

The people rejoiced: why leadership matters

Generous giving can transform a church and its ministry. Such a transformation requires leaders, both clergy and lay, to exercise their leadership and to engage personally. This paper explores the place of leadership in stewardship in Scripture and its importance for today's church.



Not too many armies have ever taken a position when those who carry the flag are at the back. It holds true for stewardship as well. Church leaders must be flag bearers for stewardship and they must lead from the front. The research is inconclusive on whether church members want the clergy to know how much they give. But congregations do want their clergy to lead in stewardship. A 2013 [survey](#) notes that where clergy are aware of giving trends in the congregation – suggesting more engagement with stewardship – there is an improved financial response.

Reluctant stewards

Money talk can be difficult, even distasteful, for some clergy and there are reasons for this hesitation (*D.Hoge et al* ch1). Clergy feel largely ill equipped by their theological training to deal with financial matters and stewardship. For some it is 'management' and not their calling; for others it's like 'singing for supper' and free-church clergy can feel this intensely.

Some clergy are embarrassed about talking about giving in low-income congregations, especially when they are among the few in full-time employment. Conversely, other clergy can feel a little out of their depth when the leadership team hosts several finance professionals. And, like everyone else, clergy have personal pressures around household finances, personal debt and sometimes resentment at the very real lifestyle changes that can accompany a move to paid ministry.

Protecting the flanks

Lay leaders have a key role in giving permission, encouragement and support to clergy, Readers, preachers and pastors to tackle stewardship from the pulpit and in the church council. But, understandably, money talk is not easy for lay leaders either. They often share with clergy an anxiety that talking money will upset people and result in less giving, not more. It is never easy when one or two in the church are vocal about this. There is also the nagging worry that people have no more to give despite, sometimes, evidence to the contrary in lifestyle choices. Perhaps we should simply leave money to those who like numbers.

Leadership in the bible

Unfortunately we don't have that option. In the bible, leadership and generous giving go hand in hand. Moses challenged the idolatry of the golden calf and then invited a repentant people to bring gifts to build the Tent of Meeting. They were so generous that the workers pleaded with Moses to ask them to stop (Exodus 35:20-29; 36:2-7).

Again, the book of Haggai tells us that, after the Exile, it was prophet, priest and king working together who led the people in rebuilding the Temple. Around the same time, in the book of Ezra, we read about spontaneous gifts for the restoration of the Temple while, a little earlier, Nehemiah leads the people in committing themselves to both tithing and the Temple tax to maintain renewed Temple worship (Neh 10:31-39).



Paul, the great missionary apostle, took a strong lead and invested time, energy and personal reputation in preparing a financial offering for the impoverished church in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26-28; 2 Cor. 8-9). For Paul, avoidance of greed is a mark of spiritual maturity and a requirement for church leaders (Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; Titus 1:7; 1 Tim. 3:3, 6:5).

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Perhaps the most striking illustration of leadership around money is the story of King David's provision for the temple in Jerusalem in 1 Chronicles 28-29. Having drawn up the plans for the Temple (28:11), and with the people ready to begin the work, David does two things. First, he gives significant resources from the royal treasury, a 'lead gift' that makes the job possible. Then David offers his own personal gift to affirm his personal commitment to the Temple (29:3).

David's generous gift gives him the integrity to invite the leaders of the clans of Israel to make their own gifts, and the effect is spectacular. There are abundant resources for the Temple and the people rejoice 'at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord' (1 Chron. 29:9).

A short bible study, *Of Your Own do we Give You*, with some discussion questions, explores this rich bible passage further. Check it out at the [Leadership tab](#).

Leadership and Giving in Grace

No matter how hard the planning group works, neither Giving in Grace nor any other stewardship programme will bear fruit without the visible, prayerful and committed support of the church leadership. A simple vote in favour at the church council is not enough. It must be spoken of in church on Sunday and in the ASDA on Monday with enthusiasm, not resigned weariness. Leaders must be champions and advocates, ready to affirm their support and to make that support concrete. In practical terms this cashes out in two key questions.

The first question is this: *Is Giving in Grace a sufficiently high priority for the church, and the leadership in particular?*

King David allocated rich resources from the treasury to the new Temple. Giving in Grace needs a small budget but above all the precious resources of people and time. Stewardship ministry is not a financial sideshow while the main spiritual work of the church continues elsewhere. Nor is stewardship

the necessary if unpalatable means of getting on with the real business of ministry and mission. Generous discipleship is as natural as prayer, worship and service. Generosity is a mark of spiritual maturity and a core task of leaders is to build a community of generous givers.

The second question is this: *Are church leaders willing to make an early, personal, confidential response?*

David himself made the first, generous and personal gift to the Temple. Church leaders can do no less. They must model a generosity they seek from others.



The leadership – clergy, wardens, elders, deacons, church council and planning group members – are strongly advised to receive and return their personal response forms before the programme is launched in the church. Fundraisers call these the 'lead gifts' and they will comprise a significant percentage of the total increase in congregational giving.

These early leader gifts are, of course, entirely confidential, as is everyone else's response. However, the *total* leader gift (the pledged increase in weekly giving by all leaders) can be, arguably should be declared in the clergy ask letter to the wider church. The letter templates at [Prepare the Literature](#) provide a simple form of words for doing this.

Conclusion

Leaders hold the key to a fruitful giving programme in the church. It is not always easy and there may be some disagreement amongst leaders, which needs to be worked through. But no programme can succeed without committed and visible leadership.