

CofEPQH applied theology resource series

Finance and budget

Seeing finance as a gift to the school community and the setting of a budget as an expression of love

*This resource looks at school finance and budget through reflection on the nature of God's grace and the idea of gift. What **embracing interdependence** might mean for school finance is explored through the lens of the community we see in the Pentecostal miracle. How can understanding money as a gift transform our approach to finance and budgeting? Can financial decisions demonstrate **love** and what does the lens of community teach us about our use of money?*

Scriptural/theological reflection

The Bible tells the story of God's grace – the freely given gift of creation and life on this planet. It is the story of relationships created, broken and restored. Seeing the world, and life itself, as a gift has the potential to turn our views of finance and budgeting upside down. What would happen if we took Jesus' injunction to 'love God and love our neighbour as we love ourselves' and applied it to our financial decisions? Jesus' reply to the question 'Who is my neighbour?' leads us to conclude (through the parable of the Good Samaritan) that 'my neighbour' is anyone who is in need.

Seeing the world as a 'gift before task' and 'understanding our value as given before it is earned' is, according to Jeremy Law, 'a matter of counter-cultural learning.'¹ Law goes on to consider education as a gift through which students can journey as pilgrims rather than tourists; where the journey is as important as the destination and the gift is one of transformation.

In Acts 2.43-45, as part of the Pentecostal miracle, we see the transformation not only of individuals but of a whole community:

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

This expression of *koinonia* ('in common') or fellowship had very a practical outworking, as verse 45 shows. Here is a community where all that they have (money, talents, gifts) exists for others. This idea of *koinonia* within a Christian community is based on deep interdependence and relationship with others and with God, through Jesus. It is very practical, as we see in Acts, and it moved Jesus' early followers beyond discussion and teaching about the love of God and their love for each other, to identify ways in which they could serve each other and the wider community of which they remained a part. Thus they

¹ Jeremy Law, 'Towards a Third Vocabulary', talk presented at the NICER Conference 2017, Canterbury Christchurch University.

came to see money, wealth and possessions as a gift from God to be held lightly in trust, as stewards not owners, to use for the benefit of all. This would require both wisdom and compassion; a response of the head as well as the heart.

Christians speaking and living out this theological understanding of money is a political act. This is a daunting prospect, but we must remember the context of these verses. Pentecost itself was a political act: it was the speaking of the gospel into the public space.² In his 2017 Lent book, *Dethroning Mammon: Making Money Serve Grace*, Archbishop Justin Welby repeated the message of Acts as he comments, 'what I receive I treat not as mine but as an opportunity to love'.³ The Archbishop suggests that we can understand a budget as 'applied theology expressed in numbers'.⁴ This in turn points us towards the upside-down nature of the Kingdom of God where service is more important than power, and seeking justice is the restoring of gift to those who have lost out.

Application to the lived reality of schools

As in many areas of the public sector, financial planning in schools is a point of pressure and when we are under pressure our natural instincts can be to look after our own; to focus on survival and protection, to aim to 'just get through it'. Understanding money as a gift we have been given and as a way of demonstrating God's love provides us with a route into financial planning that enables us to consider wider aspects of our responsibility to those within our school and communities. We may open our minds to ways of creating shared approaches with others outside those partnerships which already exist. We may look more closely at the skill sets of those within our school communities and how we can empower them to use these skills to benefit those within our communities who need our help.

The starting point of a leadership team has to be equality of access to education for those whom we serve and that education should enable the community to live life in all its fullness. We all know that, in order to be ready to learn, young people need their emotional, physical and mental wellbeing to be in the right place and that is where the tensions within budgeting begin - how do you balance the needs of the many with the needs of the few, as you know that satisfying both may not be possible?

The concept of *koinonia*, as described above, gives us a route to help consider how we can manage the conflicts within financing. When under pressure try looking outwards rather than inwards: are others facing similar issues and, if so, would pooling resources help? Are there people working in your school or local community who could help support or train others in order to multi-task and fill gaps - so supporting the community but also recognising the importance of developing the adults within your community too? Are there different working patterns that can be tried out - moving from traditional working models can be difficult within the public sector but all change begins with the first pioneers - can your school be that and then share the benefits with others?

There are no perfect solutions. There will never be enough money in the system as the wider public funding has many needs to serve. Our role, as leaders, is to take what we have and use it in the most appropriate ways we can to serve the common good. There will be constant juggling, constant scanning of the horizon for opportunity, constant assessment of balance of needs but if, through all that, we see the budget as an opportunity to love and support our communities then we have served our purpose.

² Money and the Church film, Just Finance Foundation.

³ Justin Welby, *Dethroning Mammon: Making Money Serve Grace* (Bloomsbury 2017), p. 97.

⁴ *Dethroning Mammon*, p. 126.

- *How will you encourage your leadership team to balance the needs of the many and the needs of the few?*
- *How might the vision of Pentecostal koinonia be applied to your school budget?*
- *Who is your neighbour and how do you demonstrate love to them through financial and budget decisions?*
- *In what ways does your leadership team show support for the wider community that they serve through the way finances are allocated? Some support services only survive if enough schools buy-in – how do you make that decision if you are not sure your school will utilise the service?*
- *Are there areas of expertise in your school that you currently broker elsewhere too? What scope is there for sharing that expertise and so spreading the benefit further, even if it would reduce your future income?*

Links to other resources

- Leadership practices matrix – this topic draws upon several of the leadership practices, including:
 - Creating confidence - **Embracing interdependence**
 - Practising Humility - **Learning Love**
 - Accepting vulnerability – demonstrating generosity
 - Inspiring faithfulness – embodying integrity
- *Leadership, Pedagogy and Theology* – no. 7: Budgeting and resources (p.15).
- *Ethos Enhancing Outcomes* – no. 7 Budgeting and resources (p.17).

Bibliography and further exploration

- Just Finance Foundation - God and Money resources can be found at: www.justfinancefoundation.org.uk/resources/god-and-money. You may also like to look at the themes of the Life Savers programme: www.lifesavers.co.uk/assembly-resources
- Justin Welby, *Dethroning Mammon: Making Money Serve Grace* (Bloomsbury 2017).
- Jeremy Law, 'Towards a Third Vocabulary', talk presented at the NICER Conference 2017, Canterbury Christchurch University.
- For further exploration of the relationship between money and care of neighbour see Exodus 22:25-27.