

# Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees

## Stewardship Conversations



### Session Three – Number Six

#### Talking about Stewardship as a Model of Congregational Ministry

In an article entitled, “Stewards of God’s Mysteries: Stewarding as a Model for Congregational Ministry,” Rolf Jacobson suggests that stewardship is an appropriate and helpful model for congregational ministry. He suggests two benefits to thinking this way:

**First Benefit:** “One benefit of the concept of stewardship as a model for congregational ministry is that it is a concept that is biblical. Stewards, stewardship and concepts related to the idea of stewardship, such as dominion, are referred to throughout the Scriptures, particularly in passages discussing the responsibilities of God’s people. To re-frame our understanding of congregations to be consistent with the idea of stewardship would be a move away from a primarily cultural metaphor (membership by voluntary association) toward a primarily biblical metaphor (communal stewardship of God’s mission and ministry). Moving away from a cultural metaphor to a more biblical metaphor would, in my judgment, be a step in the right direction.”

- *What would you say is the difference between “membership by voluntary association” and “communal stewardship of God’s mission and ministry”?*
- *What difference does it make if one sees it one way or the other?*

Earlier in the article Jacobson wrote, “In American civil society, church affiliation is conceived as a matter of voluntary association—and it must be so conceived in our democratic civil society. But in the Christian church, church affiliation cannot be conceived only as a matter of voluntary association—it must also be conceived as a call from God, as a spirit-given vocation, indeed as the work of God.”

“In today’s culture,” Jacobson writes, “the membership model leads people to construe the congregation as similar to a club that people join of their own free will for the purpose of having their needs met. So before people choose to join a congregation, they shop to see what programs are offered, whether worship meets their needs and what services they will find.”

- *How has the church given in to this membership model?*
- *What can be done in this congregation to change that?*

John 15:5  
 John 8:31-32  
 Matthew 7:15-16  
 Acts 1:8

### What do the Scriptures teach about our life in the church?

That is question 179 in *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*.

**The answer:** “They teach that...

A. we should seek always to be and remain members of the invisible church, Christ's body, by sincere faith in Christ, our Savior;  
 B. we should be faithful to that visible church, or denomination, which professes and teaches all of the Bible's doctrine purely and administers the sacraments according to Christ's institution;  
 C. we should avoid false teachers, false churches, and all organizations that promote a religion that is contrary to God's Word;  
 D. we should maintain and extend God's church by telling others about Jesus Christ, by personal service, and by prayer and financial support.”  
 (pages 162-165)

- *How do each of the above relate to stewardship as it is defined as the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes?*
- *What are the responsibilities of God's stewards in each of the areas above?*

**Second Benefit:** “A second benefit,” writes Jacobson, “of rethinking congregational identity along the lines of stewardship would be that it would positively reframe those matters of money, time and talents that we normally associate with the word stewardship. To be blunt, in the Bible, the concept of stewardship is not solely or even primarily concerned with wealth. If we start to re-conceive the entirety of a congregation's identity through the lens of stewardship, then Christians might have a more established framework within which to grasp matters of wealth, time, and talent...Currently, some Christians think of financial giving as ‘dues’ that we pay to keep up our membership and thus earn the right to the services of the church. Or, some people shrink away from stewardship because they associate it only with making pledges and writing checks. If most, or even all, of a congregation's identity were to be recast in the image of being called to be responsible for God's household, then the practice of offering time, talent and wealth would not come out of left field every autumn, but might, one hopes, slide seamlessly into place in the minds of Christians.”

- How are money, time, and talents seen by most of the members of this congregation? Do they see stewardship as “solely or primarily” referring to money? If so, why does this attitude need to change?
- How do most people in our community see our church (its identity)?
- How can we better manage what God has entrusted to us?

### Prayer:

Close this stewardship conversation with a prayer that God would continue to bless His church and guide us in being faithful stewards of all He has entrusted to us.

