

Stewards by God's Design: The Three R's of the Christian Steward

Relationships – Responsibilities – Resources

My Responsibilities in the Church

Goal: That participants would recognize the God given responsibilities they have in the congregations of which they are members and fulfill those responsibilities as faithful, wise, and fruitful stewards.

Introduction: Ask participants how they came to be members of their current congregation?

Background: In *The Genius of Luther's Theology* Kolb and Arand write, "The fourth order of life, the religious life, deals with external religious communities, congregations consisting of pastors and parishioners. Luther argued that we could consider religious life within the context of creation for two reasons. First, as creatures we were designed to trust God for his gifts. Second, God gave Adam his Word that he was to proclaim to Eve and formed a community within creaturely life dedicated to hearing the Word and praising God together: In the New Testament the church was called into existence in order to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and exercise Christian discipline. Furthermore, the church, as a human community, needs rules and guidelines for its practice of life together. As it takes form in the world, the congregations of God's people function as an institution that needs structures and governance...Those who live according to the traditions, practices, and percepts of the church or their religious community may well be called 'good' or 'active' members of the community. God calls them to live consistently with teachings and practices of their religion so that others can recognize their piety as good for the wider community." Page 63.

Christians are to frame their thinking for daily life in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have stewardship responsibilities daily in the estates or situations of home, occupation, society, and congregation. Because of Christ we are freed to live as members of the church. Robert Kolb writes, "(The church) exists to bring God's Word to bear on people's lives. It preaches the law to call them away from false gods, but it exists primarily to proclaim the Gospel and thus to restore the relationship between God and the broken sinners whom He has brought to perceive their need for Him once again...it exists to bring people to trust in Christ and thus to live out new lives in Him." *Teaching God's Children His Teaching*, page 8-9.

Ask participants what it means to be a disciple/church member.

Comment: A disciple is one who follows Jesus and learns from Him. Charles Lane in his book *Ask, Thank, Tell* describes discipleship. He writes, "When we talk about discipleship, the primary relationship is not with the congregation. The primary relationship is with Jesus. The congregation is the community of people with whom this relationship is lived out and nurtured. The congregation is not the end. The congregation is the means to the end. In the congregation we grow in faith and proclaim the good news to those who are not hearing that good news on a regular basis. The role of a disciple, then, is to grow deeper in Jesus and to tell others about Jesus. As a disciple lives his or her relationship with Jesus in a congregation, the disciples understand his or her work to include:

1. Doing the ministry. Disciples don't think the congregation 'pays the pastor' to do things. Rather, ministry is a partnership. (Gene Edward Veith, Jr says in his book, *God at Work*, "Certainly laypeople in the church are to be equipped for witnessing to their faith and other tasks common to all Christians...Lay people are especially positioned to reach people outside the church, by virtue of their secular vocations, which put them in contact with people who would never darken the door of a church." Page 127)
2. Giving as a part of a growing relationship with Jesus. Many lists describe the basic tasks of discipleship. One helpful list is found in Michael Foss' book. *Real Faith for Real life*. He identifies the following marks of discipleship:
 - a. Daily prayer,
 - b. Daily scripture reading,
 - c. Weekly worship,
 - d. Growth in giving to the tithe or beyond,
 - e. Serving others in Jesus' name,
 - f. Sharing the faith story with the unchurched.
3. Living life in community. The larger community is the congregation. In many cases a smaller community is a small group that gathers for prayer, study, and service." Page 14-15

How does the church bring God's Word to bear on people's lives?

Answer: This happens through the teaching and preaching of Law and Gospel. The 2017 edition of *Luther's Small Catechism* states, "In the congregation, Christians are gathered by God's Word. Preachers of the Word are charged with caring for God's Church with integrity and faithfulness. (1 Timothy 3:2-4, 6; Titus 1:9). Hearers of the Word have the responsibility to honor their pastors as these men faithfully carry out their work in the Lord's name as servants of His Word (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17). Hearers are commanded to provide financial support or their pastors (1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:6-7; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)." Page 349

Martin Luther identifies several Bible passages in the Table of Duties that speak to our responsibilities in the church. He first addresses Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers. What do each of the following passages teach us?

- 1 Timothy 3:2-4

Answer: Here Saint Paul gives the characteristics of pastors. They are to be above reproach. (No one should be able to accuse them of wrongful attitudes or behavior.) They are to be the husband of one wife, temperate (moderate), self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must be able to manage his own family well having obedient and respectful children. Pastors are to steward their lives and families so that God is glorified in all they do.

- 1 Timothy 3:6

Answer: A pastor is to be a mature believer, tested in matters of faith and behavior so that he will be a faithful, wise, and fruitful under shepherd of Christ.

Timothy J. Wengert quotes Luther in his book, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith*, "Therefore, pastors and preachers, take note! Our office has now become a completely different one that it was under the pope. It has now become serious and salutary. Thus, it now involves much toil and work, many dangers and attacks, and in addition little reward or gratitude in the world. But Christ himself will be our reward, so long as we labor faithfully." Page 159

- Titus 1:9

Answer: Pastors must know Scripture well so that they may apply it to their own lives and the lives of those in their spiritual care.

Luther next addresses what the hearers owe their pastors. What do these passages tell us?

- 1 Corinthians 9:14

Answer: Members of the congregation are to steward their finances faithfully and give to Christ's church generously so that pastors (and other workers) are paid appropriately in their service to Christ.

- Galatians 6:6-7

Answer: Just as Paul encouraged the Christians at Corinth to support their workers, so he now encourages the Christians at Galatia. Armin J. Panning writes in *Galatians and Ephesians: The People's Bible*, "Paul lays on the Galatian congregation the obligation to care for the physical needs of their workers...Paul was very firm on the principle that the person who bears the gospel message to others has the right to expect material support from the people to whom he is bringing that message. (See 1 Corinthians 9:3-11.) For himself Paul chose not to take support (1 Corinthians 9:12, 15), preferring rather to earn his own living by tentmaking (Acts 18:1-3; 20:33-35). But Paul did not require or expect other ministers of the gospel to follow his pattern of not taking support. Nor does he allow congregations to force their ministers to follow his pattern. Paul insists that congregations support their church workers." Page 105-106

Panning adds a financial stewardship note to his comments above, "It is interesting to hear Paul refer to the money and material possessions congregations are to share with their church workers as 'good things.' ...Money and property are 'good things,' a gift from the Lord. It's not a sin to be rich. The sin lies in improper use of wealth—and that can happen in any number of ways. At one end of the spectrum lies the nonuse of material things: having them and hoarding them, and letting them be the goal of one's life. That is the sort of greed Paul calls 'idolatry' (Ephesians 5:5). At the other end lies the reckless and indulgent squandering on self with no thought for others. Paul cautions against both misuses and warns that they will not go undetected by God." Page 106

- 1 Timothy 5:17-18

Answer: The word "elder" in this passage refers to pastors. Pastors are to "rule well" which means they are to steward their God given responsibilities according to His direction. They do this, at least

in part, by knowing the Word of God, preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God, not showing favoritism, and by shepherding their flock as the Good Shepherd directs.

Mark Love writes in the *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, “To give double honor means to give a greater measure of preference. While the reasons for this greater honor are many, there are two that are foundational. First, the fact that these men were chosen by God through the Church, to fill the office Christ created for their sake as the Church, is essential to why they are worthy of double honor. They serve in an honorable office for the sake of the Church. Second, the fact that they are not merely teaching and preaching, but teaching and preaching the Word of God according to the needs of the saints for the sake of their salvation makes them worthy of greater honor...Preaching and teaching is the faithful application of God’s two words of Law and Gospel to the lives of their hearers in worship, Bible study, or individual study.” Page 74

Love continues, “Having said that pastors are worthy of double honor, Paul eliminates speculation about one of the ways this greater honor is to be expressed to pastors—compensation. He does this by first quoting Dt 25:4, regarding not muzzling the ox, which he also quoted to the Corinthians (1 Co 9:7-14), and then by quoting Christ concerning the laborer and the wages he deserves (Lk 10:7; Mt 10:10). While affording the pastor double honor does not mean double compensation, it does include proper compensation. The most faithful rule to follow in terms of compensation is to be found in the words of Christ, ‘Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets’ (Mt 7:12). As members would have their employers compensate them for their labor, so they, as believers in Christ, ought to compensate the pastor and other workers that the Lord has given them.” Page 74

- 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Answer: Paul uses three words or phrases here to describe how Christians are to treat their pastors: respect, hold them in high regard in love, and live in peace with each other.

- Hebrews 13:17

Answer: Christians are to obey those who are placed in authority over them. Leaders must give an account to God for the responsibilities they bear.

Luther also mentions others in his Table of Duties.

What does Scripture say to youth in 1 Peter 5:5-6?

Answer: Young people are to be humble and submissive to those who are older. Humility is one of the characteristics all Christians are to demonstrate. It is mentioned frequently in Scripture. Moses is described as a humble man (Numbers 12:3). The entire ministry of Jesus was marked by humility (Philippians 2:5-11).

What does Scripture say to widows in 1 Timothy 5:5-6?

Answer: Widows in the early church were often in need. Paul encourages them to put their hope in God who is always with them and promises to meet their needs. They are to pray and ask God for help. God also uses those in the congregation to help meet the needs of fellow members. Paul then addresses widows who are selfish and look only to themselves. He writes that they are dead even while they live.

What does Scripture say to everyone in Romans 13:9 and 1 Timothy 2:1?

Answer: In these passages Paul encourages us all to obey the commandments and love one another as well as telling us to pray and be thankful. The Table of Duties closes with these words, "Let each his lesson learn with care, and all the household well will fare."

What other responsibilities do we steward in the church?

- Luke 4:8

Answer: We are to worship God and serve Him only. We do not neglect meeting together with fellow believers so that we grow in the faith God has created in us and encourage each other. (Hebrews 10:24)

- 1 Peter 3:15-16

Answer: We learn of Christ and grow in faith as the Spirit works through Word and Sacraments in the Church. We steward this faith as we are witnesses of it to others and as we stand firm in it—even in the face of difficulties and trials.

- Ephesians 4:12-13

Answer: Paul tells the Ephesians that God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Jerald C. Joersz writes in the *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, "God has given servants of the Word to His saints to equip them for their calling. As a soldier needs preparation for battle (6:10-17), so the saints need disciplined training for their work...The term 'ministry' or 'servant' in the NT can refer to service in general, and to the specific ministry of the Word. While either meaning is possible in this verse, it should be noted that both Paul and Tychicus are ministers in the specific sense." Page 140

Also note the quote earlier from Gene Edward Vieth: "Certainly laypeople in the church are to be equipped for witnessing to their faith and other tasks common to all Christians...Lay people are especially positioned to reach people outside the church, by virtue of their secular vocations, which put them in contact with people who would never darken the door of a church."

- 2 Corinthians 9:12

Answer: God calls us to be generous with the money He entrusts to our care. When we give generously to Christ's church, we not only meet the needs of others (like the widows mentioned above), but this generosity is also an expression of thanksgiving to God for all His benefits and blessings.

When we consider the responsibilities God gives us in the various orders of life, priorities can sometimes be a challenge. Kolb writes, "Generally, we will follow God's pattern and take care of family needs first of all, but occasionally the urgency of an occupational, societal, or congregational demand will distract us from our fundamental responsibilities at home...we strive to make the best decision possible and give thanks that we live by the forgiving mercy of our calling God." Page 8-10

Ask participants to react to Kolb's statement.

Read and discuss the other quote by Kolb on the left side of the participant's guide.

Close by reading the following from the 2017 Edition of *Luther's Small Catechism*, "As Christians, we confess that the Holy Spirit has brought us into a community we call the Church—gathered in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with many different gifts." Page 205

It is therefore my responsibility, as a steward by God's design, to regularly receive the Word and Sacraments within the community of believers, to belong to a congregation that confesses and teaches the pure Word of God, to be aware and avoid false teachings, false teachers, and organizations that promote false teaching, to tell others about Jesus, to participate in works of mercy and service, and to support the ministry of the church with prayer and financial gifts.
(Adapted from LSC page 216-217)

Encourage participants to spend some time privately examining their stewardship of each of the responsibilities listed in the above paragraph:

1. Regularly attending worship services.
2. Belonging to a congregation that confesses and teaches the pure Word of God.
3. Being aware and avoiding false teachings, false teachers, and organizations that promote false teaching.
4. Telling others about Jesus.
5. Participating in works of mercy and service.
6. Supporting the church through prayer and generous giving.