

WHAT DO I DO NOW? Clif Christopher

Yesterday I got two calls from clergy who both asked me the same question, "What do I do now? I am nearing the end of the year and we are behind in the budget. I do not have a clue as to what December will bring, and we have to prepare a budget for 2009. What do I do now?"

I am never quite sure why anyone would put such confidence in me, but for what it is worth I sought to share with them what I feel most clergy and other non-profit executives should be doing now.

1. First, do not panic. If we truly believe that God is Sovereign then have confidence in Him to lead you and His church through this time and anytime.
2. Redouble your efforts at telling your people how you are changing lives and making a difference. People still have money and they will give it, but they will become much more discriminating. Your best case needs to be how effective you have been with what has been given so far. Tell genuine stories, not statistics.
3. Be honest and upfront with your people through email and letters. Let them know the exact final condition of the church and how they help can make a difference, if they are able. I am not a fan of pulpit announcements of distress.
4. Communicate clearly to your people that you know some of them are in fiscal distress and that the church is there to assist. Encourage them to contact a pastor as soon as they can. Prepare a team at the church to be ready to help families who may be in need. Never come across that the church has shifted gears to being in the receiving end and not in the giving end. Your only right to receive has been how well you give.
5. Preach, preach, preach on the role of money in our lives and how wealth is not our God or our refuge or our strength. We have persons open to hearing sermons on money who never would listen before.
6. Have a flat or slightly decreased budget for 2009. Share with the congregation that the church knows what is going on and is trying to join them in being very prudent while remaining faithful. Some of the areas you cut can be made up later with special offering opportunities as you move through the year.
7. Visit with your major donors. I would intentionally try and see the top ten donors to the church (top 5 for sure) and see if they are o.k. or need help. These persons support a huge percentage of your budget and hearing where they are can help you determine strategy going forward. Don't assume anything...go see them!
8. Start a daily or weekly prayer group that you meet with. Strongly encourage your church leaders to attend. The sole purpose of gathering will be to pray for our nation, world, economy, church, and leaders. This will keep you grounded and keep you from falling prey to the idea that the solution is economic instead of spiritual.
9. Don't neglect planned giving. Churches that have strong endowments are weathering this crisis much better than those who don't. If you haven't gotten going do it now and be ready the next time this happens to us.