

SHOULD PASTORS TALK ABOUT MONEY?

It is no surprise that clergy are hesitant to talk about money in church. Since the Bible says that we cannot serve God and money (Luke 16:13) and that we are not to be greedy for money (1 Tim 3:8), there is a sense in which money seems unclean. We think that our spiritual lives should not include thinking or talking about finances. We leave that to the lay people. We are afraid to offend people and to appear self serving, since a big item in the church budget is the pastor's salary. While we are trying to act like lilies in the field and not worry about our finances, we watch our Pension funds dwindle. We are also aware that many parishioners are struggling financially and so it is even harder to ask people to give more to the church. I have yet to hear of any pastor who preaches about money and giving as much as Jesus did proportionately to His other messages.

Added to this not many clergy feel all that competent in financial matters. If they are, parishioners may not feel comfortable about that. In some cases it is the congregation members who object to the pastor talking about or preaching about money. These days, seminarians are a little better prepared for ministry in the area of financial stewardship. www.luthersem.edu/rethinking is a great example. Click on "Presentation Resources" and then as an example click on Philip and Janet Jamieson's slide presentation called *The Bilingual Church Leader: speaking the language of money within a theological context*. In their early years in pastoral ministry, clergy are paying off student loans and may be struggling in their own stewardship. Currently there is anxiety as churches cannot meet their budgets and some pastors will not receive a full pay check or are being asked to reduce their hours.

Well like it or not, if we are going to grow well-formed stewards in the congregation and if the people in your church are going to give generously with grateful hearts then pastoral leadership is essential. In all the stewardship readings I have come across there is a strong connection between our spiritual lives and our gratitude, our faith and our generosity.

It is not so much about the needs of the church as much as our need to give. Yes it is true that people give financially to a ministry they believe in; money follows mission. Foremost people are likely to give out of gratitude to God and because their hearts have been transformed by the Holy Spirit. We are stewards of many blessings: our health, creation, relationships, time, talents, forgiveness, the church, our ministry, our memories, faith, money and more. Discipleship is the focus of stewardship.

The pastor is to pave the way but talking about money all year round, especially when the assigned text deals with the issue and when the church is not asking for money. The pastor needs to be on the stewardship leadership team because of her or his biblical and theological training. I understand from most of the stewardship resources that a pastor should be transparent and talk about his or her own stewardship story; practices, joys and challenges. Particularly in small and rural ministries it is beneficial for a pastor to share why and how he or she gives and to be deeply involved as an enabler and model of a stewardship leader.

Pastors set the tone, demonstrating trust in God's abundance and the joy of giving. God's abundance begins with word and sacrament, and the one serving those things is the pastor. The pastor also speaks of our connectedness with the whole body of Christ through our giving. This is as close as we get to having all things in common.

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