

# Raising Money as Prophets and Pastors

## Resource 3.9

The Reverend Canon Charles LaFond

**Excerpt:** *“The ways in which stewardship leaders are both prophets and pastors in a time of over-stimulation, over-caffeination, over-scheduling, and over-spending while under-silencing and under-laughing creates a perfect social and ecclesial storm in which we stewardship leaders are a lifeboat of power and hope for clergy, bishops, and a beautiful, effective laity.”*

**Thesis statement:** *To be effective in helping people to give their money to mission, we need to stop being so nice. We need to exchange nice for kind and effective. We need to pastor the uncomfortable regarding fundraising and we need to be prophets to a church that is often deluded and a people whose fear will only be healed with adoration, glory, and awe.*

### Raising Money as Prophets and Pastors

Jesus said it more than anything else. And, no, I am not talking about giving. We are missing the point by talking about giving. I swear, if one more person tells me how many times Jesus talked about money I may just lose it. There was nothing Hallmark-greeting-card about what Jesus told us. Jesus did not come here to compliment the world. He came here to save it from pathological narcissism, one person at a time.

Jesus gave us our calling, and it was not to give. It was not to pledge. It was not to preach. It was not to say masses. It was to “Be not afraid.”

#### **Fearless.**

That is our calling. Nothing less. We are called to be fearless. We are called by God over and over again to NOT BE AFRAID. We are called to love each other. We are called to love God with everything we have and are. And we are called to be fearless.

*Fearless* about speaking truth to power. *Fearless* about living life. *Fearless* about what happens to our bodies—for they decay as we speak. *Fearless* about our money and the comforts it can bring us when we give it away. *Fearless* about the incontinence that our shame brings on as we pretend that spending money the way we do is okay. *Fearless* about setting goals for mission. *Fearless* about making sacrifices for Jesus.

*Fearless* with our praise. Lavishing it on a senior warden, a priest, a bishop, a board president, or a senator when they are beautiful examples of faithful leadership.

*Fearless* in the face of a senior warden, a priest, a bishop, a board president, or a senator when they are disgraceful examples of incompetence. Lovingly, compassionately, resoundingly fearless.

#### **Fearless.**

That is our calling. “Do not be afraid.” Jesus implored his followers; commanded them over and over again, to take courage. To be not afraid. He did not say: make your pledge. Nor did he say “Give your money away.”

Not even feed the poor. Take courage. Be not afraid. That is what Jesus kept saying. *Fearless*. That is what Jesus keeps saying.

Fearless. Death-defying. Power-defying. Stupid-defying. Boring defying. Agenda-defying. Nice-defying. *Fearless*.

If you are in this room or watching this video stream, you are here because you are in some capacity a fundraiser. You raise money for the mission of Jesus on this planet.

Now, you may be given over to Gnosticism and think that the things of this world like fundraising, pledging, and sex are evil, sticky, and stinky, and you may believe that the things of God, like stewardship, wafers that stick to the roof of your mouth, and the offertory are pretty and holy, and that is okay. But you should not be at this conference. Being a gnostic at a fundraising conference is stepping into the shower wearing a raincoat. It's not efficient.

Setting aside the church's decision in the second century that Gnosticism was a heresy, I would propose that being fearless about being fundraisers for the mission of Jesus on the planet is not such a bad thing.

But being fearless is not even enough. We must also be compassionate. *Com*-passion. Being *with* people in their struggle. *Com*-passion. Fearlessness without compassion is little more than bullying in a cloak of spiritual superiority. I am not saying it never happens. Indeed, it happens all too often—and often in stewardship circles. But what I hope to convince you of today is that my job, your job, our job is to be fearless and compassionate. What I hope to convince you of today is that fearlessness and compassion are acts of immense courage and creativity., And what I hope to convince you of today is that you are beautiful for being here and for doing this work in our church. You are beautiful. You are fearless. You are compassionate, and you are loved by a God who is nearly insane with love for you. And ... And, that you have a job to do.

That job, if you do it well, will be hard, messy, dangerous, thrilling, meaningful—this work we are doing to raise money for mission puts us on the front lines of the work of the Gospel, because at this time, on this planet, in this church, the poor need to be fed—the poor in spirit need to be encouraged, the rich need to be jerked out of their pretend-spirituality, and the suffering need to be picked up and held, and rocked, and kissed. Kissed right on their dirty, sweat-soaked, pustule-marked faces.

You see, people of God, it is time to take off the gloves. It's time to remove our bonnets, to put down the PowerPoints, lay the platitudes aside, and face the fact that when Generation X begins to take over in our churches, our politics, our businesses—an event that is four years away—when Generation X takes over—Americans who are 34 to 48 years old—when Generation X takes over leadership, something will happen to the church that has never happened in the history of Christianity since the 330s when Constantine and his momma took a rag-tag, suffering church that followed a rag-tag, suffering set of disciples who followed a simple, fearless, belligerent, Savior who loved the poor—and draped that church in gold. A church that found the nails from the Cross in the Holy Land, conveyed to Constantinople, where they were melted down and forged them into a bridle for Constantine's warhorse.

My spiritual director for a dozen years into my life as an Episcopal monk was a man named Paul Wessinger. I loved him for many reasons, not the least of which was that he was mischievous. He would often say, in a whisper and with a sparkle in his eye, “Cross of gold...heart of wood. Cross of wood...heart of gold.” It would make me laugh and then I would get into trouble for laughing in church. Which only further amused him.

When Generation X takes over leadership in four years (that’s 48 months), when Generation X begins to assume the financial responsibility for the church, something will happen which the church and the nation has never experienced before. People who today are under 48 will largely not give to the church by association.

What does that mean, “Generation X will not give to the church by association ...”?

It means that in the Dark Ages people gave to the church because it was their village or city church and because the clergy scared the living bejesus out of them with paintings of people roasting in hell. So people gave.

It means that in the Middle Ages people gave to the church because it was their family church or their cultural church or their civic church. They were taxed on their land to give. They were sold heaven to give. They were sold years off purgatory to give. They were taxed on their produce to give.

It means that in the Renaissance people gave to the church because it was a way to be socially prominent. It means that in the birthing of our nation, people gave to the church out of obligation to the Crown and then obligation to the town. It means that in the Edwardian and Victorian eras people gave to the church because it was the right thing to do—the thing my family does, the thing my people do, the thing my parents told me to do.

But in four little, tiny years, all that will change. After one thousand, six hundred and eighty four years—for the first time—adults will not feel any obligation to give to their church or, even, to attend one.

Now the dowager empresses of our churches—male and female alike—can wring their hands and twist their bonnets and agitate their hemorrhoids all they want—they can rant and rave about how society is going to hell in a handbasket and how things were not like this in my day and how young people today just don’t ...

But in the end, this is happening. This really is happening. Beginning in 2018. And the only way to face into that new reality will be to be fearless. Fearless about asking for money. Fearless about raising money. Fearless about admitting when a church does not deserve the money it thinks it deserves to raise. Fearless and compassionate. Compassionate about how frightened people are about being afraid.

So we need to be *fearless*, and we need to face into the reality that upping our game in the raising of money for mission is the only way to preserve the churches that will survive the coming social changes. So we have established that we need to be great prophets and courageous leaders as we live into this reality. How do

we do that? What do we need as leaders in the church in the next few decades as the church molts into something new?

I would suggest that there are some antidotes to the fear.

Have you ever seen a movie about a person who is dying? It may have been an adventure film in which a person fell off a cliff and is being cradled by a rescuer, or a drowning person is being encouraged to tread water, or a knife victim or gunshot victim is being encouraged not to fall asleep as they lose blood, or an Episcopalian during a dull sermon is encouraged not to lose the will to live. You have seen these scenes play out—death by cliff-fall—death by drowning—death by gunshot—death by boredom.

In these situations, the rescuer huddles close to the victim and keeps trying to get his/her attention. They snap their fingers in front of the victim's eyes: "Look at me," they command. "Stay with me. You will survive this. We will stop the bleeding. We will pull you from the river. From the mudslide. The sermon will end one day."

The rescuer begs the wounded to be caught up in the presence of the rescuer. The rescuer's job is to catch and keep the attention of the wounded one. "Look into my eyes," they always say in the movies. And they say it because it is true. We humans need the rescuer's face when we are afraid or in pain or both. And you and I—we leaders in this work of raising money for our God's mission—we need to rescue year-round, to transform our seasonal pledging and giving programs into lifelines available at all times. We must exchange "nice" for "kind" and "effective."

What does that mean? What does it mean to add being a pastor to being a prophet? How does that work? Isn't that my priest's job? I am just a lowly layperson. What can I do? I am not here for this, Charles. I did not sign up for this, Charles! I am here to get handouts. I am here to get pledge-card samples and cover-letter samples. I am here to see graphs about successful programs go up and graphs about troubling social issues go down. I am here to hear the 20 things Jesus said about money so that I can be self-congratulatory about my stewardship leadership.

No. No. *No*: You are here in order to download the courage to Walk the Way. You are here to midwife the church into strength. The midwife needs to have the courage to pull life into the world the way Jesus did in the Resurrection. The midwife needs her herbs and potions and wisdom. The midwife will always threaten a masculine church. She will even sometimes be burnt at the stake. But a midwife combines the observation of a scientist, the intuition of a shaman, and with gentle hands firmly on a gelatinous skull, musters the courage to face men running around wetting themselves with anxiety.

And not only a midwife must you be, but a warrior. Your sword must be sharp. Not because we are a violent church but a merciful one. What I mean by a sharp sword is that at times—like cutting an umbilical cord or cutting out a tumor or cutting off the head of a sad, tawdry, stupid church program, or firing an incompetent priest, chairperson, warden, or bishop—we need a sharp sword because a sharp sword is merciful. A sharp sword cuts so fast and so clean and so entirely that the body part that must die in order for the body to

survive is cut with ease so that healing may begin. A jagged wound takes ages to heal. A clean cut heals quickly when bound and attended to by the nurse and midwife.

You people here—you leaders in this work of raising money and raising people—you are called to be great midwives and great warriors.

So what are your tools? What are your towels and hot water? What are your potions and salves? What are your swords and whet stones?

I will suggest three essential tools for leading as pastor and prophet in this new millennium as we walk the way of leading the church in the work for which we have gathered—leading the church in walking the way of stewardship.

### **First, Be the Pastor with Personal Authenticity: Two Things**

Achieving authenticity is so important in leadership, and especially in a leadership around stewardship, that I would say the first step toward authenticity in leadership around stewardship is to change the words.

#### 1. Say the word “fundraising”

Hear me when I say that the people in our pews, when they pledge, are engaged in stewardship. What we are doing when we lead the conversation in which mission is funded through stewardship, is fundraising.

There is emphasis in repetition: Pledging parishioners engage in stewardship. When we inspire parishioners to give generously—that is fundraising. We must stop spiritualizing the conversation to protect ourselves from being measured for effectiveness.

When I arrived in Denver a year ago this month, I had two months to design a campaign. When I expressed my anxiety, a friend of mine said “Charles, do what you write in your book!” “Hell no!” I thought. “What if it annoys people—I want to be liked. What if it fails? I want to be impressive.”

So I did the things I wrote about in my book, the planning, the structure, the creativity, the fantastic events, the major gifts, the advance campaign, the beautiful discernment booklet, the huge pledge card, the victory celebration, the phone-athons, the hand-written thank-you card campaign. And in four months we went from \$950,000 to \$1.4 million in pledges and gifts.

I really annoy the stewardship fetishists when I use the word ‘fundraising’. I am not trying to annoy them. Annoying them is, I admit, a delicious side-benefit, but that is not my goal. I use the word ‘fundraising’ unapologetically because the word ‘stewardship’ is unhelpful. Like using the word “big-boned” when you are trying to encourage someone to lose weight. Your friend is not big-boned. He is fat. He is obese. If he does not lose weight, he will die and before he dies he will have a sad and

hard life when he loses a foot to diabetes and his energy to blood-vessel constriction. And if I am honest with my friend about his health, we can get somewhere.

We have decided to let go of Gnosticism. An altar can be a table. A chalice can be a goblet. A piece of bread can be a sacramental tool. And fundraising works when seeking to raise, well, funds. It is not worldly. It is not different. It is just a tool. An effective tool. Padding our work with spiritual mumbo-jumbo is a way to obscure failure.

## 2. Have and use an Authentic Spiritual Practice

Accept the fact that if you are going to be a spiritual leader—priest, bishop, warden, lay leader, chairman of a board, chairman of a campaign—what is different about raising money in the church is not that we call fundraising ‘stewardship’; rather it is that we call leadership spiritual practice.

So discern, assemble, and practice a set of disciplines that make you an effective spiritual leader and not just a spiritual-ish person. If you are not willing to make the sacrifice of getting up early to pray, of making a retreat without any accompanying anesthesia, of being accountable to a spiritual director regularly, of maintaining a regimen of study, of knowing what congregants pledge, of making a pledge yourself that constricts your personal budget—then, no problem. Leave the work of leadership in the church and find other work. And if the leaders in your lives are living inauthentic lives, then do the hard midwife-warrior work of firing them. In the “Leave it to Beaver” 1950s perhaps we could afford clergy who did not pray, and bishops who did not have a Rule of Life. Today, we must be merciless gardeners: our pruning shears are sharp. We are cutting the vines back to living wood. .

They say that when Martin Luther King had his rallies, people would drive and take buses and walk from great distances to show up and work for the cause. But Martin Luther King would stand at the door to those meetings and greet each new arrival in their sweat and dust from the journey.

He asked one question of them after a warm and loving greeting: “What is your spiritual practice back at home?” Some would say, “I pray daily.” Some would say, “I meditate.” Some would say, “I study scripture and pray over passages that encourage me.” Some would say, “I meet regularly with a small group to pray and read and discuss life as a Christian in a hard world.”

Each one would be welcomed inside for the rally. But sometimes a visitor would have nothing to say. They would say they worked hard for justice or they gave lots of money but had no regular spiritual practice that fed them God. Those people King would turn away at the door—yes, even the rich ones. They would have to make the long trek home not having been welcomed into the meeting. They would object, reminding him of their fervor for the cause. Righteous indignation can be so invigorating!

When asked later why he did this seemingly unkind thing, why he sent these people home at the door, this act that reduced the ranks and coffers of his rallies, the great man said, “If you do not have

a spiritual practice, then you will not have the voice you need to speak against injustice, and you will not be able to remain still when the police set the dogs on you.”

Your spiritual practice will till the soil, water the soil, and fertilize the soil. Your giving will emerge not from knowing you are doing the right thing. Your giving will emerge from knowing that you are desperately loved by God. And more than loved, that you are even liked by God. That you were made good and that your life is for letting that goodness sprout, grow, and flourish like the palm tree in the hot sun of the love of a God who is absolutely crazy about us. So find or keep your spiritual practice and you will change this church and the world, one person at a time.

## **Second: Be the prophet who demands institutional authenticity (seven things)**

What does it mean to be a financial development prophet? What does it mean to be a prophet when raising money and inspiring stewardship?

What does it mean in the face of generational change? It means we must deserve the money we think we want to raise.

And I have seven litmus tests for integrity:

1. The institution must exhibit radical financial transparency.
2. The clergy must know what people give.
3. No one donor, nor a few, may hold the spiritual growth of a church hostage to shut down fundraising and recloak it in angels and incense.
4. The money raised must go to things that Jesus would recognize as ministry.
5. Our churches, to survive the next decade (and 50% will not), must become civic centers that host occasional worship, and not remain chapels that host occasional care for the poor.
6. The people must own and be physically involved in their church, fueling its vision with their collective longings. The days of command-and-control-clergy are over. A revolution is underway.
7. “We are not greedy. We are afraid. And our greed is just the way we choose to scream.” We must name and face the fear with curiosity and compassion.

Finally, be both the pastor and the prophet, which demands that before you plan the fundraising campaign, before you discuss stewardship, before you raise the first dime—be a great church. Because pledge cards

and campaign kickoff dinners and giving kiosks and major-gifts consultants and planned-giving programs are useless if your priest is dull, your warden is Machiavellian, your vestry is contentious, your staff is competitive, your Bishop only pretends to be a person of prayer, your vision for being church is lifeless and self-indulgent.

Give the people an arresting vision. Be a great church before you try to manage a great campaign. Otherwise we apply makeup to a corpse. And we continually underestimate how easily our laypeople can spot corpses wearing makeup. They point and laugh. Then they hold their noses.

Maggie Ross

“The primary role of the institutional church is to provide a context for adoration.”

- People come to church for healing, which they find in silence and mystery and beauty— adoration. But they leave sad because they find that adoration is not the central act—perhaps the central act is organization, authority, efficiency, activity (mission), community (group narcissism), purity-seeking, absolution-seeking, self-anesthesia. ...
- People go away aware that what their “hidden heart” sought was not found.

Holiness and Adoration

- “The tragedy of contemporary institutional religion, preoccupied as it is with power struggles of the clergy, is that it seems to have forgotten this task of bringing the transfiguring silence of adoration into the static world of noise. Clergy are no longer trained for lives of holiness but for career trajectories.”

For us Christians, this awe, this holy fear is enveloped in love—making it different from horror fear. It is hard for our ears to hear fear as a wonderful, dynamic thing. Perhaps the best description of this particular kind of fear is to be found in *The Wind in the Willows* when Mole and Rat encounter the Divine Piper at the Gates of Dawn. Afloat in their small boat, paddling through a mysterious backwater, they find themselves drawn by the divine sound of distant piping. Rat says to Mole:

“This is the place of my song-dream, the place the music played to me,” whispered the Rat, as if in a trance. “Here, in this holy place, here if anywhere, surely we shall find Him!”

Then suddenly the Mole felt a great awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror—indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy—but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near. With difficulty he turned to look for his friend and saw him at his side cowed, stricken, and trembling violently. And still there was utter silence in the populous bird-haunted branches around them; and still the light grew and grew.

Perhaps he would never have dared to raise his eyes, but that, though the piping was now hushed, the call and the summons seemed still dominant and imperious. He might not refuse, were Death himself waiting to strike him instantly, once he had looked with mortal eye on things rightly kept hidden. Trembling he obeyed, and raised his humble head; and then, in that utter clearness of the imminent dawn, while Nature,

flushed with fullness of incredible colour, seemed to hold her breath for the event, he looked in the very eyes of the Friend and Helper;

“Rat!” he found breath to whisper, shaking. “Are you afraid?”

“Afraid?” murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. “Afraid! Of HIM? O, never, never! And yet—and yet—O, Mole, I am afraid!”

Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.



FEARLESS TIP: For other material on encouragement for the stewardship leader, see *Fearless Church Fundraising*, Introduction, pages 195-198.