

Stewardship Conversation Two

THE ISSUE: The Identity of the Steward

“The term *steward* is misunderstood and even foreign in our society. We do not have any terms in our modern vocabulary that carry the richness of this term. *Caretaker* fails to capture the responsibility laid on the steward. *Manager* seems inadequate to describe the relationship between the owner and the steward. *Custodian* is too passive a term. *Agent* is too self-serving in our day. *Ambassador* is too political, and it lacks the servant aspect. *Warden* is too administrative and loses the sense of the personal. *Guardian* is too closely tied solely to parental responsibilities,” wrote R. Scott Rodin in *Stewards in the Kingdom*.

Rodin continues, “Because of the lack of sound teaching on stewardship, the image of the steward offered by the church has become blurred. Perhaps the primary understanding today of the term *steward* is one who shares one’s own resources with others. Here the characteristic mark of the biblical steward—handling with integrity the resources of another—is completely lost...The image is further tarnished by its association with the purely financial aspect of its meaning. When the call to be a steward is equated only with one’s finances, then the role can be fulfilled by tithing to the church, while our use of time, our relationships with others, our care for the environment and our care for ourselves remain our own concern detached from the ‘spiritual’ part of our lives...Finally, because the term is so associated with the finances in the church, it also carries the baggage of the myriad of negative images of the church’s involvement with money and fundraising.”

Talking It Over

- How have you seen the term *steward* misunderstood?
- What terms (either those listed or other ones) do you feel most accurately describes what it means to be a Christian steward? Explain.
- We are all stewards by birth and by baptism. What does it mean to be a steward by birth? What does it mean to be a steward by baptism?
- Discuss each of the following statements:
 - “The characteristic mark of the biblical steward—handling with integrity the resources of another—is completely lost.”
 - “When the call to be a steward is equated only with one’s finances, then the role can be filled by tithing to the church, while our use of time, our relationships with others, our care for the environment and our care for ourselves remain our own concern detached from the ‘spiritual’ part of our lives.”
 - “It (steward) carries the baggage of the myriad of negative issues of the church’s involvement with money and fundraising.”

Putting It Into Practice

Attend a meeting of the stewardship committee/board and discuss the following questions:

- What is the purpose or goal of this committee?
- What kind of stewards are being formed in this congregation?

Digging Deeper

- Read pages 7-10 in *The Christian Faith* by Robert Kolb. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993.
- Check out the stewardship resources on faithaflame.lcms.org that deal with the identity of the Christian steward, especially Module One: Living with God’s Word and Module Two: Living as God’s Child.

