

Obstacles to Participating - *Fan into Flame*

1. Tension number one: Law giving or Gospel giving

You can create or alleviate tension in giving depending on how you use the Law. If you use the Law to induce giving through guilt and obligations to be met or else (which could be the congregation budget), the result is not godly stewardship. The right motivation for giving is Gospel freedom from the Law. Under the Gospel, there are no obligations to meet, only opportunities to take advantage of.

Is the Law of no use to us then? By no means! Scriptures is plain that the Law shows us God's will. Of course the Law has a legitimate use in the giving process. But we do a disservice to the application of the Law when we introduce a theological argument as to whether or not a congregation, district, or national funding campaign is legalistic, and, therefore, legitimate. In relation to giving, it is better to apply the third use of the Law: as a rule or guide. But suppose instead of using the term rule or guide, we would use the term "privilege." For, "privilege" authorizes and empowers us through our giving to do divine works which so much please our Lord and so amaze the world around us. They are our privilege to perform in the arena of God's grace.

Luther does such a marvelous job in the explanations to each commandment of using the Law negative to reveal the Gospel positive. In regards to our life among fellow saints we now can esteem parents, support bodily needs, truly model chastity, help our neighbor get rich, speak well of our neighbor, and be a model of satisfaction with what we have. The Law, as such, shows us the opportunities with which God surrounds us. The Gospel equips us with an attitude which lets us take advantage of every opportunity (which the Law pointed out to us) to serve God by serving our fellow man with the treasures God has given us.

Law giving is done out of guilt and a sense of obligation. Gospel giving is always done out of a readiness of heart to do something for the Lord. Gospel giving deems it a privilege to recognize within ourselves God's readiness for us to actuate an opportunity to give.

2. We already give to Synod and a number of other over and above agencies.

Bless you. Synod and its associated agencies have the opportunity to reach millions of souls here at home and around the world. You are situated exactly where God would use you as an extension of His mission arm. Your church body wants you to have the joy of partnering in this opportunity. *Fan into Flame* is planned to come back to you not only in dollars, but in a wealth of materials, leadership, affirmation of your mission, professional assistance, and whatever your unique situation requires. Pray for a clarification of your needs and give Synod this opportunity to help you expand your members' mission vision.

3. Our budget is already strained to the limit. So is each of our households. We are already having difficulty meeting our budget. We are a poor congregation serving poor people.

Let us help. Share with your synodical partners the needs in your parish. Allow us to share with you wonderful opportunities to do the Lord's work that you can share with each other. The Macedonian churches in 2 Corinthians 8 gave out of poverty as did the Widow who gave her mite. Jesus knows exactly how tight your circumstances are. But as He did with a boy's small lunch, He will multiply and put to use the gift whatever the size. At the same time, He will enable you to share in the fruits of Synod's wider harvest. Your plight will come to light for your fellow saints who can share with you.

4. We have to take care of the home fires first.

How true. The harvest fields are ready right around you. Attention needs to be given right at home. And since God says that the laborer is worthy of His hire, you get to partake of the first fruits of the offerings of God's people. You may hear cynics counter the *Fan into Flame* appeal by quoting the old saying, "charity begins at home." Quite true. Note, however, the old adage does not say charity stops

at home. From home we *begin* our sowing. My home congregation is the field upon which I can sow my offering to the Lord, who then in turn can sow in the community and in the Synod, which in turn sows in the world and back in our home congregation. The Lord's kingdom is a never ending, worldwide caring and sharing circle where He provides both the abundance and the privilege of sharing.

5. We have our own mission program.

Wonderful. How can we help? We would like to help you by training evangelists and field workers for you. Do you need some materials? Are you having difficulty funding your mission work? We are happy to share some excellent Gospel-oriented, "make the saints feel good about giving" stewardship ideas. If you don't need our help, please share with us those things that work well for you so that we don't have to re-invent them. We especially ask that you pray for your brothers and sisters in mission, and for us.

6. We (I as pastor) are too busy to get involved in this process. I just won't inform the congregation of this process and opportunity.

Need help? We stand ready. Conducting *Fan into Flame* is a marvelous opportunity to receive help from those who see your parish as a mission outpost for sowing the seeds of the Word and beginning to reap the harvest. We have so many resources to share with you and such an exciting opportunity to include you in the worldwide harvest.

The options seem to be -- give my members the opportunity or keep them uninformed. Is the fear really, "If I publish this giving opportunity, we will fall even farther behind in our budget?" Please realize that providing your congregation with the possibility to sow will also increase your home gifts and relieve your time pressures.

The best reason to sow is that Jesus promises there is no sowing without a harvest.

7. Fund raising and good Stewardship are opposed to each other.

Can be—but it need not be. Is your objective to frisk the saints or give the saints an opportunity, in joyful response to God's grace, to band together and double the size of the church militant? Good stewardship always talks about money to support the mission. I personally truly appreciate the opportunity to pay the salary of someone who carries the Gospel to unreached people anywhere in the world.

Recall the notes on Law and Gospel giving in number one above.

8. The courage to give comes on the basis of trust in Jesus' promises which is God breathed.

How dare the Widow give out of her livelihood! How dare the Macedonians give out of their poverty! The answer is easy. It only comes when the heart trusts the Lord. That heartfelt trust comes only through Word and Sacrament. People who are truly in the Word hear the promises and actually act on them. The Old Testament prophet Malachi presents God's simple test, "try Me and see." Jesus says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you."

Trusting God is "no risk" giving.

9. I want all of my congregation's giving to come into our home coffers.

Each congregation arranges its organizational affairs as it sees fit. Gathering the money offerings of the congregation and disbursing them for God's purposes can be a great model for each family's personal giving habits. But questionable practices like paying utility bills out of the mission offerings, for example, can actually hinder stewardship and good giving.

Stewardship by the pastor, council, and voters needs to be practiced as well as preached. Each must challenge the other to walk with Jesus. Congregational leaders often encourage their people to tithe, but are content to watch the congregation do less than the tithe when sharing with outside missions.

It is very easy for a congregation to become profit-oriented rather than service-oriented (How much can we gather? Rather than, how much can we give away?). Committing to participation in a Synod-wide campaign revitalizes everyone in leadership to the joys of personal *and* corporate stewardship.

We are here to help you sow in fields around the world. Do you have any idea how great a harvest that will be both globally and for you?

10. Synod is willing to sacrifice pure doctrine for numerical growth. We have difficulty trusting Synod's aims and officers.

Bless you for your concern. Mission work not based on the pure Word of God can certainly fall under the same judgment Jesus pronounced on the Jewish mission endeavor whose results ended up in making their newly converted person twice the child of hell he was before (Matthew 23:15), fitted not for salvation, but for destruction. **God forbid this is our practice.**

By entering into the campaign process with the rest of Synod, you will have a personal and direct opportunity to make sure that all of us are accountable to our Lord Jesus. This is your opportunity to stir up one another to love and good works. This is your opportunity to help draw outsiders back into the fellowship.

Our campaign combines both an administrative structure and solid doctrine. Being a part of the process helps participants recognize how each of these two aspects serves the other. It fosters the harmony we so dearly need in Synod (all singing the same song but not all singing melody). It is encouraging to join in the throng and experience the faith miracles each congregation has to share. Learning to really know brothers and sisters in Christ—even those we'd judge the obnoxious ones—is such a joy!

11. As pastor, I like to set the stage for my people. I am God's object lesson of service and sacrifice.

Amen. Bless you brother.