A potpourri of practical ideas to help you become a better steward

CONSUMERS GO TO CHURCH

By: Ed Fargusson

A couple of years ago I was attending a meeting at a church in our conference where one of our administrators made an announcement. This was at the beginning of the economic downturn and we were taking action to cut our budget so we would not have to let any pastors go or cut salaries. This particular congregation was without a pastor and the conference administrator told them that they were going to be placed in a district instead of having a pastor of their own. One of the members angrily announced, “If you are giving us half a pastor then I am going to give you half of my tithe!”

Since that time the sentiment expressed by that man has caused me to think about the impact that consumerism has had upon our church. The essence of consumerism is that I am paying for a service and I will only pay for that which gives me value. In this article I want to compare consumer thinking with stewardship principles.

Consumerism

The heartbeat of consumerism is greed. The idea is, “I want the most for the least.” Give me a high rate of return on my investment while I pay low interest for my debt. I want great products but at low prices. Typically I don’t care about the methods, I just want my results.

Stewardship

Stewardship; a total lifestyle that involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality and finances.
The other day I heard an editorial on the radio. The speaker was pointing out that when he buys products he doesn't question whether the CEO is fat or thin, if he or she has had an affair or not, what kind of car they drive or house they live in. We don't usually know anything about the people or the company behind the products we purchase, but we buy those products anyway. He was arguing that we should not care therefore about the character of the person that we will elect president. “Only the results matter” was his argument.

I disagree with that kind of thinking. I believe that the character of politicians does matter. I also believe that the “What’s in it for me” mentality has infected our marriages, our friendships and even our churches and schools. If I don’t believe that my marriage fulfills me, I will get divorced and find another person who will meet my needs. If one church doesn’t give me what I want I will just move down the street and find one that will. When I am only interested in how things affect me, then everything in my life becomes disposable.

Stewardship

A comedian once quipped that God is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, but is apparently bad at managing money. This is the way it seems to many people because the church is always asking for money. This constant asking for money has left a bad taste in the mouth of many in our society. God does indeed appear to them to be a beggar. To many, it just means the church is bad at money management. They reason that if we were better at managing our money, we wouldn’t need to keep asking.

God does not use giving to fund His church; rather He uses giving to grow His people into the likeness of His Son! We are reminded by Paul that, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me,” Galatians 2:20, NKJV. Christ gave Himself for us! The truth of stewardship is that giving is not about God or the church needing money; it is about our need to live with the same mindset that God has. God gave us His son, Christ gave himself and we should give to others. Tithes and offerings should be given not based upon the needs of the church or its ministries but rather on our need to sacrificially give.

Accountability

Some might argue, “I give, but I give where I know my money actually does good.” I would be the first to admit that there is always room for improvement in the church, including in the area of money management. However, the passive-aggressive action of withholding tithe and offering serves little to address true accountability but rather reveals an unhealthy relationship trend. I won't give to you until I get what I want, is the message, and it is a selfish one. Belonging to a church is like belonging to a family. Withholding isn’t the answer, engagement and involvement are!

If you don’t like the way you believe the church is using its funds, there are proper ways to hold it accountable:

Find out the facts. I find that most people who are unhappy with the way the church uses its funds, actually don’t know how the funds are being spent. They have presumptions, or they have “heard” from someone or some source that may not have the facts either. Church organizations finance statements are large and difficult to read but you can find out how the money is actually used, if you ask.

Get involved. Don’t leave it up to someone else. If you are on the church board, you will not only know how the money is spent on the local level, you will be responsible for it. Become a delegate to your conference constituency session. Become active in ministry and you will be in the know.

Express yourself in a Christ-like manner. There are three levels of resistance: I don’t understand, I don’t like your idea, and I don’t like you. We tend to jump to the third level way too fast. Assume that people have...