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by God, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.
4. Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people into more and more impiety, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are the Lord’s” and, “Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness.” In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary. **All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work.** (2 Timothy 2:15-21)
4. “Moses said to all the congregation of the Israelites: This is the thing that the LORD has commanded: Take from among you an offering to the LORD; **let whoever is of a generous heart bring the LORD’s offering;**...All the Israelite men and women whose hearts made them willing to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done, brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD.” (Exodus 35:4-5 & 29)

Opening Prayer

RESOURCES

1. Generous God, your Spirit brought creation into being: bountiful, life-giving and renewing. Your ways are the improbable being a surprise, doubt becoming a delight, and seeds cocooned in dark soil springing forth into buds of potential. We are part of your creation, and the improbable, doubting and entombed spaces in us become the delight-filled surprises of life that our communities and world need. We pray for your Spirit. We remember Jesus, whose ways confronted his community, disturbed the customary and brought forth witnesses of abundant life and even resurrection. May who we are and what we do in all matters be life-bearing and part of the declaration that you are our God, we are your people, and this community of faith is your church.
Amen.

2. All knowing One, in the moments of our striving - uncertain, sceptical and distrusting - come to us and guide our discernment.

You know those moments and we plead for your enlivening.

All loving One, in the moments of our living – longing, hoping and faithful – come to us and breathe your very self into our souls.

You know those moments and we pray for your leading.

We gather as people of faith and disciples of Jesus: wanting to be what he would have us be, responding in ways he would have us serve. If there be anything in our living that limits how we might be part of scattering new seeds or creating places of fertile growth, come and sift out those ways that new life might blossom through us.

Come, Spirit, come; equip, renew and revitalize your church in manifold ways. Come, Spirit, come into our hearts. Amen.



Opening Prayer

RESOURCES (CONT.)

3. It is hard, Lord, to step away from the habits of the past or set aside the grievances of long ago or even those recently held. Yet, we are your people. Sure enough, we have made that pledge and, before that, you claimed us as your very own. In waters of baptism and moments of broken bread and shared cup, we are reminded of you. In times gathered around font and table, we are reminded of whom we are called to be. In all that is shared in worship, witness and service, may your presence be what leads us. May all of who we are be used for your kingdom building.

Make what we do be of joy: evangelizing to all nations and generations. Make what we do be of mercy: justice seeking in solidarity with all of your peoples. Make what we do be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Redeemer and hope.
Amen.

4. Nurturing Spirit, who comes through stints of decay and in times of birth, awaken us to what needs to conclude and rouse in us what needs to become. Enable us to see who we are as your people beyond the wooden, concrete and sandstone that surrounds us. Send the gift of hope to enable new sight. Send the gift of faith to stimulate new ways of life. Send the gift of yourself to break into any habits or once life-bearing rituals that have now become hollow. Release us from anything that keeps us from risking and being your people of faithful adventure.
Amen.

5. You crafted a people who went in exodus from enslavement, beyond deserts to crossing boundaries into new life. You returned them from an exile of despair to build sanctuaries composed of your people, praising and serving. May we know we are part of this people. May all the tabernacles of your worship, witness and service be life-giving and joyful; may all sanctuaries be composed of your disciples, daring and hopeful.
Amen.

Seeds of Growth

REFLECTION



Growing up, most of us have experienced the surprise of a seed budding up from beneath a dark blanket of soil. At first, we might have questioned: “Is that a shoot bursting forth?” In returning a short time later, or even the next day, our spirits would have known the elation: Yes! There it is!! It is budding!

We may not have even known what type of seed it was, but it becomes precious to us and we want it to grow and perhaps even be part of new life budding again.

It is amazing how God creates: in our world and in God’s faithful people.

There is a delightful song, called “It Only Takes a Spark,” which has the following verse:

***What a wondrous time is spring when all
the trees are budding,
the birds begin to sing, the flowers start
their blooming;
that’s how it is with God’s love, once
you’ve experienced it:
you want to sing, it’s fresh like spring, you
want to pass it on.***

(Budjohn Songs, Kurt Kaiser, 1969)

We know the joy of seeing growth and being part of something that is filled with life.

We all, because we are people of faith, want to be life-giving. That is part of who God calls us to be.

The scriptures are filled with images of seeds budding hope, seedlings bursting forth surprises, and vines and trees bearing fruits and other seeds for a future not yet known, but entrusted. The Gospels are replete with calls for us to be a baptised and baptising people, witnessing to all nations.

Our faith histories are brimming with examples of new families welcomed and ministry enacted in Christ’s name.

Our *Basis of Union* reminds us that we are a people whose denominational history is from those who came in unity ... in sole loyalty to Christ ... and to hear anew the commission of the Risen Lord to make disciples of all nations (from Paragraph 1 of the *Basis of Union*). We believe in a transforming God who brings forth life, and that The Uniting Church ... will continue to belong to the people of God on the way to the promised end. ... [praying] that through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God’s eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord (from Paragraph 18 of the *Basis of Union*).

Seeds of Growth

REFLECTION

Is this not part of our hope? And isn't the act of planting, a hope-filled response? The new *Seeds of Growth* stewardship program is an invitation to be part of a hope-filled response: to plant seeds, some known and some unknown, and pray God's gift of nurturing spirit upon all we offer for God's ministry in our local communities, region and beyond.

Many of our congregations have contributed to the *Living is Giving* program; yet, some 35% of congregations do not give to Living is Giving. With the introduction of *Seeds of Growth*, the whole Synod - will work together in resourcing the essential ministries of our church and enabling new seeds to be planted (like Saltbush, for ministry in rural New South Wales, and Pulse, focused on youth and young adult faith formation and ministry practice). This is not a funding request. This is an invitation to join the rest of the church to be sowers. This is a summons to be a part of something life-giving and, ultimately, that is who we are called to be: people of Jesus Christ bearing fruit in faithful witness.

Please pray and discern how you can give for the work of the Church: a work that you are a part of, a work that needs your prayers and your gifts of money and other resources.

Come, let us
plant some
Seeds of Growth
together!

Please consider the following questions in your discussion

1. How might our Council become more proactive in learning more about the wider ministries and their support services that are in our Synod?
2. Could we engage with Synod leaders or utilise *Insights* magazine in assisting our congregation(s) in learning about and praying for the current ministries and new ministry seeds that will be planted?
3. How might we share in the resourcing of our church further?

Other Resources

A STORY: ONE OF MY OWN

A long-time member and proud grandfather stood at the baptismal font with his family for the baptism of his baby granddaughter. Another infant from another family that was new to the congregation was baptised at the same service. Following the service, the two families intermingled at the front of the church as they took turns having their pictures taken. At one point, the mother from the new family needed to get some things out of her bag, and the grandfather from the other family offered to hold her baby.

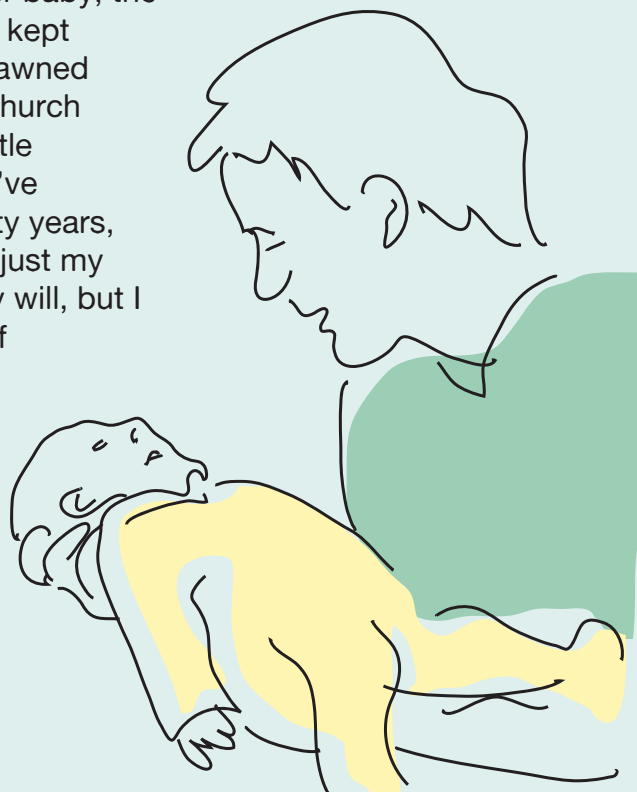
Other church members were mixing and greeting, and several commented on the grandfather with the baby, and he found himself saying several times, “Oh, this one isn’t mine; I’m just holding him for a minute.”

Monday morning the grandfather called the pastor at the church office and said he wanted to see him right away. The pastor assumed the worst, thinking somehow the long-term member was upset about something from the day before. When the grandfather arrived at the church office, he told the pastor, “I want to change my will to include the church, and I want to talk to you about how to do that.” The pastor was stunned and couldn’t help asking about what brought the grandfather to this decision.

The older man’s eyes grew moist as he said, “Yesterday I realised something while I was holding that other baby, the one from the family that just joined the church. I kept telling people that wasn’t my child, but then it dawned on me that it was part of my family, part of my church family, and that I have a responsibility for that little boy just like I have for my own granddaughter. I’ve been a member of this church for more than forty years, and in God’s eyes I’m grandfather to more than just my own. I’ve taken care of my own children with my will, but I realised I also need to provide for the children of the church. So, I want to divide my estate to leave a part to the church as if the church were one of my children.”

Extravagant generosity has a God-given vision and faith to plant seeds for trees whose shade they will never see.

(from Robert Schnase in *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, page 107-08)



Other Resources

PSALM OF STEWARDSHIP

Holy One in heaven we come to meet you:
again as Jesus taught us we use your name and address!

Yet it's not in heaven but in this world where we meet you:
our daily life and humanity are the world of your creation.

You've made us responsible for our world:
you gave us what we have and what we are,

we are but stewards of your bounty:
all good things are ours, held in trust from you.

Our money and our possessions are not ours by right:
our time and our talents have been given us of your goodness,

we have to learn to be responsible stewards:
to hold this earth in trust for our descendants,

to sit loose to what we say we own:
throughout our earthly pilgrimage to travel light;

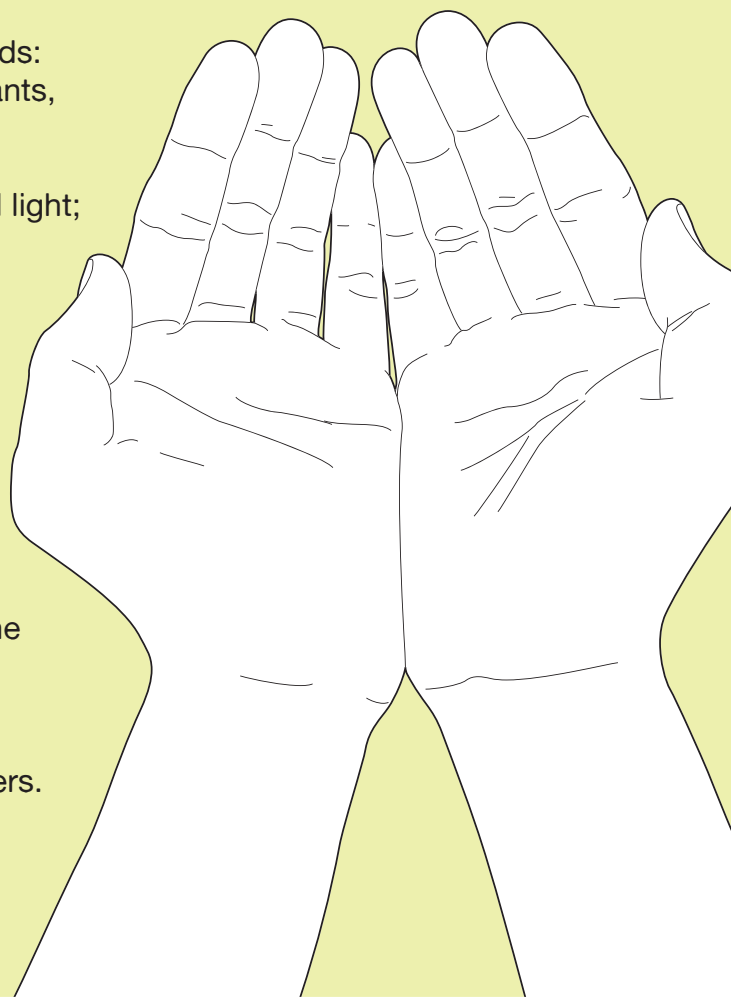
you've taught us what you require of your
stewards: it's not what we do or fail to do,
but our obedience you will judge.

Help us to value not success but
faithfulness: grant us to see the real
value of the money we use;

we can use worldly wealth to win
ourselves some friends: not money, but the
love of money, is the root of all evil.

It's not great wealth that we worship:
we honour your faith in us that never wavers.

**From *Stewardship of Life* by John
Hammersley | www.psalmssoflife.com**



Other Resources

SONGS / HYMNS

- **Be thou my vision** (*Together in Song*, # 547)
- **Give thanks, my soul, for harvest** (*Hope Publishing Company*)
- **Guide me, O thou great Redeemer** (*Together in Song*, #569)
- **It only takes a Spark {we want to pass it on}** (*Budjohn Songs*)
- **Seek ye first the kingdom of God** (*Together in Song*, #745)
- **Take my life, and let it be** (*Together in Song*, #599)
- **Today we all are called to be disciples of the Lord** (*Kenn Carmichael*)

Concluding Blessing

RESOURCES

1. Surrounded by your Spirit, we go from here, assured that with, or even in spite of us, your Kingdom will never be prevented. Enable us to see spirit-led surprises, dare to scatter seeds of growth, and be part of your nourishing people. May your grace be upon us, your love be within us, and your power enable and led us.
Amen.
2. Here we are, Lord.
You know us completely.

We pray that the discernment and decisions of this gathering will reflect your purposes and enable seeds of growth to take root, burst forth with life, and spread here and beyond.

We pray for all our living, that we be sowers, seed-carers and fruit-bearers. May new life be shared in your name. God, go with us completely.
Amen.
3. May the signs of your presence evoke in us a deeper longing. May the font of baptism remind us of nations and generations in which your new life is to be shared. May the table of your generosity remind us of the ways of loving stewards and the daring disciples. By holy word, wind and water, renew and lead us.
Amen.
4. O Lord, let us dip our hands into the basket of seeds with which you have entrusted us. Scatter broadly and lavish generously the seeds of growth assigned to us, your stewards. Send your Spirit upon all our living, that nothing is withheld from your kingdom-building. Son, Spirit & Father, be in us as we go to worship, witness and serve.
Amen.



Seeds of Growth
INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

More information?

Contact your Presbytery Representative for more information

Resources

More resources are available for download at nswact.uca.org.au or contact the Synod Communications Team on (02) 8267 4304.



**uniting
church**
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

Devotion written by Rev. Stephen Matthews (Sydney Presbytery).
Compiled and designed by the NSW and ACT Synod Communications Team.