

Gifts of the Holy Spirit -- The Gift of Administration
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Hardly would a contemporary Christian consider administrative work in the Church a gift of the Holy Spirit, but in First Corinthians 12: 28 St. Paul lists administration (some translations say governments) as a gift placed in the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is part of the orderliness expected in the church just as certain as his instruction in First Corinthians 14: 40 regarding the place of teaching a doctrine, giving a message in tongues, speaking out a revelation by the Holy Spirit, or having the interpretation of a message in tongues (verse 26). "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Some clergy think they are good administrators when in fact they are micro-managers who must keep their fingers on the pulse of everything that goes on in the church. That kind of administration stifles lay ministry and discourages people who want to use their talents for the Kingdom. The good administrator lets his staff know his heart and desire, and then gives them the liberty to do their work. They report to him at which time if re-directing is necessary it can be done. The good administrator knows how to delegate and trust those to whom he has given responsibility.

When I was in parish ministry at my last Episcopal Church I employed a lady as parish administrator. She brought into the church her training and skills in business administration. She worked full time overseeing the temporal matters of the church, freeing me to attend to what I was called to do as spiritual leader. She was part of the staff and conveyed my wishes expressed during weekly staff meetings to committee and commission heads. She met with the committees and commissions as necessary and assisted in their organization. She made sure janitorial supplies and other necessary inventory were kept current. Scheduling office receptionists, overseeing the janitorial staff, resolving problems that came up in the office, and a host of other mundane things she handled and I did not have to bother with them.

Too often pastors get buried under the details of administration when a lay person could be far more effective if given the opportunity. Small churches could avail of a retired person who might have been in an administrative position when actively employed. Their service, depending upon the size of the local church, could be voluntary. Even if some compensation is given it would be a tremendous help to the pastor and relieve him to study, pray, prepare worthy sermons, conduct Bible classes, visit his people, and do the things he was trained in seminary to do.

The same business ethics suggested for the church are also recommended for the pastor. Pastors need to develop the practice of paying bills on time. It is advisable for pastors to stay as far away from the church's money as possible. Of course, he may prepare the budget or submit to a committee the things he needs in a budget, but in so far as being the one who writes the checks on behalf of the church, it is advisable that an appointed treasurer handle this task. Financial accountability needs to be transparent, and no more

than being the one reported to, the Pastor exercises wisdom when a bonded lay person handles the details of the church's finance.

One might ask where does business management fit into the scope of spirituality? The greatest complaint against clergy and churches from the business world is they fail to pay their bills on time, and are credit risks. A young lady living with us one time worked at a local bank as the Master Card representative. She would get a bonus if she signed up a certain number of people. She wanted to sign me up for a credit card that I did not need nor want but wishing to help her, I agreed. She came back with a credit line of \$3,000 and I rejected the card. Her manager informed her that was the maximum they gave to clergy because they were poor risks, but when he checked my credit score, he admitted surprise and increased my credit line to \$10,000. That was an exceptional line of credit in 1974.

Three days after arriving at a new church a knock came on the door of our house and there appeared a government official looking for the former pastor. The problem was his taxes and later I learned he left owing everybody in the area. June and I resolved to build a credit record and went to the local Sears and purchased a freezer on credit. I paid it off a year earlier than the due date. We purchased something else and did the same, building a good credit record. When I applied for a line of credit with which to purchase our present home, all my credit scores were over 800. One of the most positive things a clergyman can do enhance his reputation in the business world is to build a good credit record.

Paying bills on time is a Christian witness to the business world, and it is no sin to operate the temporal affairs of the church on good business standards. In many ways the Church is a business no different from a department store or a car dealer, and when it employs good business practices, the church becomes a positive influence in the community.

It would be marvelous if members of the administrative board, vestry, council or whatever term used for the local church governing body, saw their involvement as a gift or ministry from the Holy Spirit. If the business meeting was viewed as a "spiritual event" as the Sunday morning worship time there would be less disagreement and the will of the Holy Spirit would be accomplished in the church.

One thing I learned about the government of the church is that many things are considered "jobs" rather than think of them as a gifting from the Holy Spirit. I had a lady who was financial secretary and each Monday morning spent three hours counting Sunday's offering, and recording the contributions to contributors' records. It was her ministry without pay. A retired man was assistant treasurer and kept tabs on all the invoices that came and made certain they were promptly paid. Again without pay! I had a janitor whom I swore had a staff of angels assisting him because he spent as much time in the chapel praying as he did working yet everything was done and the property was always orderly and clean. Perhaps it was because to him cleaning the buildings was a ministry rather than a job even though he was paid to do it.

As I said in another article, we need a surgery of the mind and heart, and see the things done in the church as a gift provided by the Holy Spirit.