Stewardship, love and prophecy:
Three things that mean the same thing
By the Rev. Norma E. Malfatti

When explaining my role as director for evangelical mission and where stewardship fits in, I almost always start with this question: “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word stewardship?” The money you put in the offering plate? Pledge cards? Budgets and spreadsheets? A grateful response to God? What about discipleship? Justice? Evangelism? Love?

For many, stewardship means “the church is asking for money again.” It brings to mind that time every fall when the church tries to ensure there is enough money to fund next year’s budget. While the annual financial response may be wrapped up in religious language, at the end of the day it’s about the congregation’s need to receive rather than the giver’s need to give.

Stewardship encompasses so much more than money. It’s a way of life. It’s the integration of our faith in God and the way we live our daily lives—we are a church that is energized by lively engagement in our faith and life. Stewardship is a mindset, a culture and a discipline that can never be contained in an annual three- or four-week financial response. Clarence Stoughton, former president of Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio, says stewardship is everything we do after we say “I believe.” It’s the way in which we use all of the resources that God has entrusted to our care so we can love God and our neighbor. Stewardship is about love.

So if stewardship is about love, then every dollar a community of faith spends is about sharing God’s love and making disciples who will join in sharing God’s love. When you prepare to give your offering every week (or balance your checkbook and make note of your automatic giving), what acts of love are you hoping your offering is used for? Take a look at your congregation’s budget. Are you able to make a direct connection between your spending plan and the ways God’s love is shared? (Hint: You can do it! For instance, fellowship is an opportunity for people to develop relationship, with each other and God).

It’s with this focus that I invite you to consider spending time with the prophets this fall in Bible study, worship or your personal devotion. It could be said that when a prophet showed up, it was because Israel—either its leaders or the people as a whole—was being a bad steward. They talked about how money was spent, caring for one another, telling God’s story, health, peace and so much more. Whether your congregation uses the Revised Common Lectionary or the Narrative Lectionary, the fall is full of prophets who had some important things to say about stewardship and embodying God’s love. What are the prophets saying to you today? ☬

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Gational partners “adopt” each student and also pay $200 per person. The balance of the expenses are covered through fundraisers and Student Association funding.

The trips are just one part of the group’s commitment to community service and engagement. During the academic year, the group hosts two to three service projects per month, including a community dinner at First Lutheran Church, Family Promise, preparing meals for Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless, the Emergency Overflow Shelter and many others.

To learn more, visit ualbanycornerstone.org.

Sandy Damhof is director of Cornerstone Campus Ministry.

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During the week of Jan. 7, 11 members of Cornerstone Protestant Campus Ministry at the University of Albany traveled to Houston to help rebuild homes destroyed by Hurricane Harvey.

What do you remember about Hurricane Harvey? Often in our quickly changing news cycle we get a few images on our TV screens, may say a quick prayer and then we forget the disaster as the next breaking story comes along. The 2018 hurricane season was a full one—with lots of breaking headlines, one worse than another. For the people of Houston, Hurricane Harvey continues to be big news as they recover from the devastating impact.

Here are some facts about Hurricane Harvey: the Category 4 storm hit Texas on Aug. 25, 2017, causing $125 billion in damage, according to the National Hurricane Center. That’s more than any other natural disaster in U.S history except for Hurricane Katrina. Harvey made landfall three times in six days. At its peak on Sept. 1, one-third of Houston was under water. Two feet of rain fell in the first 24 hours. Flooding forced 39,000 people out of their homes and into shelters. Hurricane Harvey damaged 203,000 homes and destroyed 12,700. Federal forces rescued 10,000 people who were trapped in their homes or on flooded highways. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) moved 14,900 people into temporary housing. As of Sept. 1, 8,000 families had moved into 9,000 hotel rooms. The family we served was in a hotel until they could return home in late March.

While in Houston, the campus ministry group was hosted by members of Gloria Dei Lutheran, who took great care to provide housing in trailers on their church parking lot and lots of food. Almost every evening a different small group from the church provided us with a home-cooked meal.

As for the service part of the trip, the group partnered with the Fuller Center. Millard Fuller, the founder of Habitat for Humanity, had a vision that has impacted communities worldwide by providing affordable housing. The Fuller Center, the disaster aspect of the organization, works to help families by coordinating volunteer efforts and groups like ours. Cornerstone worked side by side with homeowners Eddie, Rochel and their children. The students removed the old roof and installed new shingles, built a few walls, poured cement for a few floor patches, installed a lot of drywall, and started to tape and mud the rooms. It was a full week and much was accomplished.

The trip was part of a long-standing tradition of winter break service-learning trips. Over the years, the group has made 10 trips to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina; a trip to Austin, Texas, to rebuild after wildfires; a visit to Birmingham, Ala., to rebuild after a tornado; two trips to the Arizona-Mexico border to serve immigrants; and a visit to Baton Rouge, La., after flooding in 2016.

Each student pays $200 toward the cost of the trip, which averages $800 to 900 per person. Congre-
Campus ministry at RIT

The purpose of The Table, the Lutheran-Episcopal campus ministry at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) is to:

- Provide an opportunity for the campus community to live out their faith through worship, study, fellowship and service.
- Communicate and cooperate with other faith communities at the RIT Center for Religious Life.
- Work with congregations and faith communities in the Rochester area to follow Christ’s command to love and serve all God’s people.

Each Sunday night, 15 to 25 students gather at 6:30 for worship in the Allen Chapel at RIT. Our students come from Lutheran, Episcopal and many other denominations. Some have little or no church background. We have several international students as well as a few deaf students who regularly participate in our ministry.

After worship, we enjoy a meal provided by local congregations. This is also a time for fellowship and group-building.

We also do service projects from time to time. We regularly help out with local congregations who provide a free dinner to those in need.

We give thanks and praise to God for all the support we have received from you. May God continue to bless our shared ministry to these students.

For more information, contact the Rev. Craig Swanson at cbcpm@rit.edu.

Using ELCA social statements to enhance faith practices

By the Rev. Lori A. Kochanski

Ever wonder what the ELCA has to say about issues like racism, criminal justice, abortion or creation care? How about human trafficking, gun violence, the death penalty, genetics or human sexuality? There are social statements that have been adopted by ELCA churchwide assemblies that address these issues and more.

Since its birth the ELCA, through the Church Council, has been intentional about gathering folks from diverse backgrounds into task forces for long-term study of social issues from a variety of angles. A task force will then craft a social statement that combines its conclusions on the topic into one document for consideration by the members of the church body who gather in assembly. Before consideration by a churchwide assembly, there are multiple entry points for engagement with the draft and study that are meant to include everyone who wants to be part of the creation of the statement.

The statements are not meant to tell you what you must think about social issues. They are intended to be helpful guides in beginning to understand and articulate your opinions when it comes to the issues addressed in the statements. I know of someone who read all the statements prior to serving jury duty. He told me that it helped him to be grounded...
When God won’t stop calling

By Mary L. Johnson

Candidates preparing for rostered ministry come from diverse backgrounds and bring a great variety of gifts to the church. Each has a different story of answering God’s call to ministry, but many share the experience of facing challenges before they could begin the candidacy process. For some candidates from our synod, it took years—or decades—struggling with obstacles before they could begin seminary. Some of the most common challenges are family responsibilities, finances, educational requirements and lack of confidence. For candidates like Laura Wade, though, “as each obstacle presented itself, God provided a path through it all.”

For some with family responsibilities, new pathways for study such as distributed learning make seminary possible. Susan Salomone had four young children when she first applied for candidacy. She says planning and persistence have been key. “When my youngest was in Pre-K, I felt the tug again to explore candidacy and now I had the time to commit to the process,” she said.

Rick Mollenkopf-Grill first felt called to rostered ministry in high school but didn’t enter candidacy and seminary for more than 20 years. God kept “nudging” him along, he said, as he returned to school for a bachelor’s degree and then served as a youth worker. Jim Vitale credits conversation and discernment with trusted mentors for giving him the confidence to trust his call. For Jackie Jefferson, the affirmation of her pastor was “transformational.”

For each of these candidates, continued depth and breadth of experience in the church and the affirmation of others encouraged them in their journeys toward candidacy to prepare for rostered ministry. If you believe God is calling you to serve as a rostered minister, the first step is to talk to your pastor. LL

Then, consider how you can engage others in conversation using the study guide. You also may want to notice how you are called to use what you learned as a catalyst for action.

Also, you can have an impact on the statement that is currently in development on women and justice. Access the draft at elca.org/womenandjustice. After you read it, you can submit your comments via the website or at the hearing in Syracuse on Saturday, Sept. 8. Comments are being accepted until Sept. 31, 2018. The statement will be formally considered for adoption at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August 2019. LL

in his faith as he experienced the jury selection process. It also helped him feel like he was not alone in his thinking and actions.

At West Central Renssalaer County Lutheran Parish in Troy, Vicar Samantha Rossi used the social statements as part of a weekly Bible Study and conversation.

When I was in high school, our Sunday school teacher taught a series on the social statements. We would read through each one together while making a connection to current events. It made for lively and practical engagement on important issues.

There are many ways these statements can enhance your faith practices. The first step might be choosing a statement to read. You can find them at elca.org/socialstatements. Each statement has a study guide that can accompany your use of the document.

By Mary L. Johnson

is assistant to the bishop for candidacy and mobility.

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