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Will Our Pastor's Be Stewards?

Last Summer I attended a forum on the role of seminaries in stewardship education convened by the Association of Theological Schools and the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education. The most important insights of this group, from my perspective, were first that the public leadership of pastors on the topic of faith and money is key to effective leadership in this area and second, that it is directly affected by the pastor's personal stewardship beliefs and practices.

At one point in the conversation, several of the seminary administrators expressed frustration. Despite their best efforts to reduce the costs of a seminary degree through grants and scholarships, too many graduates are beginning their service in the church burdened with large indebtedness resulting from the misuse of credit to support a consumer lifestyle. This indebtedness often results in tremendous stress and anxiety that understandably impedes their capacity to provide a "non-anxious presence" in their leadership roles.

Their conclusion was that by the time individuals enter seminary, lifestyle patterns and theological convictions around the topic of faith and money are already established - and that these patterns and beliefs are influenced more by our consumer culture than by faith convictions.

The forum participants agreed that more can and should be done through the process of financial aid counseling, the seminary curriculum and continuing education opportunities, to address the personal stewardship habits, theology and leadership skills of pastors. However, they realized that the effort to develop pastors who teach and model good stewardship must begin in the home and congregation in their earliest years of spiritual formation of all our children.

This website provides information about many of the resources and efforts available to help with this process. However, these resources cannot be effective so long as we relegate all discussion of money and possessions to annual appeals for giving to the church's budget. Rather, we must integrate it into the entire life of the congregation throughout the year as well model faithful stewardship in our institutional practices. It is only as we do this that we will nurture leaders who can faithfully model and effectively address the issues around faith and money.

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