Are We Responsible to the Local Church?

Nancy and her husband Tom face a pressing and distressing decision. What is their responsibility to the church that has been their home for fifteen years? This question has been on both of their minds for the past couple of years. Both just turned sixty. Their faith and related activity in the church have been an integral part of their lives. Nancy, in particular, feels upset about her steadily diminished role in the church which is characterized as evangelical with its main growth occurring in younger congregation numbers.

This concern has grown in the latest couple of months as Nancy and Tom actively consider whether to move to some place further south. Tom has just retired from his long-term position with a local firm. They are now financially secure and able to consider a range of options for their future. The winters in northern Illinois are starting to wear on them. But Tom and Nancy are trying to decide where their responsibility to their church lies in their set of priorities for the next several years. The general consensus of their friends outside the church is that they feel no real loyalty to one church and feel that, wherever they would move, they could find another church that fits their needs.

Their church is in a community outside Chicago, Illinois. The church’s stated focus on bringing in the ‘lost’ has been its central mission since its formation eighteen years ago. The congregation initially started as a small cadre of believers within Chicago. Their Sunday services graduated from individual homes to the local high school auditorium in the early years. Three years ago, as the congregation grew rapidly, the church leadership proposed that the church would purchase land just outside the city limits and would build a church facility that would handle the expected future growth. The church moved to this new facility two years ago.

The congregation has continued to grow with the influx of residents of the new community more than matching those members who remained in the inner city. Furthermore, the age distribution of the church membership has declined considerably and continues that decline with younger people in essence replacing the older generation that Nancy and Tom belong to. She hasn’t thought too long on how her responsibilities should change given the evolving nature of the church membership. In the past few months, she honestly feels that she would likely grow in her faith in a church in which the membership includes a greater percentage of older members and less of a focus on growing the congregation. She feels that this growth orientation has diminished the education of longtime members.

One of their daughters in a different city had recently decided to change churches also because the focus on “shepherding the flock” in her prior church appeared to be declining. The church had decided to allocate its resources more toward appealing to new attendees to the apparent
detriment of programs more oriented toward existing members. Nancy and her daughter had discussed this issue in great depth. Tom disagrees; he feels a loyalty to their current church and argues that they should adapt to meet its needs instead of the reverse.

As Tom and Nancy have thought about the issues, the decision comes down to whether they should focus primarily on their own individual needs or those of their church. They have come to you, a friend of many years, for advice. You, yourself, have moved among several churches, but primarily for job change reasons. Given your background of such moves, Tom and Nancy feel you would have unique insight into their dilemma.

You decide that what is needed is a scriptural base for such advice rather than the more social reasons often used for church moves. There is little time as they do not wish to delay this important decision.

ASSIGNMENT

What is the Biblical foundation for Tom and Nancy to use in deciding which church to attend in their retirement years?
My Scriptural Research:

Group Scriptural Research:

Decisions / Recommendations:

Primary Scriptural References: