

Our churches need money but we don't like talking about it and we really don't like the vicar doing it. Not to worry; many clergy don't like it either! But money talk matters both practically and spiritually and leaders, lay and ordained, must lead in this important area of discipleship.



Must we talk money?

Like bookends the opening and closing chapters of *Beyond the Collection Plate* address the sensitive question of why it is so important to talk about money and the key role that church leaders play in shaping that conversation and the actions that follow from it.

Money talk matters

Money is an operational necessity for churches just as for any other organisation. Without money we cannot pay our bills or make repairs to the fabric. We cannot pay our clergy or other staff. We cannot support the ministry of our church members and we cannot resource mission in the place where God has called us. These are practical implications but money matters run much deeper than that.

It is simply a mistake to see money as a worldly, secular matter but prayer and worship as spiritual concerns. In blunt words Jesus reminds us that we can follow the money, that what we do with money speaks of our heart: 'for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Mt 6:21).

The apostle Paul challenged the church in Corinth to make a generous gift to the impoverished church in Jerusalem. More than money, for Paul this offering was an 'administration of grace' and those organising it he called 'the glory of Christ' (2 Cor 8:19, 23). Money talk is talk about what God has entrusted to us. When we make decisions around money we are managing the things of God, not of the world.

Leadership, both lay and ordained, is as important around money as for any aspect of church life. 'Clergy cannot abdicate responsibility for leadership in stewardship on the grounds that they are pastors and teachers. Lay leaders may deal with day to day money matters but cannot divorce money from ministry, mission and discipleship.'ⁱ

Reluctant stewards

But money talk is hard and brings particular challenges to clergy. Clergy hesitation to talk money is entirely understandable. One report from the USA, *The Reluctant Steward*, notes a clergy skills deficit around managing buildings and money, a deficit not addressed in seminary. The report also notes a second factor which Mark Chaves describes elsewhere: clergy 'have a tendency to consciously separate religious, spiritual, and pastoral authority and responsibilities from practical, financial, and administrative authority and responsibilities'.ⁱⁱ

Flying the flag

As the closing chapter of *Beyond the Collection Plate* notes, no army ever took a position when those carrying the flags are at the rear. Leaders must lead in money matters, in stewardship. The final chapter offers three pictures, three ways of thinking about the role of leadership in stewardship. Leaders, lay and ordained, are architects of good stewardship practice, story tellers who keep fresh the story of God's abundance and generosity and fellow travellers with those they lead.

Notes and Resources

ⁱ Beyond the Collection Plate p70

ⁱⁱ The Reluctant Steward, a report by Saint Meinrad Seminary (1992). The report is summarised in Financing American Religion ed. M Chaves and S Miller (1999) and the Chaves quote is from p176 of the same book.