

## **That's stimulating!**

by Mark E. Lail

*To stimulate: to rouse to action by encouragement or pressure; to spur on or incite.*

That's what a fresh cup of steaming hot coffee does for me at 6AM. That's what your government hopes you will do for your economy, so they are mailing you a check in May or June for about \$600 per taxpaying adult and \$300 for their children. The hope you will stimulate the electronic gadget market, the over-priced athletic shoe market, or perhaps the fried-food market.

With family stimulus payments in the ballpark of \$600 to \$3,000, visions of sugarplums, HD TVs, quad-runners, living rooms sets, gaming systems, and down payments on anything from the Harley Davidson store are dancing through heads.

What a great time to teach stewardship! This unexpected government bonus check is an opportunity to stimulate the hearts of God's children. Here are a few ideas that might stimulate discipleship:

1. Stimulate Non-Tithers. Teach tithing and let it start with the stimulus check. Have a special stimulus tithe Sunday and celebrate first-time tithers as they give from their "free money" checks. Consider having a Stimulus Envelope and celebrate as the total contribution grows through the summer.
2. Stimulate World Evangelism. Overpayment of the World Evangelism Fund specifically funds outreach to new world areas. Use this time to teach the effectiveness of the World Evangelism Fund and use the stimulus giving for overpayment. Helpful [brochures](#), such as "What is the World Evangelism Fund?" and "Where Does Your Church Dollar Go?" are available from Stewardship Ministries.
3. Stimulate Personal Savings. Encourage members to invest in an IRA or emergency cash reserve account with a portion of their check. Some for the Lord, some for the future, and some for the present is a great choice for a stimulus check.
4. Stimulate Education. Even if as few as 10 families gave generously from their stimulus checks, it would be enough to start a scholarship fund at a Nazarene College or University that would benefit students from the church for decades to come.
5. Stimulate Debt Reduction. Payments toward principle can save bundles in future interest charges, especially early in the life of a loan. Wipe out a chunk of debt from stimulus checks and celebrate the great stewardship of God's resources.
6. Stimulate Compassion. Somebody within the ministry reach of your church needs a good, loving touch. The stimulus check is an opportunity to show extraordinary love. Or pick a project at [www.ncm.org](http://www.ncm.org).
7. Stimulate Generosity in Children. Have families bring their checks and their children to church for a night of learning and sharing. Involve the children in a group decision and let them actually spend a portion of their family's check. Many will be thrilled to choose hot meals over Hot Wheels. The children will learn to think of others and will see how personal sacrifice may impact the world.
8. Stimulate Apportionments. With most families in the church receiving four-digit government bonuses, take this opportunity to pay off a budget early. Choose a budget – the Pensions & Benefits, Education, or World Evangelism – and pay it off in one month! It will bless the entire year.

Retailers have a plan for the stimulus checks in your church. And they know very well that people make spending choices with their hearts and justify their choices with their heads. The marketing pros at the Bass Pro Shops know exactly what touches hearts!

As pastors, we teach, preach, and model stewardship at every opportunity. The economic stimulus payment checks are an opportunity to help disciples examine their hearts and to make choices appropriately.

*Mark E. Lail, DMin., is the director of Stewardship Ministries of the Church of the Nazarene.*

## **Beyond Time and Money: Becoming Stewards of Creation**

by Jonathan E. Twining

Being a pastor's son and growing up in the Church, I heard dozens of sermons on the topic of stewardship, and most of them addressed two things: time and money. Well, there is another whole side of stewardship that most church leaders have never even considered, and that is stewardship of the earth that supports all life.

Many of the students I teach are astounded that they have never heard a sermon about caring for creation from their pastor. I'd like to encourage each of you that receive this newsletter to make it a point to preach at least one sermon on this topic some time in the next year, because it is a message that we all need to hear and heed.

A starting point for a sermon on environmental stewardship, or creation care, is the issue of ownership. The earth belongs to God and not to us (Ps. 24:1); we were put here to be keepers and caretakers of the earth (Ge. 2:15).

God made the earth to glorify and praise him (Ps. 19:1, 98:4-8), and to point the way to him (Ro. 1:20; Job 12:7-10). However, when human beings turned to sin and selfishness, creation became frustrated and degraded (Ro. 8:19-23; Hos. 4:1-3, Jer. 9:10-13), and the natural world continues to suffer today as a result of sin; in particular, greed, injustice, and materialism.

How then should we treat the earth? The answer lies in the fact that we were made in the image of God (Ge. 1:26,27), and we were also given dominion over the earth (Ge. 1:28). First, we must acknowledge that God has dominion over everything (Job 25:2, Ps. 22:28). Consequently, if we are made in God's image, and we as Christians are being transformed into the likeness of Christ (2 Co. 3:18), then our dominion of the earth must look like God's dominion over the earth. According to Psalms 104 and 145, God loves and cares for all that he has made, extending his hands of compassion to meet the needs of every living thing.

For other ideas about what to include in a sermon on environmental stewardship, you might want to take a look at the document "Creation Care: Environmental Stewardship for the Church of the Nazarene", posted [here](#). This document contains additional biblical references to creation care; a discussion on affluence, poverty, and the environment; and some practical suggestions of things that we can do as individuals and as churches to take better care of creation. Other Nazarene creation care resources can be found [here](#).

The way I see it, we are Christ's ambassadors, and if Christ loves and cares for his creation, then the church should be an outward expression of this love. In other words, the world should be looking to the church as an example of how we can have a healthy relationship with creation, as God intended. If you want to move your church beyond sermons to action, a good place to start is an environmental audit of the church facilities and practices. This may sound like a daunting task, but there are many resources available today to help in this effort, and you may even find ways to save money by conserving energy and water. One tool that you might consider adapting for your use is an environmental audit guide for churches.

A great place to find more resources about creation care, including sermon ideas and outlines, is the Evangelical Environmental Network's [Web site](#), as well as its companion Web sites, [Healthy Families Now](#) and [What Would Jesus Drive](#). Another good resource is the book "[Serve God, Save The Planet](#)" by Dr. Matthew Sleeth. Dr. Sleeth is the Executive Director for the [A Rocha USA](#), a Christian conservation organization.

Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." It is time that the Church becomes good stewards of all that God has placed on this earth, and not just our time and money. We should be setting the standard for the world in terms of caring for the rest of creation. Pastors, let's begin to demonstrate in our churches and communities that we love and care for creation just like the God whom we serve.

*Jonathon E. Twining is an assistant professor of biology at Eastern Nazarene College.*

### **Are you connected?**

A few months ago, Stewardship Ministries launched the online Pastor's Forum. The forum is designed to provide a place for discussion, thought, and ideas for teaching and preaching stewardship in your local church.

All of you are members of the Stewardship Network, but most of you have not signed up for the online forum. We need your voice and your ideas. Take time now to sign up for the online forum and get started with the conversation.

You can sign up for the online forum at [www.nazarene.org/stewardship](http://www.nazarene.org/stewardship). It is free to members of the Stewardship Network.