



30 YEARS OF  
INSPIRING  
GENEROSITY



The  
Diocese of Huron

## Living the Gift: Stewardship in Word and Practice

Pastoral Opportunities and Challenges at the intersection of money and meaning Handouts

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As you read this case study, look for the following:

- ▶ What is the presenting money issue?
- ▶ What emotional or spiritual issue may be underneath it?
- ▶ What boundary is needed?
- ▶ What pastoral care is needed?
- ▶ What leadership structure should be involved?
- ▶ What would transparency require?
- ▶ What would generosity require?
- ▶ What should the priest carry, and what should the priest not carry?

### Case Study One

Margaret has been a member of St. Anselm's for more than forty years. Her family helped pay for the parish hall renovation in the 1980s, and her late husband served twice as senior warden. After Sunday worship, she asks the priest for "just a few private minutes" and explains that she is prepared to give \$75,000 toward the church's capital needs. The gift would be enough to fix the leaking roof over the sacristy and finally replace the aging sound system.

There is, however, one condition. Margaret wants the gift used only if the vestry agrees to restore the 8:00 a.m. service permanently with "none of those new words," remove the children's area from the nave, and stop "all this talk about changing the music." She says, "I don't want to be difficult, but people like me have kept this place alive. If the church wants my support, I need to know it is still my church."



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### Case Study Two

At the October parish council meeting, the treasurer presents the draft budget and says the church is facing a \$90,000 gap for the coming year. Several leaders become visibly anxious. The stewardship chair says, “People need to understand how serious this is. We should send a letter saying that unless pledges increase dramatically, we may need to cut staff, close the building during the week, and reconsider whether we can afford full-time clergy.”

By the next Sunday, versions of that message are already circulating at coffee hour. One parishioner tells a newcomer, “We’re in real trouble. I hope you’re planning to pledge.” Another says, “Honestly, people here enjoy everything but don’t pay their share.” The priest knows the financial concerns are real, but also notices that the conversation has moved quickly from stewardship into fear, blame, and pressure.



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### Case Study Three

After a weekday Eucharist, Daniel asks the priest if they can talk privately. He is embarrassed and tearful. He says he lost his job three months ago and has been using credit cards to keep up with rent, groceries, and medical bills. He has not told most people at church because he is ashamed. He asks whether the church can pay his rent this month and possibly cover his utilities until he gets back on his feet.

Then Daniel adds, "Please don't tell the parish council or anyone on the pastoral care team. I know people gossip. I only trust you." He also says he has stopped pledging for now, but hopes no one will notice. The priest wants to help and feels the weight of Daniel's fear, but also knows the church has limited discretionary funds, informal practices around assistance, and no clear policy for repeated financial support.



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### Case Study Four

Charles is one of the largest annual donors at Grace Church. He is generous, charming, and deeply committed to the parish, but everyone knows he dislikes surprises. Over the years, wardens have learned to “check with Charles” before launching anything significant. When the parish council begins discussing a new outreach partnership that would involve sharing parish space with a community organization, Charles asks for a meeting with the priest.

He explains that he is “concerned about the direction of the parish” and says several longtime members feel the same way. He reminds the priest that his annual pledge covers “a meaningful portion” of the church’s operating budget and says, “I would hate to reconsider my giving, but I need to know that the parish is being led responsibly.” Later that week, two vestry members separately tell the priest they think the outreach idea should be paused because “we can’t afford to upset Charles right now.”



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### Case Study Five

At St. Lydia's, several members have become frustrated that the parish council continues funding the youth minister position even though "there are hardly any children here anymore." One Sunday, a longtime parishioner tells the priest that a small group has decided to redirect their pledges. Instead of giving to the operating budget, they will designate their gifts only for "core worship expenses": altar supplies, music, building maintenance, and clergy salary.

The parishioner insists this is not a protest. "We just want to make sure our money goes to the real church," she says. By the next week, the treasurer reports that five households have submitted pledge cards with restrictions written across the top. The priest feels the immediate budget pressure, but also hears something deeper underneath the behavior: grief about change, suspicion of leadership, and a shrinking definition of what counts as ministry.



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### Case Study Six

At Emmanuel Church, the finance committee is trying to close a budget gap. During the conversation, one member says, “Well, nobody goes into ministry to get rich.” Another suggests freezing staff salaries for the third year in a row and asking the parish administrator to reduce hours while “still helping out when emergencies come up.” Someone else wonders aloud whether the priest might voluntarily decline part of the housing allowance “as a sign of shared sacrifice.”

The priest sits quietly as the room nods along. Everyone frames the conversation as practical, faithful, and necessary. But the priest notices that no one has suggested asking the congregation to increase giving, reducing beloved programs, or telling the truth about what ministry actually costs. The financial problem has somehow become a moral test for the people being paid least to carry it.



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