



Live *simply*

We experience change at a rapid rate. Along with change comes the pressure to upgrade our homes, cars, technology, possessions, education, vocations. At the same time, we are encouraged to economize, or perhaps we are forced to consider doing so because of our circumstances. In this dichotomy, we long for a simpler way and a less demanding life.

God can help us with all this! We hear lots of talk, but we also want to hear God talk. As your congregation uses this Live Simply stewardship emphasis, listen for God's voice above the clutter. The Live Simply emphasis offers four weeks of worship focus, culminating with a simple meal of Stewardship Stew and a commitment Sunday. The emphasis has four subthemes:

- Live Simply: Follow Jesus
- Live Simply: Face the Truth
- Live Simply: Act Together
- Live Simply: Share Enough

Paul shares his simple secret of contentment in Philippians 4 when he says that he can do all things through Christ. As your congregation learns to more fully follow and rely on Jesus while loving and serving in community, you can experience the joy of a simple yet generous and abundant life and faith—life that really is life.

This Live Simply center section is based on the Make It Simple resource for stewardship education and annual response published by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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Phone/Fax 855-278-4372, Email: office@stewardshipresources.org;
Website: www.stewardshipresources.org.
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TIMELINE

Week One:

- Begin organizing for the nine-week process:
 - four weeks of preparation
 - four weeks of the program worship theme
 - one week of follow-up
- Meet with your pastor and make sure he or she is on board with the Live Simply theme and is ready to designate four worship Sundays to Live Simply.
- Find the right facilitator (from your own congregation or a guest) who has a holistic understanding of stewardship, an appreciation for your church size and culture, and the ability to guide the Live Simply program effectively.
- Recruit members of your Live Simply Planning Team. Their tasks will include planning and putting together printed resources, helping with worship audiovisuals, coordinating the meal events, planning related social media, working with children and youth on the Live Simply message, and structuring follow-up for those unable to attend a meal event.

Week Two:

- Meet with your Live Simply Planning Team:
 - Reflect on the importance of the theme and sub-themes named in the Four Worship Sundays section on page 4.
 - Review the highlights of this program. Confirm dates for the leadership team meal event and the Stewardship Stew Simple Meal event(s).
 - Decide how many Stewardship Stew Simple Meal events will work best for your congregation. If you need more than one,

you might choose different days of the week, perhaps a weekend plus one or more weekdays. If your church is large enough to require more meal events, begin your meals during week six.

- Order Live Simply stewardship emphasis materials from the Ecumenical Stewardship Center web store (stewardshipresources.org/resources), including printed materials, worship starter videos, and the Companion Resource.
- Send a print or electronic introductory letter to your congregation from your pastor and facilitator about the Live Simply worship series, key dates, and the commitment process for supporting God's work through your church's ministries in the year ahead.
- Determine who else in the church family can help with specific aspects of the program.
- Start e-mail and social media messages if they are part of your plans. In your messages, emphasize extending the church's outreach and creating more opportunities to share the good news in people's lives.

Week Three:

- Prepare any reflection questions or devotional materials if you are planning to offer those for church members to use at home.
- Decide whether or not you want to offer a small group during the four Live Simply weeks, using the studies from the Live Simply Companion Resource.
- Confirm logistics for the Stewardship Stew Simple Meal events. When and where will they take place? Who will emcee the mealtimes, and who will greet people with nametags? Who will provide the food? Schedule all meals to be completed by the Saturday before Live Simply Commitment Sunday (week eight).

TIMELINE

Week Four:

- Start getting sign-ups for participants at the Stewardship Stew Simple Meal events. Consider sending invitations that list the optional meal times along with a reply card to everyone.
- Complete a theme banner and/or other visuals for the worship series.
- Hold a meal event for your pastor and spouse and your church leadership team and their spouses:
 - Present an overview of the Live Simply theme. Have a discussion about the importance of trusting God to meet our individual and congregational needs to “take hold of the life that really is life” (1 Tim 6:19). Emphasize that the generosity of this group is an important expression of their congregational leadership.
 - Briefly review your congregation’s history and patterns of giving.
 - Review the plans for the Live Simply emphasis and the Stewardship Stew Simple Meal event(s).
- Allow time for those present to fill out and return their commitment cards for God’s work through the church in the year ahead.

Week Five - Week one of the Live Simply Sunday worship series:

Live Simply: Follow Jesus

- Use the Live Simply: Follow Jesus sub-theme as your worship focus.
- Continue with sign-ups for the Stewardship Stew Simple Meal events.

Week Six – Week two Sunday worship:

Live Simply: Face the Truth

- Use the Live Simply: Face the Truth sub-theme as your worship focus.
- Continue with sign-ups for the Stewardship Stew Simple Meal events. If your church is too large to accommodate all the congregational meal events in one week, start them this week.

Week Seven – Week Three Sunday worship:

Live Simply: Act Together

- Use the Live Simply: Act Together sub-theme as your worship focus.
- Begin or continue the Stewardship Stew Simple Meal events.

Week Eight – Live Free Sunday worship:

Live Simply: Share Enough

- Use the Live Simply: Share Enough subtheme as your worship focus.
- Testify how these past weeks have helped the congregation learn to trust God to meet our individual and congregational needs to “take hold of the life that really is life” (1 Tim 6:19).
- Have additional commitment cards in the pews and consecrate all the commitment cards received from the leadership team, the meal events, and that Sunday.

Week Nine

- Follow up with people who were unable to attend a Stewardship Stew Simple Meal event (see follow-up section on page 7 of this insert).

FOUR WORSHIP SUNDAYS

Here are some ideas for your corporate worship during the four Live Simply Sundays:

Week One: Live Simply: Follow Jesus

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Matthew 6:25-33

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches the crowds and his disciples about their relationship with God and their discipleship in the world. In these verses, Jesus speaks about how God provides for our every need and how undue concern for our possessions can get in the way of our living as his disciples.

These words speak to us today as we wrestle with the daily realities of our lives. We often find ourselves overscheduled, overextended, and overdrawn. Our lives are cluttered with too many commitments, too many possessions. We can be consumed by it all: we wonder, "Will I have enough?" We fear not wearing the right clothes, not driving the right car, not having the latest electronic toy, not living in the right house. Too often our things define who we are.

Jesus comes to us in the midst of our fears and announces: "Do not worry! God has provided for all of your needs!" What does it mean for us to live in relationship with Jesus? How might our daily discipleship help us to live more simply, trusting in God's abundance?

GIVING MAGAZINE ARTICLE FOCUS: "Simple Living and Christian Stewardship" by M. Douglas Meeks

Week Two: Live Simply: Face the Truth

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Psalm 51:10-12, NRSV; Mark 4:37-41, NRSV

Why is it so hard to live simply? Daily we face a complex world of our own making. We feel pushed and pulled by forces beyond our control. And when things feel like they are out of our control, we often feel afraid. We become like the disciples in the boat with Jesus. We are afraid that we are perishing, tossed about by the wind and the waves in our lives.

Read Mark 4:37-41 and imagine being one of the disciples in the boat. When you decide to wake Jesus up, what do you expect of him? What do you need from Jesus in the midst of the storms of your life? Can you hear Jesus's question in the moments of calm in your life? "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

Jesus's question can lead us to hear the words of the psalmist, "Create in me, O God. . . Put a new and right spirit within me. . . Do not cast me away. . . Do not take away. . . Restore to me. . . Sustain in me." Look at all that God does in our lives. Where do we focus? On the wind and waves? Can we focus instead on what God provides? And how do our choices matter for what we see?

GIVING MAGAZINE ARTICLE FOCUS: "Not So Simple: Living in Christ" by Adam J. Copeland

Week Three: Live Simply: Act Together

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: John 13:34-35 NRSV

In the upper room, at the last supper, Jesus gives this new commandment to his disciples: love one another. They (we) are to love one another as he has loved them (us). It is about witness to the world. It is how the world around us will see and know that we are disciples of Jesus. This commandment is about

community. It is about the common good. It is about our living as disciples of Jesus. He commands that we follow him together. He commands us to love one another.

These are strange and foreign words in a culture that worships individualism. It is an odd concept in an economy that is based on the premise that the one who dies with the most things wins. It is hard to comprehend this commandment in a time when we all seek something more—more house, more car, more status, more power, more stuff. In this drive for more we find ourselves isolated and feeling alone. We are driven to protect our stuff. So we fear our neighbor, we build higher fences and security systems, we live in fear of losing what we have accumulated.

Jesus commands us to love one another. He calls us into relationships; he calls us into his community. His command is to love one another as he has loved us! In this community we move into relationship with Jesus and one another.

This truly is a radical command. In our culture of individualism, none of us has enough. We all are driven to get more. But in this community of Jesus's disciples, we begin to see that God provides us with more than enough!

GIVING MAGAZINE ARTICLE FOCUS: "Generosity in Community: An Interview with Shane Claiborne"

Week Four: Live Simply: Share Enough

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Philippians 4:11b-13

What does contentment feel like? This is a difficult question in our current culture. When surveys have asked "How much is enough?" responses have been consistently "20 percent more than I have now." If that is true, how do we break the endless circle that this leads us toward? It is always "20 percent more." We are told over and over every day: "You don't have enough. . . What you have is fragile and could be gone at any moment. . . You have to go get more!" These messages come from a world focused on scarcity.

In this setting how do we understand our relationship with God? God is creator and we are God's creatures. How do we live in relationship with our creator? Martin Luther reminds us in his explanation of the first article of the Apostles' Creed "that God has created me and all that exists. . . God daily and abundantly provides. . . all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life...out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all!" It is in this relationship that we recognize that God has abundantly provided us with all that we need. Living in that abundance, we give of the blessings we have received.

If we focus on the scarcity, we never have enough. When we focus on God's abundant blessings, there is more than we can ever imagine. Learning from Paul's message to the Philippians, we can be content with what we have because we know that we are blessed and can "do all things through him who strengthens us."

GIVING MAGAZINE ARTICLE FOCUS: "Confessions of a Recovering Consumerist" by Maribeth Westerfield

Electronic Witness

Communicating electronically is crucial, even if your church doesn't do that on a regular basis. Most North American denominations offer websites to their congregations. At least 207,000 congregations have their own websites in the United States. As for Canada, thousands of churches have websites in the Ottawa area alone. People of all ages have access to laptops, tablets, and smart phones to receive personalized information about the world; whatever the purpose, "there's an app for that." Even the most print-oriented grandparents e-mail their grandchildren, and once-stodgy businesses now use e-mails as part of the backbone of their communications.

Five hundred million people use Facebook, half of them logging in every day. Facebook and e-mails are most popular among baby boomers (people born between 1946 and 1964) in the United States and Canada, and baby boomers now dominate church leadership in North American congregations. Pinterest has attracted more than four million unique daily visitors. The age of these visitors is overwhelmingly between twenty-five and fifty-four, the age range that is missing in most North American churches.

Take social media seriously if you've ever heard the complaint, "We need to attract more young people, more children, more youth." Two hundred million people consistently use Twitter, which gets 36 million unique visitors from their desktops each month. The number of tweets topped 300 billion two years ago. In fact, tweets are so popular that several commercial television programs ask for and post Twitter responses during their on-air time. When it comes to Tumblr, a microblogging and multimedia site, 110 million users are registered, hosting more than 180.7 million blogs. Instagram, a photo-sharing social network, has become a massive social network with more than 75 million daily users, primarily teens and twenty-somethings.

It would be foolish not to take advantage of this communication explosion. So, create a social media team for this nine-week period. Make sure the team members are the youngest or most media-savvy members, preferably middle school through college age. Have the

team chair share the primary messages of your theme and let them generate at least two dozen ways to get the words and pictures out. Even if your team is only two people, they can have a huge impact!

Many churches already have an e-mail prayer list or database for highlighting events within the congregation. Name one or two people to generate e-mails to send out on whatever time basis you have determined. Would a weekly e-mail be helpful to help members build excitement over the nine weeks? Be sure to send out an e-mail at least to introduce the program and each of the four weeks when Live Simply is your worship theme. Encourage the rest of the team to use other social media as often as they can. If your church has a website or a presence on Facebook, set up a Live Simply page and post photos as you go along. Consider creating and posting video testimonies about how your congregation is learning to Live Simply.

Organize an audiovisual team to create and post video testimonies about how your congregation is learning to Live Simply. What if just two folks are interested during these nine weeks? That's fine! One person can serve as the interviewer and the other can film it on a tablet camera (iPad has beautiful resolution) or even on a smart phone. Film interviews can be ten minutes or less or even two-minute responses to questions related to the worship sub-themes. Use these clips during worship, online (with permission, of course!) and perhaps even at the Stewardship Stew Simple Meal.

Initially, an electronic effort may sound like a lot to small churches. At the same time, it will feel natural to congregations that already communicate electronically on a regular basis. Thousands of local churches are located in rural or open-country areas that already depend upon electronic messaging, while millions of people in their thirties and younger depend solely upon Internet technology. If Live Simply is worth inviting people to participate, don't leave anyone out!

Stewardship Stew Meal Event

Inviting people to give does not need to be elaborate or complex! Create a welcoming, casual, relaxing atmosphere at this intergenerational event with a simple meal and powerful message. Make sure your congregation knows that everyone is invited, young and old alike.

1) Prepare the Simple Stew to be ready by the time of the event:

- Have an individual or group prepare onsite;
- Have several individuals or families prepare and bring pots of stew;
- Have everyone prepare stew and add it to one big pot onsite!

2) When the meal is ready, gather together:

- Gather in a circle (perhaps around the stew!). Sing an opening song or hymn familiar to most participants. Pray this prayer: "Dear God, help us to follow Jesus, face the truth, act together, and share what you have provided. Amen!"

3) During the meal, have conversation:

- Specifically ask persons from different generations to share their thoughts about what Live Simply means.
- Invite persons to share how they are considering living more simply.
- Invite discussion on how living more simply can lead to greater generosity.
- Invite discussion on how your congregation might Live Simply and yet be more generous.

4) After the meal, share a brief program

(approximately twenty minutes):

- Encourage everyone to remain for the program: clean-up, socializing, and playtime can wait until the program is finished.
- Begin with the skit "Jesus Teaches Us How to Live Simply": see next page for script.
- After the skit, the appropriate person (leadership team chair, stewards chair, etc.) should share the church's plan for ministry and mission in the year ahead. Consider preparing a narrative budget; for an example see <http://www.centerforfaithandgiving.org/Resources/AdministrativeResources/BuildingaNarrativeBudget/tabid/950/Default.aspx>. Ask all those present to review the materials at the tables. (Don't forget children's commitment cards!) They may complete their commitment cards at the event, or take them home for prayerful consideration and bring them to worship the following Sunday or bring or mail them to the church office.
- End with a familiar song and prayer.

Stewardship Stew Meal Event

5) Follow up after the meal event(s):

- Send a thank you letter to everyone who participated in any part of the Live Simply meal events, including planners, speakers, leaders, cooks, etc.
- Provide alternative ways of giving for people who are unable to attend a meal event and thank all who have been involved in this venture.
- Mail people questions for conversation at home, a commitment card, presentation materials from the meal events, and any interactive reflection questions on the theme of Live Simply.
- In your mailing, provide a contact name and phone number if they have any questions about the program or any of the issues raised.
- Put Live Simply commitment cards and envelopes in the information area at your church for at least a month after the end of your program.

STEWARDSHIP STEW RECIPE

(serves 8-10)

Allow two hours preparation time.

2 lbs. lean beef (or another protein source)

1 qt. water or broth

2 c. sliced potatoes

1 c. sliced turnips

1 c. sliced carrots

1-2 onions, chopped

3 T flour

Salt and pepper

Garlic, parsley, or a few other favorite herbs

1. Sauté the meat, stirring constantly. When all surfaces are well-browned, put it into the soup pot.
2. Cover with water and bring to a boil; skim fat off the surface. Simmer for one hour.
3. Add carrots, turnips, onions, and potatoes; simmer for one more hour.
4. Thicken with 3 tablespoons of flour diluted with enough cold water to pour easily.
5. Let the stew come to a boil again and cook ten minutes.

LIVE SIMPLY SKIT

JESUS: Hello, everyone! Tonight I'd like to talk to you about living simply. Will you help me with this story? When God came to earth as me, Jesus, I was born in a manger. Pretty simple surroundings, eh? Can you help me sing about my simple beginning? Let's sing the first verse of "Away in a Manger" together.

GROUP: Sings first verse of "Away in a Manger"

JESUS: After I did some growing up, I was baptized and God gave me some simple directions: Tell others about God's love through word and deed. Let's sing thanks to God for those simple directions. You know the song; it's called "Hallelu, Hallelu."

GROUP: Sings one chorus of "Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah, Praise Ye the Lord," perhaps with the motions of standing up and sitting down.

JESUS: I spent years healing, preaching, performing miracles, and traveling around with my disciples. We didn't carry much stuff, and we tried to be generous to the people who needed us. Then I had to say goodbye and leave this world. There's a simple song we love that I'd like to sing with you now. It's called "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know."

GROUP: Sings one verse of "Jesus Loves Me."

JESUS: God acted simply through me, bringing joy to the world when I rose on Easter morning. Let's sing about joy with a song you've heard, "Rejoice in the Lord Always."

GROUP: Sings one verse of "Rejoice in the Lord Always," perhaps as a round.

JESUS: Ever since that time my followers have simply tried to follow the commandment I gave them, "Love one another." I still live in each of you, and I can help you to make the right choices about simply caring for the world and its people. As the body of Christ, you are simply and clearly part of this mission. Let's sing another joy song; this one is called "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy down in My Heart."

GROUP: Sings one chorus of "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy down in My Heart," perhaps with motions.

JESUS: I know that sometimes it's hard to simply trust God. It was hard for my disciples too, so I told them this story. (Matt 6:25-33, The Message)

"If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds. Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion - do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers - most of which are never even seen - don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

So you see, God cares for each of you very much!

JESUS: Finally, I have some very important words for you. These words tell you how to live your life. There are just three words. Simple, right? Three words that I'm counting on you to remember. Here are the words: Love one another. Can you say them with me?

GROUP: Love one another.

JESUS: I see some younger people here, some older people here—boys and girls, men and women. But everyone can understand these three words! Let's say them together again: Love one another.

Do you know what my church is? A church is a group of people acting out the commandment I just gave you: Love one another. When we truly love one another, we will want to help each other and even those who are not part of our church by being loving, kind, and generous. I'm counting on you to work together!