

What is Expected of a Congregation

Is Every Congregation Actually Running Its Own Gambling Casino?

When I was a pastor for seven years at Trinity Lutheran in Mott, North Dakota, did I have any idea that I was a significant leader in a gambling casino? No! No! Never! The thought never crossed my mind. At that point it would not have made any sense to me at all.

Now this possibility to you might immediately have you think “This is a ludicrous proposition. Enough said!” But let’s probe this a little further, just for the heck of it. We know what people do at a casino: slot machines, roulette wheels, blackjack, etc. Why? Because they have come to win money, to walk out feeling good, to gamble that what they are doing will bring them satisfaction in some way. So they take the money they have worked hard to earn and they put that money or chips out there in a vulnerable place in the scary belief that this money will bring them greater returns. They say to themselves, “I hope I will win and not lose.” Most of us have tried this at some time in our lives with smaller or larger sums. We know the drill.

Now how in the world can we compare what goes on in a casino to what goes on in a congregation? Is this just wild thinking? Let us play along and consider for a moment. In the case of a congregation, what is it being gambled with? What is like the money or the chips in a casino? Try this on: the lives of the young people in the congregation. Are they ready for the world they will face? Have we done our best to pass on our faith to them? Are they seeing in some form that this belief in Jesus and following him is something real or is it make believe? Have they been prepared to fend off foolish or evil pressure from peers or other connivers? Are they headed for possible disaster because the teaching, the modeling, the praying, the parenting has been done in a haphazard way, not that effective?

Have we prepared those who will have the most influence on these young people to do the job only they can do? That means the parents, the grandparents! They are the ones looking at their vulnerable offspring and seeing “This child is not ready to meet up with a skilled manipulator who knows how to cheat to get his or her way.” These parents and grandparents are ones who have the authority and influence who are in the position to can say at the end of the road, “I have not lost one.” Facing the reality of all the influences on a child’s life, are all our parents or grandparents asking, “How can I more faithfully raise my odds this so my offspring will keep the faith, outsmart the groomer, live to give leadership in the next generation? I can see my odds are not very good right now unless I am kidding myself or am in complete denial.”

Now let’s say you are a novice at gambling. But you want to play blackjack. You walk up to the table and see a person dealing the cards out. All you know is you want to win and you don’t want to lose. Otherwise you don’t have a clue. The first hand you get real good cards. You win. It feels good. It prompts you to play more. As you keep playing, you start to realize this game is a little more



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complicated than you thought. You are now losing more often than you are winning. Besides you, you gradually notice another gambler who seems to be making some good decisions. He quits the game and walks away. You run after him and say, "I've got a question." He turns around. You blurt out, "You are pretty good at that blackjack game. How has that happened?" He looks at you and realizes I was the one usually losing. So he says, "I used to lose most of the time. But then I found some people who knew much more about the game than I did. I read and listened and learned a lot. It took me a long time but it was worth it." Now the game is a lot more fun and I win much more often."

Ask Yourself "What's going to happen to my offspring? Am I gambling with their lives or preparing them?"

So here is the question, "Has my church trained and equipped me as a parent, a grandparent so I am ready to work with my child and bring about a solid result, a win not a loss? Has my church told me directly that we are all in a casino and our kids' lives are at stake? Are we saying, "We were losing them after confirmation. We were losing them to the molesters, the bullies, the sextortionists, the Internet pornographers, the drug dealers, the rapists, the domestic violators. But now the numbers are down. We have learned how to win. Come to our casino (congregation) and we will teach you how to have fun, outfox the foxes and find joy in the Lord. But it will take work!