

Evangelical Congregational Church

So You're A... Steward



So you have been elected to serve as a steward in your church. Stewardship is an important theme in the New Testament and there is much said in the Gospels regarding their responsibilities. The steward is mentioned as one responsible for management of another's possessions. The meaning of the Greek word for steward is "manager of the house." Luke 12:42 speaks well of the steward that continues to be faithful in the house even though the master is gone for a long time. The parables which speak of physical stewardship apply to all things that God gives, both material and spiritual. In 1 Peter 4:7-10 you will find a discussion of the many spiritual blessings that we are given in Christ and our responsibility for them. It ends with the admonition, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." In this, the concept of stewardship is extended to the total ministry life of the church, all of the gifts that God gives for which we are responsible. In 1 Corinthians 4:2 Paul calls himself a steward and says, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

The New Testament establishes that a part of the responsibility you bear as a steward is to serve as a leader and example of the wise use of the gifts that God has given, not merely material things, but also all of the spiritual things which God provides to the church and through which he intends to minister. These responsibilities are by no means limited to stewards—each member of the house of God has a responsibility for the things God has given. It is a responsibility of the elected stewards, however, to keep before the congregation those aspects of stewardship necessary for the life of the church. Some aspects of the material life of the church—ownership of property, purchase of supplies, negotiating business needs—are the primary responsibility of the Trustees who are legally responsible for the business of the congregation. The stewards share ministry for the spiritual life of the church with the Class Leaders, who have a unique responsibility for the prayer life of the church. However, most aspects of the spiritual life of the church will be the responsibility of the stewards and these are the aspects with which you should be familiar.

The Special Rules of the National Conference, provide for the election of stewards by the Local Conference. A minimum of three (3) are elected and are to be persons who have shown spiritual growth and who are familiar with the DISCIPLINE of the Evangelical Congregational Church. They must also possess the necessary ability to transact temporal business. The section of the church DISCIPLINE which relates to stewards is paragraph 315. Stewards are nominated by the Pastor with the total number to be elected being not more than the number of trustees of an individual congregation. Two people are nominated for each position and are elected by ballot. The term of office begins at that time and continues until successors are elected. Terms of office are to be staggered making it necessary for one or two stewards to be elected each year. This makes it easier for the pastor to seek two or four nominees instead of a full slate of as few as six and as many as 14 in a given year. It also provides continuity among the stewards since not

all could be replaced at one time.

The by-laws of most churches require that those elected as stewards shall meet within thirty (30) days and elect a President, Vice President, and Secretary. The secretary's responsibility is to record minutes of the meetings. In most churches, stewards hold regularly scheduled meetings at which the pastor is present and matters relating to the spiritual life of the church are discussed. Most church by-laws have provisions for special meetings for the stewards as occasions may arise.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF STEWARDS

The responsibilities of stewards are spelled out in par. 315.2 of our DISCIPLINE but this forms only a basic outline of their duties. Paragraph 315.2 says:

315.2.1 They shall meet with the pastor and consider the salary and other benefits for the pastor for the ensuing fiscal year and shall make recommendations accordingly to the Local Conference held just prior to the beginning of that year.

315.2.2. They shall provide the bread and unfermented fruit of the vine for the Lord's Supper.

315.2.3 They shall procure or assist in procuring living quarters for the pastor, with approval of the Official Board/Ministry Council.

315.2.4 They shall be accountable to the Local Conference for the performance of their official duties.

315.2.5 They shall have such duties in promoting the financial program of the church as may be directed by the Official Board/Ministry Council.

315.2.6 They shall have such other duties as the Local Conference or the Official Board/Ministry Council may from time to time delegate or assign to them.

From this list it can be seen that the stewards have special responsibilities relating to the pastor. They are to meet with him prior to the calendar year to establish his salary and other benefits. The recommendations are made to the Local Conference. The stewards also assist in procuring living quarters. Since most of our congregations have a parsonage, this usually means meeting with the pastor and representatives of the trustees to discuss what changes or alterations may be necessary to accommodate his family. From time to time during the pastor's ministry, occasions will arise for discussion on matters relating to his personal financial needs so that suitable adjustments can be made to enable the pastor to be more effective in his ministry.

Paragraph 315.2.2 specifically gives stewards the responsibility of providing the elements

for the Lord's Supper which brings them into the worship life of the church. In many congregations, they may assist during the communion service. The by-laws of local congregations can give stewards other specific responsibilities. For example, stewards, together with the pastor, could have charge of all church services, could arrange that the pulpit is properly supplied in the absence of the pastor and make recommendations to the Official Board for special services. The stewards could also make recommendations with respect to remuneration for church supply pastors and for quest speakers. When necessary, they provide suitable accommodations for supply ministers and guest speakers.

In some congregations the Stewards serve as a membership committee. They meet with the pastor to discuss those people who are candidates for membership; they may meet with the candidates to discuss with them the seriousness of joining the church and may make recommendations of membership to the Official Board. They may be responsible to examine the church rolls on an annual basis to determine which members are in good standing and make recommendations for removal from the church roles. They may take the important shepherding responsibility of working with the members of the church, visiting delinquent members, finding those who have special needs, both financial and spiritual, and make recommendations concerning benevolence. They may be asked to assist in discipling members of the congregation. As you can see, stewards play a very significant role in terms of the spiritual life of the church.

The section of the DISCIPLINE listed above says that stewards shall have such duties in promoting the financial program of the church as may be directed by the Official Board. Many local congregations give stewards the specific responsibility of receiving and recording the finances from the congregation and making them available to the church treasurer. They may act as a finance committee along with the church treasurer and the church financial secretary. The stewards need to be beyond the mere receiving of tithes and gifts from the congregation. They need to help establish a clear program of financial stewardship as well.

One of the aspects of church life that especially needs strengthening is stewardship of life. Stewardship—the practical giving of one's life back to God—involves the financial, material, and spiritual emphases. The financial side of this stewardship is only one aspect but is an important aspect. Many times congregations have not given proper attention to the financial needs of the work of Jesus Christ because there is no effective program bringing stewardship of life into the mainstream of church teaching. It would seem that stewards should encourage this special church ministry.

The stewards of the local church should also be aware of the various denominational programs which support the mission and teaching arms of the church and those denominational endeavors which depend upon support from local congregations. By cultivating the total church program within the Evangelical Congregational denomination as well as the important ministry

of the local church, they may establish a program of stewardship which meets all these needs and enables the congregation to be effective ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A good steward looks for the total needs of the local church in worship and stewardship and seeks ways in which he or she may minister.

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