

## Why Clergy Should Know what their People Pledge

*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12, NRSV*

Right in the midst of Paul's great homage to love—the greatest of Christian virtues—he saw fit to remind the Church in Corinth that he himself was fully known by God. And that they (and ourselves, too) are being invited onto the fullness of knowing like God, who knows all things.



What a beautiful and terrifying proposition! And how congruent with love. We who have been loved by another person know what a costly blessing it is to be fully known, and yet loved nevertheless: in our imperfections as well as in our holiness. What greater mirror (of imperfections and holiness) than our household budgets? Friends in parish leadership, I encourage you to make sure that your clergy “fully know” the pledge commitments of your faithful. To know what and how people give is an exercise of pastoral attention, and—dare I say—of love!

Most of us are well aware of how sensitive conversations about money can be in our culture. We all feel vulnerable about our budgets and our giving; more would always be better, no? Knowing sensitive information is a tender ministry of trust. For clergy, however, the responsibility of knowing people's pledge (and other giving) commitments is critically important to the spiritual health of individuals and our Christian communities. Why?

### **What is unknown has power—**

... sometimes of unhealthy dimensions. Confidentiality is appropriate, but when Christians intentionally conceal their money decisions, spiritual danger is nearby. As clergy we've all seen the damage caused by secrecy around money—and debt and gambling—in marital relationships. This is equally true for clergy households. One way to model good spiritual health is to disclose our relationship with money in safe settings, and one such setting should be our churches and with our pastors and spiritual directors. We diminish the spiritual risk of money—the having, the hoarding and the spending thereof—when we learn to create an expectation that giving will be known by the pastor.

### **What is known is accountable—**

... literally and fiscally! Clergy need to know about changes to income for the purposes of good parochial management and planning, but we also should know about changes in member household finances, because they're often a source and a sign of stress. Vestry members and parishioners, fear not! We have no desire to privilege the rich or penalize the poor (if anything it works the other way around), but we do want to know if you've changed or lost jobs so that we can accompany you pastorally. And if it happens that a church member changes their pledge in protest against the church—yes it happens—we'll want to know that, rather than just guessing about what has changed.

### **What is known is always loved—**

...by God, and by your pastor. Whether a member gives much or little, more or less than last year, every gift is received with gratitude. We clergy see the generosity of our people, and we know the choices you are making to support your church. Together with God, we consider that an act of faith and we love you for it. And if we can pastorally encourage our communities to greater works of mercy and acts of generosity, well... we're doing our jobs. Paul had things to say about that too—

*And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

—1 Corinthians 13:13, NRSV



*The Very Rev. Julia McCray-Goldsmith serves as Dean of Trinity Cathedral in San Jose, California, and is humbled by the generosity of her parishioners every day!*