STEWARDSHIP UNIVERSITY

Why Clergy Should Know Confidentially What Their People Give

When clergy know the church's finances and what people give, it overcomes the false split that exists between the financial life of the congregation and the spiritual life of the congregation. The financial life of the congregation is often portrayed is separate and inferior, a necessary evil best dealt with by people with business experience. The members of the clergy should only deal with spiritual matters.

Money is a HUGE spiritual matter in the life of the church. "If you don't talk about money in your congregation you are assuring that money will be a problem in people's lives with Jesus" (Lane, p. 60).

The primary reason that many church boards or vestries (Bishop's committees) want to keep financial matters away from the member of the clergy is fear.

Fear—

that the pastor/priest may want to change some things;

the pastor/priest may find out that people's stewardship isn't what it should be;

that as long as the financial life/spiritual life split remains "then people don't have to hold their financial lives up to the light of scripture," and "religion can be kept in a safe box that does not have to impact the business that fills in the rest of the week" (Lane, p. 61);

because keeping the pastor/priest ignorant of church finances preserves the power and control of whose who are involved:

> *The pastor needs to shatter the 'conspiracy of silence' by talking about money. The pastor must do this for the spiritual health of the people in the congregation. As long as the pastor refuses to shatter the 'conspiracy of silence' then the conspiracy will continue. Because of the unique position of the pastor, he or she alone is in the position to end the false spiritual/financial dichotomy.* (Lane, p. 63)

So how does the pastor/priest do this?

First, **the pastor/priest must be a part of the stewardship team**; his or her role is too important in the spiritual lives of the congregation to not be a part of the team; additionally, they bring theological and biblical knowledge to keep things on track, and can keep the team focused on the giver's need to give, not the church's need to receive.

Second, **model effective personal stewardship**. The pastor/priest should talk about his or her own personal stewardship, and speak to the church about how much he or she gives and why. If they are tithing or giving beyond, the congregation should know that. If circumstances prevent tithing, share those circumstances as well. Honesty and integrity go far here, and quiet naysayers.

Third, **the pastor/priest should know what each person gives to the congregation.** For some, this represents a final 'taboo,' often objecting on the grounds of favoritism in pastoral care giving.

> *"If the pastor knows how much people give, the pastor will let this influence his or her ministry to people. He or she will cater to the big givers." My standard answer to this is that if your pastor would structure pastoral care around giving levels, then you have much bigger problems than what the pastor does or doesn't know.*
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> *Because wealth and what we do with the money and possessions God has entrusted to us is such a huge issue in our relationship with Jesus, the pastor has to know what people give. How is the pastor to help people grow in their relationship with Jesus if he or she is kept in the dark about how much people give? The pastor needs to have access to giving information, and the pastor needs to handle this information just as the pastor handles everything else the pastor knows about people's lives—confidentially and pastorally.* (Lane, 63-65).

For more, see Charles Lane's *Ask, Thank, Tell*, Chapter 5, and J. Clif Christopher's, *Not Your Parents Offering Plate*, Chapters 2 and 3.