Faith Aflame: 360 Degrees

Stewardship Conversations

Session Three – Number Three

Talking about the Importance of Changing the Stewardship Culture

Anthony B. Robinson writes in *Changing The Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*, "Changing the culture of organizations, institutions, or a society is about changing the conversation."

What we talk about and how we talk about it has an impact on the congregation's culture. Robinson lists a number of conversations that need to be deepened and sustained in the ongoing life of the congregation. Some of those conversations include:

1. **It's not about you.** "Congregations," Robinson writes, "have come to believe that what they are undergoing is about them." "While there are few congregations that cannot stand some improvement, much of what is being faced and experienced by many mainline Protestant churches is not about them. It is about the end of an era, a sea change in the religious ecology of North America and the role of congregations in our society."

When it comes to stewardship, what changes are having the greatest impact on the health of the congregation?

2. **And yet…it is about you.** "The bottom-line point is urgency," says Robinson. "There is, in my experience, a good deal of anxiety in congregations and denominations, but not nearly enough urgency."

When it comes to stewardship, what anxieties are there in congregations and how do they often deal with these anxieties?

How can congregations help members see the urgency of changing the way they think about stewardship?

3. **A New Heart.** Christian stewardship is a spiritual issue. We are created to be stewards. We are recreated in Holy Baptism to be Christian stewards. It is the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace that gives a new heart. Intentional teaching and preaching from the Word of God that focuses on passive and active righteousness is needed.

When it comes to stewardship, what will it take in the congregation to elevate stewardship to being important enough to teach year-round rather than just once a year at budget time?

When it comes to stewardship, what will it take in the congregation to enlarge stewardship so members understand that it is about all of life and not just about money?

4. **Who will lead them?** Robinson writes, "During the era of Christendom, clergy tended to have three roles: chaplain, scholar, and part of the authority structure of the town or community…Today, however, clergy must be leaders. That is, they must be capable of helping their congregations identify and make progress on their own most pressing problems and deepest challenges. Moreover, clergy must be teachers of the faith and ministry mentors."

When it comes to stewardship, what are the most pressing problems and deepest challenges congregations face?

What are good stewardship practices that leaders (clergy and lay) need to model for the congregation?

5. **Why are we here?** "Many—too many—long established congregations have come to see their purpose as being to maintain themselves…Without much thinking about it, many congregations and their members have come to think that the purpose of the church is the comfort and satisfaction of its members," writes Robinson.

When it comes to stewardship, what does your congregation see as its purpose?

How can the members of the congregation be encouraged to be "outward focused?"

6. **Taking on Adaptive Challenges.** "Adaptive challenges," Robinson says, "require intrinsically spiritual work for they involve loss, risk, and the changing of hearts and minds. (Technical problems) tend to a problem/solution frame, and typically experts or authorities are called upon to do the work." Adaptive challenges have to do with changing attitudes and ways of thinking.

When it comes to stewardship, what are some of the things that keep congregations from addressing adaptive challenges? How can these issues be overcome?

Robinson includes the following in his list of adaptive challenges for congregations:

- Focus on adult Christian formation.
- Shift from a board culture to a ministry culture.
- Shift from stewardship as meeting the budget to growing generous people.

Discuss how each of these applies to your congregation.

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