

## **The pastor and stewardship**

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I was at a first call event in Wisconsin recently during which I found myself in a discussion about the pastor's role in congregational stewardship ministry. Several of the new pastors had already been instructed that their place in the congregation's life did not include financial matters. One was told that preaching about stewardship was not necessary, and not welcome. Another was told, "You don't need to worry about finances. We'll take care of that. You preach, visit the sick and do the other things that pastors do."

This conversation has caused me to think again about the pastor's role in the congregation's stewardship ministry and financial life. Here are some of my convictions.

The pastor must occupy a central place in the congregation's stewardship ministry. Stewardship is not so much about raising money as it is about helping people make connections between their relationship with Jesus and their relationship with money. If the pastor isn't involved in this work, it simply won't happen. If the pastor isn't involved in stewardship ministry, it will almost inevitably be reduced to "paying the bills," and that is not a good thing.

The pastor should also be integrally involved in the congregation's financial life. Although we may not like the terminology, there is a sense in which the pastor is the CEO of a small nonprofit (and in some cases, not so small). As such, the pastor needs to be fluent in the congregation's financial reports and should be central in financial decisions that are made.

The pastor should know what people give. I know this is often a contentious issue in congregations. Pastors should know what people give because giving is one of the few quantifiable measures of spiritual maturity. With this knowledge the pastor can help people grow spiritually, the pastor can acknowledge those whose giving reflects a high level of spiritual maturity and the pastor can watch for dramatic changes in giving that indicate a significant change in a person's life and/or relationship with the church.

The pastor should make sure good financial controls are in place. Assumption of the good intentions of all involved should not replace good financial controls. The church landscape is littered with sad stories of trusted people who misused this trust to steal congregational funds. Congregations need to make every effort to never put anyone in a position where they could easily steal if they decided to do so.

Finally, the pastor should try to never handle cash or write church checks. In even the smallest congregation, there are lay leaders who both can and should handle these matters.

I don't expect everyone who reads this email will agree with all of these. That is fine. Let my words be a catalyst to help you think about what you consider to be the appropriate place of the pastor in the congregation's stewardship ministry.

Also by Chick Lane --

## **Watch your pronouns**

Several years ago I served as stewardship staff in the Northwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA. In that position, I had many stewardship conversations with pastors.

One of the things I quickly learned was that some pastors would refer to the stewardship and/or finance committees using the third person plural pronoun. "They are doing this. They are doing that." What I also learned was that there was an almost direct correlation between this pronoun usage and congregations that were having stewardship difficulties.

When the pastor didn't feel that the stewardship ministry of the congregation was best described with the pronoun "we," there were almost always problems.