

Cultivate a healthy stewardship culture

by ALBAN at Duke Divinity school

Not every pastor feels comfortable preaching and teaching about personal stewardship and church finances. However, as the economy continues to ebb and flow, congregations will need to discern how to talk about — and be good stewards of — money.

No minister wants to be known as the preacher who “only talks about money.” Honest members might confess that they hope the day their friend comes to church with them is not the day the sermon is about tithing. Yet even though interest rates continue to rise and inflation is real, this is not the time to shy away from reminding disciples about God’s expectations related to stewardship. Of course, stewardship extends beyond finances. We are called to be stewards of our bodies, relationships and the earth. Yet money is often more difficult to discuss publicly because so many people treat money as a private concern. Our culture tells us that it’s nobody’s business what we do with our money. It’s worth reminding people that the gospel challenges that assumption.

A first step for a church that wants to have healthy conversations about financial stewardship is for the pastor to be self-aware regarding their own financial journey. Does the leader practice faithful stewardship? It is almost impossible to lead people where we are not willing to go ourselves.

A good second step in building a healthy stewardship culture is for the lay leaders to get on the same page about the language that will shape the church’s practices and theology. What is money for? If the church is affluent, how will you describe what generosity looks like? If members have more limited economic resources, how will you communicate about money without shaming or guilt-tripping people who already face serious financial challenges?

Money can be a tough topic. You need to talk about it. Are you ready for the challenge?

Before you go...

I agree with Henri Nouwen’s perspective on money. He wrote that fundraising, which I would broaden to include stewardship, is just as spiritual as “giving a sermon,

spending time in prayer, visiting the sick or feeding the hungry.” This is a key reason congregational leaders cannot afford to be silent about money: too much is at stake.

Financial resources help the church actualize the vision of God’s beloved community. The communal approach of pooling our money to fulfill a mission that is bigger than any one person challenges our culture’s hyper-individualistic values. As we pass the plate (or give on our apps), we’re saying, “We’re all in this together.”

As you strive to be faithful in your calling as a leader, don’t forget that money matters.