
REFRAMING THE ECONOMICS OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

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Abstract: One of the central questions in congregational leadership concerns pastoral salaries. Viewed more broadly, issues of money are vital to churches' health. This article critically presents and applies the "capability approach" to economics and well-being as a vocabulary that can help church leaders think about clergy compensation and other questions of money. It examines individual and communal dimensions of human capability and offers guiding questions and perspectives for congregations to incorporate financial considerations into ministerial leadership and the vocation of clergy and lay alike.

Introduction

In the conclusion of his landmark book on church leadership, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*, Jackson W. Carroll states that there is a great need for critical theological reflection on the meaning of money in our society, including what constitutes fair compensation for clergy. Clergy should not be left to bear Christian witness to the virtue of a simple lifestyle primarily because their salaries leave them no option. If small and large congregations are to have the good leadership for which they ask, they will need to pay

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This article offers a contribution to the economic dimension of pastoral leadership.

Americans find it uncomfortable to talk about money, either in church settings or in public life.³ This is particularly true in the context of religious leadership and the question of clergy compensation. Within Christian congregations, ministers report the difficulty of talking about money, especially when their own salaries and benefits are at issue. After all, in their profession or calling, money is not supposed to be the principal motivation—and most clergy report that it is not. Still, money does matter to them, largely because of the material goods it enables them to buy, but also because of its role in communicating a minister's value to the church community.

One challenge of ministry is to find ways for laypeople and ministers alike to learn together what goods matter—asking which goods address genuine needs and which material goods simply are unnecessary, or even unhealthy, luxuries. How do people afford what they need? How much is too much, and how much is too little? What is fair compensation for their work, whether they are clergy or lay? These are not just economic questions. They go the heart of what it means to live a decent or well-lived life. It would be a mistake to say that while *needs* are good, *desires* are bad; people should strive, instead, to develop their desires for goods that are healthy and that contribute to well-being. Developing some sort of communal culture of determining genuine needs is a part of church leadership.

² Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006).

³ Laura L. Nash and Scotty McClennan, *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday: The Challenge of Fusing Christian Values with Business Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); Robert Wuthnow, *Poor Richard's Principle: Recovering the American Dream through the Moral Dimension of Work, Business, and Money* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Amid tough economic times, many ministers as well as laypersons are trying to make ends meet. Many church leaders are perplexed because it appears they might need to trade off economic security for fulfillment in their respective callings. In addition to that perception, they often lack a vocabulary for framing their financial situation. In general terms, seminaries do not prepare ministers to think carefully and theologically about economic concerns—either their own or those of their parishioners. How should they address the importance of economic security without reducing everything else to that concern?

Biblical perspectives on the economy emphasize that life is more than food, clothing, and other material things (Matt. 6:25). Yet, money does help people provide for themselves and their loved ones so they can achieve a decent standard of living within their community. The author of Proverbs pleads with God: “[G]ive me neither poverty nor riches.” If he is led astray with riches, he “shall be full, and deny” God. Alternatively, if he is poor, he shall “steal, and profane the name of God” (30:8b-9). Navigating between poverty and riches, we must dig deeper than the standard focus on money alone. In this article, I examine moral and theological resources in order to approach the economics of pastoral leadership in new ways. I ask, “What goods and capabilities enable a well-lived, faithful life?” Trying to put a price tag on the labors that pastors and laypeople undertake requires asking more fundamental questions than those about salaries, pensions, and housing allowances, as important as those issues are. I draw upon and apply the “capability approach,” a vocabulary that helps us to think about well-being and leadership, including compensation for good work. I place this philosophical and economic language of capabilities into theological discussions of ministry in order to generate scholarly and practical perspectives on the economics of pastoral leadership.

Asking the Right Questions

What do people need to live well and faithfully? Too often, ministers and laypeople translate this question into a simpler one, “How much money do I need?” There should be no doubt that income and wealth are key resources for acquiring things that are essential for our well-being. Food, clothing, shelter, and transportation: People cannot live without these. Precisely how people meet those needs complicates things. For example, do they require a car, a new car, or just access to public transportation to do their work? Is a cell-phone a luxury or a necessity for their jobs and their personal living?

Church teaching affirms that life is embodied, that human beings have very real bodily needs. Material needs within a good but fallen creation connect directly to spiritual and relational needs.⁴ Isaiah sums up the need for many things—including the material basics—when he admonishes his people: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (55:2). Every person, created in the image of God but created from earthly dust, has a need for material sustenance.

Economic goods like food, clothing, shelter, and transport in turn make possible other kinds of goods in life. Even the most spiritual acts such as reading scripture or administering the sacraments require materials like texts, water, bread, and wine. These are the same elements, common elements, that contribute to some of life’s best pleasures, such as reading a good book or sharing a good meal with friends. The common life of religious congregations could not take place without those material provisions.⁵

But, as Isaiah lamented, the goodness of material things can easily lead people to value them in ways that

⁴ For a creative and powerfully written account of the embodied life, see Stephanie Paulsell, *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

⁵ This was the topic of the Material History of American Religion Project, directed by Jim Hudnut-Beumler and Dan Sack.

are unhealthy. America is a consumer culture in which ads proclaim salvation by shopping. The consumer economy is supported by Christians' habits and actions; as just one example, 40% of retail sales occur during the "Christmas season" in November and December, much but not all of it fueled by a theologically supported vision of gift-giving. People may rightly criticize the retail industry for exploiting the Christmas message, but there is no denying that this faith story is inextricably linked to the annual consumer binge.

The Christian message and the consumer message have become intertwined (not just for society as a whole but in our own way of thinking). Although some preachers and academics call Christians to opt out of economic life and to form alternative economies through the churches, it is better to ask not how to avoid the economy but how to fit economic actions within a wider vision of a good and decent life.⁶

Speaking of Money

Framing an understanding of money within a well-lived life is no easy task. Three fallacies about the relationship of "the spiritual" and "the material" are current in church life. The first fallacy is an over-spiritualization of life that denies the significance of material goods. In this view, people hold a negative disposition towards stuff: The true and highest expression of humanity concerns the disembodied spirit, and earthly encumbrances (such as the need for food and shelter) are only necessary evils for finding a spiritual abundance. But this ascetic or even Gnostic view of life denies the rich texture of a life that is lived out in very human, very material form.

A second fallacy is the "gospel of wealth," in which wealth is interpreted as God's blessing—and poverty as the result of God's disfavor. The best-selling *Prayer of*

⁶ For one example of a call for an alternative church economy, see Michael Budde and Robert Brimlow, *Christianity Incorporated: How Big Business Is Buying the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002).

Jabez is one widely read book that articulates this flawed theology.⁷ This view wrongly equates economic success with God's approval. This perspective has an interesting and complex relationship to Max Weber's famous thesis on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.⁸ Hebrew and Christian scriptures are full of warnings to the rich—not just warnings for the dangers of money for their own lives, but also denunciations of the abuses of power and privilege that the wealthy exercise over the poor. A New Testament scholar captures this aspect of money in her aptly titled book *Wealth as Peril and Obligation*.⁹ Conversely, since God does not wish for suffering or marginalization upon any human being, it is clear in many biblical narratives that impoverished persons have a favored place in God's concern.

The third fallacy places exclusive emphasis on meeting material needs, especially of the poor, while overlooking the other kinds of human needs that all persons have. A caricatured liberation theology is portrayed to emphasize only the social-economic aspects of Jesus' ministry and of God's liberating activity on earth. In this view, the kingdom of God is equated, without remainder, to the removal of poverty and the creation of earthly justice. We need a fuller account of the human person, and of human needs, in order to articulate a theological vision of genuine well-being.

In response, then, to these misguided or limited views, theologians and church leaders have rightly emphasized that authentic human well-being requires seeing and meeting—at the same time—the economic, social, political, cultural, and spiritual needs of people.¹⁰

⁷ Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000).

⁸ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 1992 [1930, 1904/1905]).

⁹ Sondra Ely Wheeler, *Wealth as Peril and Obligation: The New Testament on Possessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995).

¹⁰ One well-stated account of “integral development” is found in Paul VI's papal encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967), para. 14 in O'Brien, David J. and Thomas A. Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*

It is simply not possible to separate, in any decisive way, the economic from the spiritual. The real question concerns *how* economic goods should play an appropriate part of an authentic spirituality.

Although money measures provide helpful ways to approximate how well people are doing, surely some more basic and important values are at stake when talking about a well-lived—and a faithful—life. So, we should ask: What ends does money serve? As difficult as it is, we should shift our focus to the less tangible, more complicated purposes of life.

The Capability Approach

Church leaders and theologians have long debated human well-being. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) states that the chief end of the human person is to glorify and enjoy God forever.¹¹ In order to specify this theological vision—how, precisely, do persons glorify and enjoy God in this time and place?—we must consider well-being from various dimensions of life.

A group of scholars, including the philosopher Martha Nussbaum and the Nobel laureate in economics Amartya Sen, have developed one helpful perspective, a way of thinking that explains well-being in terms of human *capability*.¹² The capability framework addresses the various important aspects of what a person is able to accomplish in his or her society. The focus is on important ends of life, while keeping the means to those ends in their proper place. In this view, money is one

(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992). See also M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) and Douglas A. Hicks, *Inequality and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapters 6-8.

¹¹ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 1 [1647], in *The Book of Confessions: Study Guide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

¹² Amartya Sen, “Capability and Well-Being,” in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 30-53; Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999); Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

crucial resource for achieving valuable ends, but it is the ends themselves that merit closer attention. The language of human capabilities helps us to focus on things that really matter. Some of these capabilities are readily recognizable ones, such as being in good health, having decent shelter, and being literate. Other capabilities are harder to articulate, but they are, arguably, just as significant: having meaningful work, participating in political and cultural life, belonging to one or more social or community groups, and expressing one's religious commitments and worshiping God. See Chart 1 for these and other examples.

Chart 1: Human Capabilities: Selected Examples

Being well-nourished
Being in good health
Having decent shelter
Being literate
Having meaningful work
Participating in political and cultural life
Belonging to one or more social or community groups
Contributing to those groups and one's society
Expressing religious commitments and worshiping God

The capability approach offers a broad vision of well-being in its diverse components. People with distinct theologies and life experiences may have differing views about which capabilities are fundamental or essential. It is also necessary to consider how key capabilities may have changed or remained constant over time and across contexts. The capabilities approach is a resource for provoking precisely this kind of discussion in local and denominational contexts: Which capabilities really do matter, and can people agree?

Keeping in view my focus on the economics of ministry, the next task is to consider the role of material

goods within this approach to well-being. What does money have to do with achieving these capabilities?

It is clear that money can contribute to achieving some—indeed, many—of the capabilities noted above. People who cannot afford medical care are at far greater risk of being in poor health. Income assists families in educating their children and in securing decent housing. Even as our democratic values strive for political equality, affluent persons often translate their wealth into political influence. Clearly, having economic resources plays a vital, but incomplete, role in attaining various capabilities.

Do Clothes Make the Minister?

The great economist and philosopher Adam Smith spoke of the importance of being able to appear in public without shame—a human capability that requires the economic means to buy “proper” attire for one’s context. In his classic work *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith wrote:

By necessaries I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but what ever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without. A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty which, it is presumed, nobody can fall into without extreme bad conduct.¹³

¹³ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner, and W. B. Todd, Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 869-70; see Amartya Sen, “Poor, Relatively Speaking” *Oxford Economic Papers* 35 (1983): 153-69.

Do ministers need the latest fashions—so that people will easily relate to them—or will any decent garments do? Are there times when their trendy or expensive outfits signal that they have accepted too much of society's consumer ethic? Would that suggest that they are not communicating the message of simplicity and concern for the poor?

The author George Eliot considered clothes and fitting-in specifically for clergy in nineteenth-century Britain. In her work *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Eliot narrated the challenge posed for the Reverend Amos Barton to live decently, though not extravagantly, in his parish of Shepperton:

And now, pray, can you solve me the following problem? Given a man with a wife and six children: let him be obliged always to exhibit himself when outside his own door in a suit of black broadcloth, such as will not undermine the foundations of the Establishment by a paltry plebeian glossiness or an unseemly whiteness at the edges; in a snowy cravat, which is a serious investment of labour in the hemming, starching, and ironing departments; and in a hat which shows no symptom of taking to the hideous doctrine of expediency, and shaping itself according to circumstances; let him have a parish large enough to create an external necessity for abundant shoe-leather, and an internal necessity for abundant beef and mutton, as well as poor enough to require frequent priestly consolation in the shape of shillings and sixpences; and, lastly, let him be compelled, by his own pride and other people's, to dress his wife and children with gentility from bonnet-strings to shoe-strings. By what process of division can the sum of eighty pounds per annum be made to yield a quotient which will cover that man's weekly expenses?¹⁴

¹⁴ George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. David Lodge (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 44.

It is not necessary, of course, to accept Eliot's particular gendered and time-bound account in order to recognize that some aspects of the economics of ministry are perennial challenges. Conversations about clergy compensation thus are not about money alone—but about what ministers need in order to be capable to lead their congregations in the challenging work of ministry. This does not require accepting social norms and mores as a given; on the contrary, it creates room to be critical of them. But issues of social context do merit discussion, something that the capability approach allows.

Money as a Means

Talking about capabilities rather than money alone helps establish—against the consumer culture's ethos—that affluence is not something valuable in itself; it is not a station to be aspired to. Rather, economic goods serve to open up or make possible those more intrinsically valuable goods, such as participating in public life or making a contribution to one's society. The question shifts from "how much money?" to "money for what?"

At the same time, to paraphrase a well-known MasterCard ad, there are simply some capabilities that money cannot buy. In a region without a decent healthcare facility or even a helicopter evacuation service, all of the money in the world cannot buy emergency heart surgery. In the era of segregation, people of color could not secure housing in "respectable" neighborhoods; their money couldn't buy their way into a whites-only community. People who have been severely abused as children may not be able, however wealthy they become, to appear in public without shame—even though they have done nothing for which to be ashamed. No level of salary can take away the dehumanizing aspects of some dead-end jobs. And, despite some medieval and modern attempts, neither indulgences nor large charitable contributions can buy one's salvation.

Money can't buy the privilege a minister often has of being present at life's most important moments—in the joy as well as in the suffering—of one's parishioners. Nor

can it buy the respect of one's colleagues or the satisfaction of serving God by helping meet human needs. Indeed, the language of capabilities helps articulate the well-lived, faithful life that ministers often describe when explaining why they find joy in their calling.

In overall terms, this discussion suggests that, when thinking of the goods that play a part in genuine well-being, we should focus on many aspects of life. Money is no magic key, yet in the church ministers and laypeople still tend to overlook the capabilities that are the ends of a well-lived life.

Shared Ministry and Capable Leadership

One significant capability is having meaningful work.¹⁵ In economic frameworks, for purposes of modeling behavior as simply as possible, human motivation is reduced to the maximization of self-interest. Even the understanding of self-interest is simplified. In the standard view, having a job serves the sole end of earning money, which can, in turn, be spent or saved. Surely this is a narrow-minded account of why people work (as most economists would also acknowledge). Christian theology and the capability approach offer richer accounts of the value of work. The Reformation theologian John Calvin saw human labor as a way of living out God's call, each in one's own way, and creating a society that modeled (however imperfectly) God's intention for human life.¹⁶ More recently, Pope John Paul II wrote that human labor is one way in which people make their contribution to the common good and, in so doing, reflect their dignity, bestowed by God. In work people also express and develop their gifts and

¹⁵ Two insightful accounts of work are Joanne B. Ciulla, *The Working Life: The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work* (New York: Times Books/Random House, 2000); and Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

¹⁶ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1960 [1559]).

provide for their own and their family members' needs.¹⁷ Miroslav Volf's writing emphasizes the fundamental role of human work within the spiritual life.¹⁸ Feminist ethicists have helpfully pointed out that, in the Christian account of work, the test of valuable labor is not whether it is financially compensated; rather, the test is whether it enables people to become more human.¹⁹ Meaningful work—whether financially compensated or not—is one way in which humans respond to God's creative activity in the world and in our lives.

In the capabilities approach, the very act of working—when the task meets certain conditions, including serving the common good and not oppressing the worker—is the realization of the important human need to make a contribution to one's society, to understand one's activity as purposeful.²⁰ Does this mean that people are not partially motivated to work in order to gain money, which becomes a resource for other ends? Certainly, they are. Yet good work can serve multiple purposes at the same time. The Pulpit and Pew project revealed that pastors have a high degree of satisfaction in their work, even as they experience a low degree of effectiveness in some of their key tasks and express some dissatisfaction about their financial outlook.²¹ The way the congregation welcomes a pastor, the way pastors are compensated, the way they have a sense of participation within the community—these are all directly related to personal satisfaction in one's calling as well as to one's effectiveness in the work of ministry.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, in O'Brien and Shannon.

¹⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Towards a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Elizabeth M. Bounds, and Pamela Brubaker, *Welfare Policy: Feminist Critiques*, ed. Mary E. Hobgood (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1999).

²⁰ See Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, pp. 20-21 and 94-96, for his discussion of the intrinsic (as well as instrumental) importance of work—and the consequent “unfreedom” of unemployment.

²¹ Pulpit and Pew research findings based on national survey of clergy, 2002. See L. Gregory Jones, “A Satisfying Vocation?” *The Christian Century* (August 14-27, 2002).

How should money matter to ministers vis-à-vis the ways it matters to other members of the community? Approaching these questions within an economics of pastoral leadership, I begin with the *commonalities* between ministers and laypeople. All members of the body of Christ have gifts and talents to share. All people have particular needs and wants, and all seek to realize a high level of various capabilities. People want to be well-nourished, to have adequate housing, to be in good health, to appear in public without shame, and to have meaningful work. This latter point is especially important given the Christian conviction that God calls each person—and not just the ordained—to good work. Within this approach to church leadership, active and capable followers as well as active and capable leaders play significant roles.

This commonality between ministers and laypeople is a foundational point upon which to establish the economics of ministry. Everyone is part of this local economy. That is, all members of the community contribute to supplying the material and other resources that comprise Christian ministry. And even more significant, in this frame, all serve God, whether ordained or lay, whether church employees or church volunteers, and whether working within the formal labor market or outside of it. The ministry of all believers is a key insight for understanding individual well-being and the church's common life.

At the same time, while specific theologies and polities of ordained ministry vary across denominations, in each the role or function of the pastor is distinguished from lay ministry and service. In one way or another, the ordained minister is charged to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). Clergy take on leadership roles, and they are in some way set apart, in order to help organize the church in ways that model the worship of God and the service of one's neighbors within and beyond the church walls. Ministers should model the use of one's talents and gifts towards the love of God, neighbor, and self.

Conversely, churches should model God's call to just compensation—narrowly and broadly considered—in its attention to the well-being of its employees. A Christian community affirms the value of meaningful work by paying adequate salaries to clergy and non-clergy employees.²² This is the point at which the economics of ministry can be the theological and moral exemplar, enabling persons living with adequate means to glorify God and enjoy God forever. If the church is to live out its prophetic call for justice in society, it must also be just within its own organization.²³ Providing adequate compensation and good working conditions, that is, are ways of embodying the gospel.

It is important to acknowledge that, although the language of human capabilities can help clarify the analysis of what constitutes adequate and just compensation, the specific determination of justice as well as adequate standards must still be worked out in each context. Capability-language is a tool, not a one-size-fits-all solution, for local conversations about well-being and just compensation.

Alongside the conscious commitment to provide financial and non-financial compensation that promotes the well-being of its employees, the church can also help all of its members find meaningful, or at least decent, work in the economy and society. Laura Nash and Scotty McClennan take the church to task—particularly its leaders—for not helping its members to understand work within the contemporary business world.²⁴ While Nash

²² Most ordained ministers are different from most laypersons: They are paid directly by the religious community. Some laypersons, including Christian educators, choir directors, janitors, secretaries, and administrators are also on the payroll of the religious community. Further, some ministers are volunteers, or they are paid by foundation, para-church, or other sources beyond the purview of the community itself. All of this is to state that many ordained and some lay members of the community are more directly dependent upon the economy of the congregation than are the members who receive their income from sources beyond the church itself.

²³ Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* (1971), in O'Brien and Shannon.

²⁴ Nash and McClennan, *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday*.

and McClennan sometimes seem to accept uncritically the practices of business, they are quite right to call for more thoughtful attention in the church to finding good work. The church can model a faithful economy, and it can also help its members to understand the role of work in their own lives.

Ministers, Laypeople, and Church Inequalities

Economic factors beyond the church—and beyond the power of ministers or others to change things—largely shape the context in which the economics of ministry is determined. America is a society in which people are overworked, overstimulated, and overspent.²⁵ If many clergy report working long hours, feeling that they can't meet all of their needs, and suffering from debilitating debt,²⁶ it is at least partly because they live within the context of American consumer capitalism. Ministers likely receive little sympathy from their parishioners when they say they are working long hours and not improving their real wages or buying power—given the reality that many laypeople experience the same problems, and often with less flexibility.²⁷ We need to reflect together about the role of the economy upon people's lives and to determine which ways they can properly react to market forces.

As we think about the relationship of the minister as an economic actor (as both a “consumer” and a “laborer”) alongside laypeople, it is fitting to broach a

²⁵ Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Robert Frank, *Luxury Fever: Why Money Fails To Satisfy in an Era of Excess* (New York: The Free Press, 1999); Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

²⁶ On the question of the severity of clergy debt and how it can undermine ministry (and well-being), see Barbara K. Wheeler, “Is There a Problem?: Theological Students and Religious Leadership for the Future” Auburn Center for Theological Education study (2001) and Anthony Ruger and Barbara Wheeler, “Manna from Heaven?” Auburn Center for Theological Education report no. 3 (1995).

²⁷ Paul Krugman, “For Richer,” *New York Times Magazine*, October 20, 2002.

difficult question: How should the economic status of the clergy relate to the economic status of the persons he or she is supposed to be serving in the church? Should a minister's standard of living be roughly comparable to that of the parishioners he or she serves? Of course, this is complicated by the reality that, in many congregations, there is a range of economic well-being. Or, should the minister have a greater obligation to model Christ's simplicity, or, as some have put it, "evangelical poverty"? Should the pastor have adequate financial means to be able to afford to live within the neighborhood in which he or she serves? How can we think simultaneously about the economic compensation and human capability of both ministers and laypeople?

In order for persons to feel there is a genuine sense of mutual relationship, or reciprocity, within a community, they must sense some degree of moral and social equality amongst the members. As Paul put it, "I do not mean for there to be relief for others and hardship for you, but rather it is a question of equality, with your present surplus going towards their lack. At another time, their surplus may be for your lack, so that there may be equality. As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little'" (2 Cor. 8:13-15).

It is not easy to state in quantifiable terms how much disparity is healthy before fellow church members no longer see themselves as equals.²⁸ As challenging as it might be, this issue deserves attention in church circles, for it is part of the hard work of determining what economic well-being looks like within given contexts. The pastor's place and role within a community is just one, but an important, part of the issue. Some church members believe their pastor should drive a modest car, so as to model Christian simplicity—almost as an ambassador of evangelical poverty on behalf of the whole congregation (so they don't have to do it

²⁸ See Hicks, *Inequality and Christian Ethics*, for a fuller discussion of the relationship of economic inequality and moral equality.

themselves). In other churches (perhaps more affluent ones), key lay leaders want their pastor to live in relative comfort, perhaps either to represent their congregation with the “establishment” or to achieve the pastor’s general acceptance of the congregation’s affluence. In either case, the issues of socio-economic inequality within congregations should be a part of compensation conversations.

Compensation Broadly Considered

Throughout this article, I have sought to build a case to show that the capability approach, especially when complemented by the theological resources within a church community, is not merely an intellectual exercise. I suggest that it also has practical teeth. So I offer in this section some guiding questions for churches’ “compensation conversations.”

I have already suggested that the broadly considered rewards to pastors for their labors include far more than salary; a host of human capabilities should be considered. (Refer to Chart 1.) Although salary is clearly a fundamental part, the intangible returns for being able to play a faithful and valuable part in the lives of one’s parishioners are inextricable from one’s calling. Many goods are not income based, yet they, too, are part of clergy compensation in the wider sense. For instance, in appropriate ways, the minister can experience the gift of friendship with members of the community. Further, a respectful and mature community of lay leaders can enable the pastor to receive the gift of hospitality—and forgiveness, too, when it is needed. The pastor-congregation relationship raises other questions of capability and well-being. Do pastors have the respect of their parishioners? Are they included as part of the community? Do they have support when they, like their parishioners, experience grief and loss, joy and celebration? These goods “without a price tag” are part of the rewards of meaningful pastoral work.

In addition, and in a more tangible vein, compensation also includes healthcare, housing

allowance, and time for Sabbath, vacation, and study. As one example, clergy participants in Lilly-sponsored sabbatical renewal programs and lay leaders in their congregations have reported that pastors who are able to be well-rested, renewed, and freshly prepared for the challenges of ministry also prove to be—in a word—more *capable* pastors upon their return to their congregations.

Certain economic goods are necessary to allow a pastor to exercise his or her spiritual gifts—not to mention better fulfilling the often-unspoken expectations of a congregation. Having decent housing can allow a pastor more easily to exercise the gift of Christian hospitality. Indeed, many churches fully expect (without always communicating it to their ministers) that clergy will entertain parishioners in their homes. As I have emphasized throughout, the capability of having adequate housing can be furthered by income, but income alone may not offer the whole picture. On this issue of housing, churches have a variety of approaches, ranging from the provision of a manse to complex arrangements involving housing allowances.

Similarly, many congregations make assumptions about the clergy spouse and the volunteer contributions that she or he should make to the congregation. However, recent studies, including a Pulpit and Pew report on clergy salaries, demonstrate that most often, clergy's spouses are the chief breadwinners in the household—not to mention being less satisfied than the minister with the compensation package from the church.²⁹ Health coverage, security, and education for all household members (especially children or other dependents) are chief concerns. In healthy households or families, some level of cooperation makes it possible to

²⁹ Becky R. McMillan and Matthew J. Price, *How Much Should We Pay the Pastor?: A Fresh Look at Clergy Salaries in the 21st Century*, a report issued by *Pulpit and Pew: Research into Pastoral Leadership* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2003).

achieve these and other capabilities.³⁰ Ministers or other church employees might be much less concerned about salary or overall compensation packages in any given year than they are with having a workable long-range plan (which may or may not depend heavily on financial compensation) to educate their children. Speaking about capabilities, and not directly about dollars, might better capture these hopes and concerns. What are pastors and their loved ones able to do and be, based on the overall package of goods they are provided by a congregation?

The effort to reframe and understand clergy compensation in the church requires focusing on how to achieve the types of capabilities noted in this essay. Congregational and pastoral leaders can ask together: Is this community providing the minister with the opportunity to express her gifts and talents? Are we properly recognizing those gifts? What are the tangible and intangible goods that this congregation can provide that would contribute to the minister's well-being? How do the minister's capabilities, in turn, contribute to the development of the capabilities of the laypeople? Chart 2, "Congregations and Capabilities," offers a sample list of questions that local leaders could use to begin a capability-based discussion of compensation.

What the capability approach cannot do, of course, is solve questions of whether situation A or situation B is better. It might just create the vocabulary, however, for seeing that neither A nor B is a fixed entity, and neither is determined by income-based variables alone. Talking about capabilities can help create the kinds of mutually beneficial conversations that help church leaders and parishioners to avoid those hard dichotomies and awkward situations that too often lead to frustration and miscommunication.

³⁰ Amartya Sen, "Economics and the Family," *Asian Development Review* 1 (1983); Douglas A. Hicks, "Gender, Capability, and Discrimination: Insights from Amartya Sen," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 30(1) (Spring, 2002): 137-154.

Chart 2: Congregations and Capabilities: Selected Elements for Compensation Conversation

Tangible
Do we provide an adequate salary for employees?
Do we provide healthcare for employees?
Do we provide adequate resources for retirement of employees?
Do we provide time off for employees for Sabbath, vacation, and renewal?
How can we assist with management (and reduction) of clergy debt and assuring responsibility to manage household finances?
How can we enable employees to educate themselves and their children and other dependents?
Intangible
How can we provide employees opportunities to express their gifts and talents?
How can we properly recognize employees and volunteers for their contributions to community life?
What non-financial conditions can we offer for continued learning and renewal?
Do we offer good conditions and respect for spouses and other family members?
How do we allow for meaningful relationships (even appropriate friendships) between clergy and laypeople?
Do we offer support to ministers and other employees upon their own grief and losses?
How can we encourage participation in social and cultural life of the wider community?

Conclusions: Reframing the Analysis of Economics and Church Leadership

So, how much should we pay the pastor? It would be a mistake to take from these pages the message that this question does not matter. It matters greatly, but it needs to be posed in a new way. It matters alongside a number of questions about the economic goods and the overall well-being, of pastors, laypeople, and communities together. Ministers give in myriad ways to their religious communities, and they receive, likewise, in various ways.

A fair and decent salary is part of the quality of life that ministers should be able to expect. Likewise, a fair and decent salary is what other employees of the church deserve.

Laypeople can rightly seek the same in the wider world; their role in a constructive discussion of compensation within the church can prepare them to respond in their own places of work. (These “places of labor” include both the formal workplace and unpaid contexts including the household.) Indeed, although recognizing that the immediate focus is on fair compensation of good work within church-based organizations, I aim to spark these broader conversations of economic goods, human capability, and Christian theology.

It is often difficult for clergy to articulate their real concerns about money. Naming the problematic nature of the question about “paying the pastor” allows clergy and laypeople alike to reflect upon what power they have in the economic decisions that affect them. In this way, again, there is commonality among all parties: Everyone would prefer, and everyone deserves, to have a voice in the economic decisions that concern them. Expressing one’s agency is important alongside having adequate income in making a person truly well-off. Agency is also a fundamental aspect of leadership.

Ministers and laypeople need to be able to participate in the decisions that affect them; they need to be part of meaningful friendships; and they need to have opportunities to use their gifts both within and beyond the community and to be respected for those gifts. These are just a few aspects of the well-lived and faithful life. Money is an important contributor, but just a means, to achieving these capabilities. Thinking together in a new way about well-being, capability, and compensation allows us to focus on the things that really matter about Christian life and pastoral leadership.

The analysis here emphasizes, consistent with the best thinking in the study of leadership, that in effective communities both leaders and followers must engage one

another as equals and work together in a common process. The framework I have presented here thus emphasizes that the economics of pastoral leadership should be reframed and expanded from money alone to many spheres of human well-being. Although this can be done in different ways, the capability approach offers a particularly rich vocabulary for such multi-dimensional analysis and should be especially useful in clergy-congregation discussions. Quality-of-life decisions also depend upon an understanding of leadership that requires the input and active participation of all parties within the community. All people, whether clergy or lay, whether holding church posts or not, struggle with similar issues of how their economic decisions help shape their overall quality of life. And, in the Christian understandings of church and vocation, all people contribute to the work and leadership of the church.