

# VESTRY PAPERS



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## Good Stewardship Addresses Hopes and Fears

by Kate Ferris

Nothing sends people scurrying for the sexton's closet faster than hearing the footsteps of the stewardship chairperson coming down the hall. When it comes time for the annual quest for financial support, many parishioners say they can't pledge for a whole year because they don't know if they will have enough money for themselves.

Yet until church treasurers are allowed to print dollar bills, the money has to come from the congregation. So a good stewardship campaign will address the fears of the treasurer (having enough money to pay the church bills) and the parish members (having enough money to pay their own bills).

One campaign that worked exceedingly well for our parish, St. George's in Clifton Park, New York, provided both practical and spiritual messages about pledging. The campaign, "Stewardship is Discipleship," had a contemplative theme, a definite timeframe, a mix of tools and a final celebration. Pledges surpassed the goal by 9.5 percent and increased the number of families

pledging to 72 percent of the total parish — because of the following factors:

### **A strong stewardship team**

The stewardship committee was comprised of four or five volunteers who had strong marketing and communication skills, an understanding of the financial issues of the parish, and deep faith. While not necessarily the largest pledgers, committee members were people who had *giving* as a high priority in their lives.

### **Spend money to make money**

A small amount of money was budgeted to produce a professional and polished campaign. All the materials for the campaign were designed and produced by committee members. Stationery, posters, and bookmarks all had a consistent look.

### **A thoughtful stewardship theme**

The theme of "Stewardship is Discipleship" tied in with St. George's mission statement

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*This Issue:  
Stewardship*

*Circulation 24,500*

*Stewardship is a holy endeavor because it is done in God's name for God's people. Faithful stewardship does more than raise money to pay the bills — it helps build the church for generations to come. Here our writers examine the dynamics needed to help congregations give freely of their time, talent and treasure.*

*See insert for new insights regarding stewardship in Latino communities.*



While raising money for God's work is rarely easy, many hands make lighter work.



Welcome to some 3000 new readers of Vestry Papers since the first of the year! We welcome your thoughts and ideas. What interests you most about your work on the vestry? What would be most helpful to learn from other congregations? Let us know:

[VestryPapers@episcopalfoundation.org](mailto:VestryPapers@episcopalfoundation.org)

# Discipleship and Young Adults: A Good Mix

by Uchenna Ukaegbu

When my rector asked me if I'd consider heading up the annual stewardship campaign, I admit to a sinking feeling in my stomach that many of us experience when faced with the task. And I got more than my fair share of knowing smiles and smirks from friends who had been there and done that. As a younger adult in my parish, and having only been a member for about a year, I felt more than a little nervous and unprepared.

Fast forward six months, to this article. *What should vestries know about young adults and stewardship?* I thought back to my recent experience, and asked a few other young adults about their experiences in their own parishes. The answer wasn't surprising; after all, the core concept of stewardship is the same for everyone. The differences are often in how we perceive the call to faithful stewardship, how we relate to money, and how we practice our stewardship.

Stewardship is a core concept of our faith, one which is key. Just look at the Gospel parables, or today's newspaper. But it can still be a challenging idea to embrace. Our parents' generation grew up with the idea that hard work and perseverance would lead to wealth. In more recent history, we've seen many examples of innovation, creative investing, and good timing leading to quick fortunes. The commercials that we are bombarded with daily teach us that our goal in life should be to acquire lots of stuff —

the biggest car, the smallest cell phone, the trendiest gear. And with so much advertising targeted to eighteen to thirty-five-year-olds, younger adults must often quiet the inner consumer to hear the inner steward.

## Be authentic about the message

If the message is the same, what is different? One difference is in how the message is received. Many people explain stewardship as our obligation to give to the church. For those who were brought up in the church and associated such institutions with feelings of security and longevity, this is a difficult commitment to make. But for those whose perceptions were formed more recently among scandals in big business, government, and even the church, institutions are often thought of with more skepticism than trust. This is why it is important to be clear, consistent, and authentic about the message of stewardship. *Stewardship is about discipleship, and it is essential that discipleship remain the focus.*

Another difference is in the relationship many young adults have with money. The news is full of stories of young adults having to juggle skyrocketing school debt, housing and childcare costs, and health insurance — and many of us are living that reality. With shorter earning histories and large debts, it is easy to forget about our obligation to be faithful stewards. It's easier to focus on bills

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Photo credit: Anne-Marie Jeffrey, Church of the Epiphany, Washington, DC

Uchenna Ukaegbu, left, talks with other young people at the Church of the Epiphany in Washington DC, where she chaired a recent stewardship campaign.

# By the Numbers: Mission, Diversity Matter

by Matthew Freeman

When we speak of stewardship, we're often using a theological word for a practical concept: taking care of business. We need to make sure the computers turn on, the congregation is dedicated and supportive, and that the operating budget is met. Through the prism of this concept, we see the Church as we would like it to be.

The flip side of this is the Church, in a larger sense, as it is. How many actual members are there? Is membership on the rise, or on the decline? What is the actual average age of an Episcopalian? How many of us are there, and...how many of us are actually showing up on Sunday?

According to the latest nationwide survey by the Office of Congregational Development at the Episcopal Church Center (current as of 2005), there are 2,205,376 domestic Episcopalians, of which 787,271 actually regularly attend Sunday morning service. The total number of Episcopal parishes and missions is 7155.

According to the report, the data shows a drop of 8 percent in total numbers over the last ten years, and a 6 percent drop in

self-identified Episcopalians over the last ten years. In 2004, there were 7200 Episcopal missions and parishes, indicating a nationwide loss of forty-five parishes and or missions in one year.

## Membership is down, pledging is up

Membership in Episcopal congregations is largely white and largely older. Some 89.9 percent of Episcopal congregations are at least 60 percent white/European American. Another 3.8 percent of Episcopal congregations are predominantly African American or Black. (In 3.9 percent of Episcopal churches no racial/ethnic group predominates.) And 56 percent of Episcopal parishes report that their members are, on average, over fifty.

The average pledge as of the latest survey is \$1,947, up 2.9 percent from the previous year. While it's always nice to see a gain, the loss overall of a certain percentage of parishioners could account for the median rise in pledging. If, for example, parishes and missions that were financially struggling

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## Good Stewardship

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and a popular component of its adult Christian education. As "a family of disciples joyfully reaching out ..." the congregation understood the importance of discipleship in Christian life. Also, for several years clergy and lay leaders had offered a series of year-long Bible studies entitled "Disciple: Becoming Disciples through Bible Study" produced by Abingdon Press, where there was a daily focus on how to be a disciple.

The Committee reminded the congregation that to be a good disciple, one also must be a good steward of all the gifts of time, talent, and treasure that God has given. Proportional giving was encouraged, whether that was one or five percent, or the full tithe. The committee understood that it can be unnerving to commit a proportion of one's income, but this was where being a true disciple came in.

### A clearly defined time schedule

Our campaign ran in the spring, starting one or two weeks after Easter, and lasted only six weeks. The dates were approved

well in advance to make it a time to focus on stewardship, and ended promptly as scheduled.

### A mix of practical and spiritual messages

We made an effort to balance the type of messages people received. Some people understand that unless they pledge, the church cannot meet its financial obligations. Others respond to the biblical teachings about giving first fruits or giving back to God.

Charts explained where money was spent on different ministries, such as outreach, worship, and education. Individuals gave examples of how church funds enabled them to carry out these ministries.

In addition to spiritual and practical messages in the monthly newsletter and the weekly bulletin, the campaign also offered a variety of "contacts" including:

- During Lent, before the start of the campaign, a spiritually-themed letter was mailed to all members asking them to consider their reasons for pledging.

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## *Does your vestry have a statement of faith?*

*Kristine Miller, Director of Stewardship and Planned Giving of the Diocese of Michigan, says writing one is a powerful witness for the congregation. To create one, explore the following questions.*

### **Beliefs:**

*What does your vestry believe about God's call, stewardship, and relationships to possessions?*

### **Commitment:**

*What is your response to these beliefs and what will you do as a result?*

### **Invitation:**

*How will you invite the congregation to join you? See sample statements at [www.edomistewardship.org](http://www.edomistewardship.org)*



*Dig deep, learn well. The Episcopal Church Foundation provides a variety of resources in financial leadership for vestries, including tools in planned giving, annual appeals and capital campaigns. And the Office of Congregational Development at the Episcopal Church Center has a wide range of stewardship information to share as well.*

## Good Stewardship

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- At the start of pledge season, a personalized letter was sent to each parishioner asking for a specific amount of increase in pledging.
- Weekly presentations were delivered from the pulpit at each service. In addition to at least one sermon by the clergy, other members of the congregation spoke each week on what motivated them to pledge to St. George's.
- A brief announcement was made at the beginning of various group meetings, such as the choir, Men's Group, Daughters of the King, Stephen Ministers, etc. to remind people to pledge.

church (locally, diocesan-wide, or nationally). These calls were made by knowledgeable stewardship committee members who could tactfully respond to the needs or concerns of the parishioner.

### **Be grateful**

Every person was thanked in writing, even if the pledge was only a dollar a week. Given that each gift was a gift from someone's heart, that action deserved a grateful thank you.

Finally, a celebration concluded pledge season. Continuing the "Stewardship is



### **Follow up, say thank you, and celebrate**

For those people who lagged in making a pledge, a letter was sent or a phone call made, gently reminding them that the deadline was near. There were times, however, when there were issues that

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*Given that each gift was a gift from someone's heart, that action deserved a grateful thank you.*

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needed to be addressed, whether a person was no longer in a position to make a pledge or was upset with something going on in the

Discipleship" theme, there was a joint celebration on Stewardship and Discipleship Sunday. All outstanding pledge cards were due, and students completing any of the "Disciple" classes received their pins. Culminating with a potluck picnic — and with God's blessing — the celebration was held outdoors as a feast for the whole parish.

*A consultant on board leadership and strategic planning, Kate Ferris was co-chair of Stewardship and Capital Campaigns for St. George's Episcopal Church in Clifton Park, New York, from 2000-2005. To see more details about the campaign in a fuller text, go to the **Vestry Papers** link at ([www.episcopal.foundation.org](http://www.episcopal.foundation.org))*

# Discipleship and Young Adults: A Good Mix

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and tangible goods over something as intangible as discipleship. *Stress that it is the regular practice of stewardship that matters, not the pledge amount.* When stewardship is confused with fundraising, it is easy to feel that a small monthly pledge isn't worthwhile. But when a parish encourages members to give regularly from the resources God has entrusted to each, that small contribution is the fulfillment of a promise, and it is indispensable.

## Join the 21st century

Young adults often have different ways of physically managing money. With the ease of online shopping and banking, and debit/credit card readers everywhere, it's possible to go several days without touching a dollar, or writing a check. Newer technologies are springing up every day — at the Whole Foods near my apartment, you can now pay for your groceries by scanning your fingerprint!

This means that focusing solely on the cash-in-plate mechanism may make it harder for someone who doesn't have cash for those who don't carry cash. *Acknowledge and incorporate modern practices so that those who use newer money management techniques can still make the regular practice of stewardship part of their routine.* Encourage parishioners to make online bank payments to your parish. Or consider setting up a Paypal account, as many campus ministries and parishes have done, so that those who are not in the pew every Sunday can still fulfill their pledge.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. Young adults are as varied as any other demographic group in the church, and as the entire Episcopal Church itself. Our experiences vary based on where we live, with whom we worship and more. *One of the most important things a parish can do when developing their stewardship program is to include young adults on the stewardship committee.*

Too often, this task goes to members who have given the most in the past, or are the most vocal, or who have occupations that deal with money. But if stewardship is about individuals acknowledging and responding to God's blessings, then a diverse committee — wealthy and poor, old and young — representing the entire parish should work together to develop a stewardship program that speaks to all. You may be surprised at the innovation and inspiration that emerges from such a staid topic.

And who knows? One day, you might even include fingerprint readers on the collection plates!

*A budget analyst at the US Food and Drug Administration, and Board member of the Episcopal Church Foundation, Uchenna Ukaegbu, 29, is a Nigerian-American and also the financial stewardship ministry leader at her parish, the Church of the Epiphany in Washington DC. Thanks to Dan Wagner of Christ Church, Greenville, South Carolina and Ellen Dingwell of the Church of the Transfiguration, Dallas, Texas for their insights.*



*“Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.”*

2 Corinthians 7-8

*“Do not think me mad. It is not to make money that I believe a Christian should live. The noblest thing a man can do is just humbly receive and then go amongst others and give.”*

David Livingstone





# By the Numbers

*continued from page 3*

simply closed their doors, one could see a reduction in overall population, and a rise in the average pledge.

According to these numbers, membership in the Episcopal Church is on the decline, following a national trend of declining membership for most mainline denominations, while evangelical and conservative denominations are seeing growth.

The most recent report, by C. Kirk Hadaway, director of research of the Office of Congregational Development, addresses the decline by highlighting practices within the church that statistically inspire growth. He also compares the performance of the Episcopal Church to other mainline denominations, and addresses the question of whether fundamentalism universally inspires growth. The report includes factors such as location, worship practices, the congregational “identity,” congregational activities and leadership.

Within the report there are some conclusions that are easy enough to discern: strong leadership and active recruitment lead to growth, for example. But there are also several unusual conclusions.

## Leadership and passion matter

One is the seemingly counterintuitive relationship between decline and strong conservatism in an Episcopal parish. Hadaway breaks this relationship down to a fine point, noting that the correlation is not particularly strong (48 percent of “strongly conservative” congregations show a decline versus 34 percent “strongly liberal” congregations) and that many dioceses that are known to be particularly conservative show growth on their own. Simply put, the theological basis on which a congregation is founded will not automatically increase growth or pledging as much as other factors, including leadership, recruitment and passion for ministry.

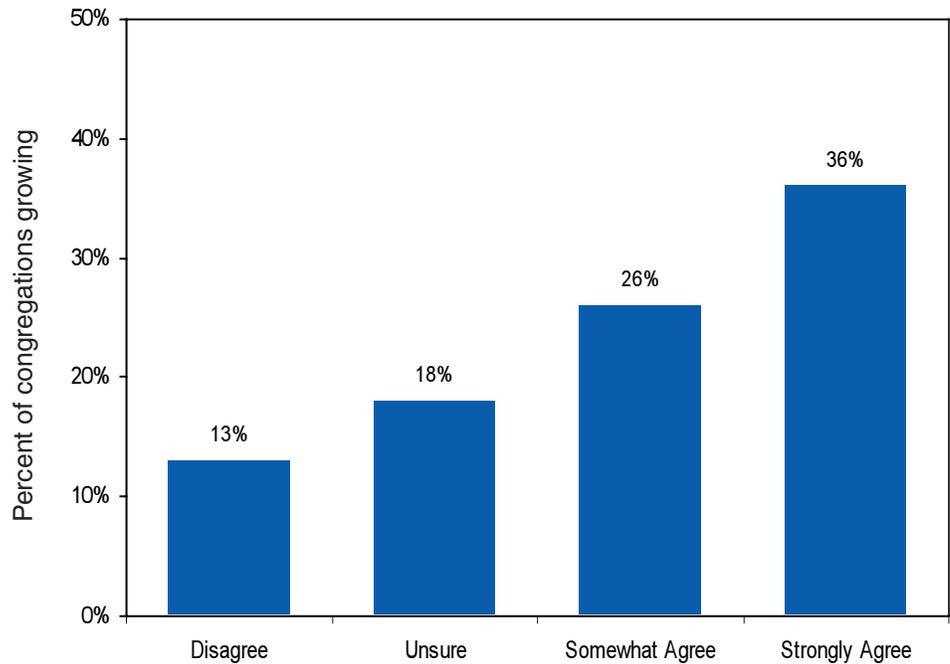
Secondly, churches and missions that are predominantly multiracial (e.g. a mix of Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American) report stronger growth than those that are predominantly white. And thirdly, congregations with older populations show less overall growth than those with a large number of younger members and families.

## A sense of mission is key

So what can we glean, with an eye on stewardship, from these findings?

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## Living Things Change



Our Congregation is Willing to Change to Meet New Challenges

Like any living body, congregations that are open to change are more likely to grow, says Kirk Hadaway from the Office of Congregational Development. Reprinted with permission.

*“Begin your stewardship program with prayer. If we are to know what God would have us do with the gifts we have been given, it is imperative to consult with God.”*

*Kristine Miller,  
Diocese of Michigan*

# By the Numbers

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We can see that while the Episcopal Church's overall membership is trending downward, there are certain practices and understandings we can adopt for further growth.

A congregation should not see a move towards fundamentalism as necessary for its own growth: in fact, trends imply the opposite. *More important than any particular theological bent is, in fact, a sense of mission for the parish.*

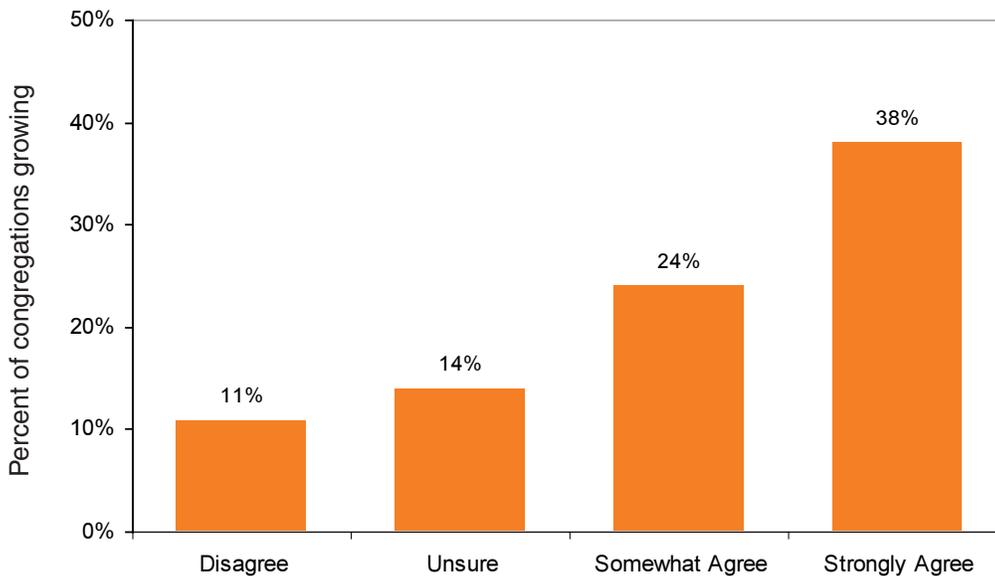
"Growing congregations are clear about why they exist and what they should be doing," says Hadaway. "In American religion

with older members trend towards decline, and, as is noted above, the average age of an Episcopalian trends above fifty. It behooves any stewardship effort to respond, promoting active participation in younger membership and involving families with young children. *A surefire way of growing a parish or mission is to focus on capturing and keeping younger parishioners.*

## Diversity and youth are needed

And while the Episcopal Church's membership is historically and dominantly white, growth is statistically high where

## Purpose-Driven Growth



Our Congregation Has a Clear Mission and Purpose

Parishes that have a clear mission and purpose are more likely to grow, according to research by the Office of Congregational Development. Reprinted with permission.

generally, conservative churches tend to be clearer about their mission and purpose. But this is not the case in the Episcopal Church. Here there tends to be a greater sense of purpose and mission among more theologically liberal congregations."

*Growing congregations are clear about why they exist and what they should be doing*

One fact in the life cycle of the Episcopal Church certainly needs attention: churches

diversity is encouraged and cultivated. Diversity can be just as powerful as youth in promoting growth in a parish.

For further information about trends in growth and to find more about how your own mission or congregation fits into the landscape of Episcopalian demographics, the Office of Congregational Development offers its reports for free on its website: [www.episcopalchurch.org/research.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/research.htm)

*A lifelong Episcopalian, Matt Freeman is the Giving Service Associate for the Episcopal Church Foundation and a playwright and actor in New York City.*



*Vestry members, your presence at parish events, including Sunday morning, is key. If there is a Sunday night study program, be there. If there is a parish work day, come and help clean the parking lot. If the phone rings, answer it. Your cheerful involvement will inspire others.*

*Next Issue: Creative Outreach*



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# Stewards: Caretakers of God's Abundance

by Frances Caldwell

The word stewardship is from the old English word “sty-ward” and refers to the person appointed by the lord of the manor to be the custodian of the manor’s valuable asset — the pig sty. Though the pig sty did not belong to the sty-ward, the treasured responsibility of the pig sty was carried out with care and love for this critical resource of the manor community. This was a job of prestige and importance.

The responsibilities of stewards over time have remained broad. The resources in question are not insignificant but rather both critical and treasured; they are managed for the good of the community; and nowhere are these resources defined as purely monetary. They are resources managed by someone other than the owner and requiring the steward’s time, talents and treasures. Sound familiar?

As Christians, we live in community whenever two or more of us are gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ. There is responsibility in our community to be good stewards of all of our resources — resources which we tend to think belong to us. We are transients in this world and as the saying goes, “you can’t take it with you.” If we could take it with us, we would go empty handed because all that we have, no matter how small or large, comes from and belongs to God. We are on this earth simply as the caretakers of God’s abundance.

Being good stewards means more than pledging to the annual fall campaign, contributing to the latest parish fundraiser or making a will with a bequest to our church. It is about more than spending several hours a week at church studying or working. It is about more than sharing our personal talents to further God’s work in our communities. It is about our relationship with God and with each other. It is about using everything we have — our work, our wisdom, our wealth — in a Christ like way. All day, each day, in every way.

Much reflection has taken place in our world, a world that has changed dramatically in the first years of the 21st century. As we travel our short journey on earth, may we all reflect on the meaning of “stewardship” and the relationships we choose to nourish and build with all that we have — our gifts from God. May we leave legacies that our children and grandchildren will remember as meaningful and significant to their lives as Christians as well as to the lives of their children and grandchildren.

*Frances Caldwell, Director of Stewardship and Development at St. James's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia, is chair of the Stewardship Committee for the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes, a member of the Consortium's Annual Conference Committee, and a member of the Stewardship Committee of the Diocese of Virginia.*



# La Mayordomía Cristiana en la Comunidad Hispana

por Joel Almonó

La Iglesia Episcopal en América tiene una presencia débil, casi pasa por desapercibida, lo que ha hecho que muchas personas piensen que los hispanos solo tienen dos tipos de iglesias la católica romana y los pentecostales.

La verdad es que existe una comunidad hispana por ejemplo, yo vengo de una familia Episcopal y desde niño escuché al sacerdote hablar de la mayordomía cristiana y que tenemos dos meses clásicos para conversar y enseñar sobre ese compromiso y deber cristiano.

La mayordomía, con sus famosas tres T, talento, tesoro y tiempo. De las cuales se era enfático en el tesoro, no se hablaba de diezmar, porque era un termino empleado solo por los hermanos evangélicos, solo hablábamos de llenar la “promesa” después se olvidaba continuar con ella, por una gran parte de la feligresía.

## Una ascunción falsa

Este comportamiento se acrecienta cuando a la iglesia Episcopal vienen hermanos precedentes de la confesión católica romana. En América Latina, la mayoría de las iglesias católicas romanas sus fuentes de recaudación se obtienen por diferentes vías, y no necesariamente por las “limosnas” que dan los fieles. Esto ha creado una falsa opinión que es sostenida, por personas que no son fieles comulgantes de ninguna iglesia, y es que a la iglesia no hay que darle dinero, porque la Iglesia es rica.

Este fenómeno adquiere otra dimensión cuando los hispanos que vienen a Estados Unidos y llegan a la Iglesia Episcopal, inmediatamente hay un choque entre su visión de la Iglesia América Latina y la visión de la comunidad americana. Pues mientras la comunidad Anglo entiende el sistema de sostener su iglesia, mediante su diezmos o promesas, cuidan y mantienen el edificio donde esta la Iglesia.

Para el hispano es todo lo contrario, no hay esta la Iglesia sostener a la Iglesia económicamente, pues esta tiene dinero. ¿Este comportamiento es porque los hispanos son indolentes? O simplemente no tienen sentido de responsabilidad?

Ni una cosa ni la otra, tienen mucha responsabilidad y no son indolentes. Recordemos que muchos de los hispanos que abrazan la fe Episcopal proceden de la Iglesia Católica Romana, y en ella mucho de los feligreses son oidores de la Misa, no participantes activos, por ende asisten, escuchan la misa y cuando esta termina muchos no se quedan a compartir, no saben lo que acontece en su seno, no saben sobre el sostenimiento del edificio, ni como se sostiene, ni les han enseñado sobre el particular, por lo tanto han asumido que no le corresponde saber lo que ocurre dentro de ella y se da por entendido, que esa es una potestad exclusiva del sacerdote.

## Los recursos son limitados

Que acontece entonces con los Episcopales que llegan de América Latina y se incorporan a una iglesia Episcopal local? El fenómeno es más interesante aun, porque aunque han oído hablar de mayordomía y pueden tener un conocimiento sobre el tema, la realidad de ser hispanos, y eso significa no tener trabajos bien remunerados, en lo peor de los casos muchos sufren abusos por no tener documentos legales, esa realidad les da de lleno en el rostro.

La otra cara de esa moneda es que tienen, con lo poco que ganan, sostener su familia y mandar dinero para ayudar a sus



hijos o sus padres que quedaron en América Latina, por ende no pueden ayudar a sostener a sus iglesias locales, como quisieran.

Entonces los Episcopales hispanos en Estados Unidos acogen con beneplácito las dos T de la Mayordomía, es decir el talento y el tiempo, lo ponen a la disposición de la iglesia local donde les ha tocado vivir.

Los talentos del mundo hispanos son muy ricos y diversos, abarcan desde la música, que cambia la vida de la iglesia local para inyectarle nuevas energías al servicio; el arte culinario, que se presenta con un variedad de platos típicos de diferentes regiones de América Latina; sus Kermés, que son muchas veces, fiestas pro-recaudación de fondos, sus bailes folclóricos y sus fiestas patronales entre otras.

En cuanto al tiempo los hispanos, no tienen limitaciones, para servir a Dios en sus iglesias, solo tienen límites cuando sus trabajos se los impide, pero después no es extraño que si tienen que limpiar el templo, les acompañen sus hijos, o si tiene que hacer algo por la iglesia, salgan del trabajo a atender esa responsabilidad, en una palabra son incondicionales, porque entienden que el tiempo que les dan a la iglesia no es al sacerdote, ni a nadie en especial lo hacen para Dios.

Cuando una junta Parroquial o Vestry puede asimilar esa parte de la Mayordomía que dan sin vacilar los hispanos, tienen un tesoro de incalculable valor, que permite un crecimiento en diferentes órdenes para cualquier iglesia.

La otra parte, que es el del tesoro, será posible en la dimensión que se espera en la segunda generación de hispano en la iglesia Episcopal, pues no tendrán que enviar dinero a América Latina y habrán asimilado la dedicación y entrega que hace la primera generación por su Iglesia.

*[El Rev.] Joel Almonó, nacido en la República Dominicana actualmente sirve como [Presbítero] Asociado en la Iglesia de la Gracia, Lawrence, Massachusetts, donde sirve a la creciente comunidad hispana. Sirvió en la Misión del Santo Niño Jesús, St. Paul, Minnesota, hasta fines de 2006.*

*Estos artículos han sido editados por razones de espacio pero se encuentran completos en [www.episcopalfoundation.org/library/Vestry20%Papers/](http://www.episcopalfoundation.org/library/Vestry20%Papers/)*

# Christian Stewardship in the Hispanic Community

by Joel Almonó

The Episcopal Church in Latin America is not widely known. It has a muted presence because of its small size, making many people here in the United States think that Hispanics only belong to the Roman Catholic or Pentecostal faiths.

The reality is that there exists a vibrant, though small, Hispanic community of Episcopalians in Latin America. This is my own particular case; I come from an Episcopalian family in the Dominican Republic. Since my childhood I have heard the priest talk about stewardship, especially during the traditional two months of the year that focus on teaching this commitment.

Stewardship is perhaps most famous for its three “T’s” — time, talent, and treasure. We often focus on “treasure” and how to bring in more to benefit our church. In my youth no one talked about tithing. This was a term used by our evangelical brothers, not by good Episcopalians. We only talked about filling out our pledge card. Many in my church dutifully contributed the amount written on their pledge card for a month or two, and then, well, it was just forgotten.

## A false assumption

In Latin America the majority of the Roman Catholic churches obtain their funds from diverse sources, with little expectation that the parishioners will provide anything more than a charitable token. This has created the false assumption that has been sustained and generalized until today, that the church is wealthy and doesn’t need the financial support of the people.

When Hispanics come to the United States and arrive at the doors of the Episcopal Church, there is immediately a collision between the vision of the Church in Latin America, and the vision held by the Anglo community in the United States. The Anglo community has lived the system of supporting the church through pledges, taking care of the building, and all the other tasks required to manage a church. Sometimes this has become so internalized in the Episcopal Church in the US that some churches even become isolated and rather exclusive in the neighborhood where they have existed since their founding.

For Hispanics, everything is the opposite. The Hispanic community in Latin America has never had to sustain their churches economically. There is always the feeling that the church itself is rich, no matter the denomination, and that the building where the church is located belongs to everyone, so there is no need to give it support. Would we therefore call Hispanics indolent or irresponsible?

Neither would be a true characterization. Hispanics are very responsible and they are not indolent. In addition to never learning that their “treasure” was really needed, participation in the church consisted of hearing the service, not participating actively.

Because of this perhaps they were not aware of what was happening at the center of the church; they didn’t know about issues such as building maintenance and its costs, or the church budget. The feeling has always been that these issues are the exclusive domain of the priest.

## Resources are limited

So what happens when Hispanics incorporate into the local Episcopal Church here in the United States? They have heard talk of stewardship, and may have knowledge about this topic. However, when it comes to sharing the third “T” of stewardship — their treasure — the reality is that as immigrants and as Hispanics they don’t have the resources to contribute. They probably have work that is poorly paid, and in the worst case, suffer abuses at work because they don’t have legal documents. This is the reality Hispanic immigrants confront, in addition to never really feeling it was their responsibility to contribute financially to the church.

On a personal level Hispanic immigrants earn little, and with this small sum they sustain their family here and send funds back home to help those who remain — be it children, parents or other family members. For this reason they cannot help sustain their local church, even if they wanted to.

Hispanic Episcopalians in the United States accept with approval the other 2 “T’s” of stewardship. They are willing and able to participate in providing time and talent to the church where they now belong.

The talents of the Hispanic community are rich and diverse, encompassing broad areas such as music — where the Hispanic influence can inject new energy into the service — the culinary arts, and celebrations.

Normally the Hispanic community is very generous with their time. There is a desire to serve God and only the confines of work impede Hispanics from coming to the church to help. Often Hispanics will come with all the family, children included, to attend to a church responsibility, or will leave work for a short time to come and help. There is a general understanding that the time dedicated to the church is not given to the priest or to the other members. It is done especially in service to God.

When the bishop’s committee or the vestry can assimilate the contributions that the Hispanic community is able to make in stewardship toward the church they gain a fortune of incalculable value.

In terms of contributing to the growth of the treasure of the church, it’s possible that the church will have to wait for a greater contribution from the Hispanic community with the second generation of Hispanic immigrants. As this younger generation grows up, has fewer economic responsibilities back home, and retains the dedication and willingness to help shown by the first generation, the Episcopal Church can expect a greater financial contribution from the Hispanic community.

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*Edited for space, these articles may be found in full on <http://episcopalfoundation.org/library/Vestry%20Papers/>*