

A Guide for Discussion

You may of course read the books in this series on your own, but because they focus on the transformation of the Episcopal Church in the twenty-first century, the books are especially useful as a basis for discussion and reflection within a congregation or community. The questions below are intended to generate fruitful discussion about an experience of the Bible in the congregations with which members of the group are familiar.

Each group will identify its own needs and will be shaped by the interests of the participants and their comfort in sharing personal life stories. Discussion leaders will wish to focus on particular areas that address the concerns and goals of the group, using the questions and themes provided here simply as suggestions for a place to start the conversation.

chapter one

The Current Landscape

In this chapter Robertson compares stewardship patterns in the Church of the Wise and the Church of the Foolish.

- ♦ In what ways does your congregation resemble the Church of the Wise in its approach to stewardship?
- ♦ In what ways does your congregation resemble the Church of the Foolish in its approach to stewardship?



Researchers have identified a number of different understandings of stewardship among the several generational groups that are found in most parishes. Robertson believes that “a pledge program or capital campaign that works for someone in their sixties will not likely work for someone in their forties, much less someone in their twenties” (page 5).

- ♦ What generational groups do you see in your congregation? Which ones are the largest? Which ones exercise the most power in decision-making?
- ♦ Does your congregation use a “one-size-fits-all” approach to stewardship, or does it adapt its stewardship plan according to the various age groups of the members? How could you tell?
- ♦ If your congregation uses the “one-size-fits-all” approach, to which generational group(s) are stewardship materials generally addressed—in tone, mode of approach, and choice of themes?

chapter two

Tour Guides

In this chapter Robertson explores some of the scriptural foundations for a Christian understanding of stewardship.

- ♦ Read chapter 12 of Luke’s gospel, considering each of the sections identified by Robertson on page 31. How would you describe Jesus’ views of material possessions—his “theology of stewardship”?
- ♦ Which aspects of Jesus’ understanding of material possessions do you find appealing? difficult or confusing? offensive? impossible to live out?
- ♦ Where do you see individuals or communities, either in history or today, living out a relationship with material possessions that resembles the principles Jesus describes?



Robertson concludes the chapter with the question, “What, then, does it mean to be a faithful and wise steward?” (page 48).

- ♦ How would you answer his question?
- ♦ What “tour guides” or mentors, past and present, have informed the development of your relationship with material possessions—your “theology of stewardship”?

chapters three and four
Suggested Route and
Tools for the Journey

In these two chapters Robertson explores his “Barnabas plan” for stewardship and offers tools for implementing it. Imagine how such a plan might look in your congregation by considering the following questions.

- ♦ *Begin with the big picture:* How might you gather answers to the fundamental question of why your church exists? What are the important moments in its history? What are important elements of its mission today?
- ♦ *Arrange structures strategically:* In what ways do your current structures reflect your priorities in mission? What is missing? How might a mutual ministry review be practiced in your congregation? What questions need to be asked?
- ♦ *Retain and recruit newcomers:* How are newcomers welcomed and integrated into your congregation? What might prevent visitors from finding your church? What might encourage them to come back? What might discourage them from becoming members?
- ♦ *Nurture fellow leaders and stewards:* How is leadership shared in your congregation? In what ways are future leaders nurtured and trained? How do you identify what gifts are not being fully utilized?
- ♦ *Ask for direction and support:* How is prayer incorporated into the stewardship plan of your congregation? How is the wisdom of former leaders and long-time members valued and heard?

- ♦ *Budget with vision:* How are budgets developed in your congregation? Who has input, and when? Does your budget reflect your shared vision and mission?
- ♦ *Analyze giving patterns:* How is pledging evaluated in your congregation? Who analyzes the data, and how is it shared with the members? Consider how the analysis forms in Tool 7 might be useful in your congregation.
- ♦ *Specify a strategic pledging plan:* How are stewardship plans developed in your congregation? In what ways are they effective? Where do they fall short?



Robertson describes in some detail his vision of an ACTS Commission that is responsible for many of the tasks involved in a stewardship plan.

- ♦ What might an ACTS Commission look like in your congregation? What would some of the obstacles be to forming such a commission? How would it resemble current or past stewardship committees?
- ♦ How might you make stewardship a year-round program in your congregation?
- ♦ How could you personalize your pledge program to address different groups within the congregation? Are children and youth currently included in your stewardship plan? How are new members taught about financial matters?
- ♦ Is planned giving part of your stewardship plan?

chapter five

The Destination

In this chapter Robertson describes a number of churches that have been transformed and renewed through their work in developing a more holistic understanding of stewardship as part of their identity as Christ's ambassadors in the world, rather than seeing stewardship as a once-a-year plea to increase pledging.

- ♦ Which congregations and dioceses described here resemble most closely your own?
- ♦ If you were to add a description of the stewardship journey of your congregation during the past twenty years to Robertson's list, what would you write?
- ♦ Now imagine what your congregation might look like in five years if a revitalizing holistic stewardship program were implemented. How would you write that story of your congregation for Robertson's list?



Robertson concludes this chapter with an invitation to Holy Communion that reminds us all that "God is with [us] on the journey" (page 154).

- ♦ How does it change your sense of the work of a parish stewardship or finance committee when you hear this reminder? What difference does it make to you that God accompanies those who undertake that responsibility?
- ♦ What are some of the concrete ways that God accompanies us on the journey?