

The idea of a "tent maker" strongly connects with my research on pulpit culture. I believe it challenges us to realign with our churches and bridge the gap between clergy and laity.

Tent Maker

To begin, I want to highlight that the "negative budget" model reflects a deeper dissonance between our faith and our approach to pastoral care. I know this may sound strong, but I invite you to hear me out—you don't have to agree with me, and I welcome a thoughtful conversation.

As pastors, we proclaim that God is sovereign, that He is our provider, and that He cares for every need of His people. Yet, if we truly believe this in our hearts, why do we often struggle to be content with the provisions He grants us? Why do we sometimes project scarcity or insecurity onto the church community, rather than leading them in trust and gratitude?

The early Church modeled a very different spirit when it came to financial matters. Paul, one of our greatest examples, intentionally chose to work as a tentmaker. He supported his ministry through his own labor so that he would not be a financial burden to the churches he served (Acts 18:3; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9). His actions were not driven by pride or self-sufficiency but by a desire to serve freely, without entangling the gospel message with financial pressure. The early Church emphasized fairness, mutual support, and voluntary generosity—not obligation or demand.

The early church writings echo this approach:

1. Didache (Late 1st – Early 2nd Century):
"Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain more than one day, or two days if there's a necessity. If he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle departs, let him take nothing except enough bread to last until he reaches his next stop. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet." (Didache 11:4-6)
2. Tertullian (c. 155–220 AD) – Apology 39:
"Each puts in a small donation... it is not spent on feasting, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the needs of orphans, elderly men confined to their homes, shipwrecked sailors, or those in prison for their faith."
3. Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258 AD) – On the Lapsed* 5:
"They who serve the altar of God should live by the altar; but let them serve the altar in such a way that they seek nothing except the necessities of life."

"Let no one who is a bishop be lavish in his clothing or food. He should not live above his means, nor should he be adorned with gold or costly garments. Let him be an example of simplicity, and let him show, by his life, the virtues that he preaches."
(Cyprian, On the Unity of the Church, Chapter 7)
4. Apostolic Constitutions (4th Century, Based on Earlier Traditions):

"The deacons are to take care of the money of the church and distribute it to the widows, orphans, and those who are in need, as well as to the presbyters who labor in teaching and ministry." (Apostolic Constitutions 2.26)

The Anabaptist Reformation Against Wealth and Power

The Anabaptists were early Reformers who took a bold stand against the blending of Christian faith with worldly power, privilege, and wealth. Unlike the established churches of their time, they envisioned a return to the simplicity, humility, and shared life of the early Christian community.

1. In The Schleithem Confession (1527), a foundational document for Anabaptist faith and practice, they outlined key principles for Christian living—including a radical approach to leadership and financial integrity. Article IV speaks directly to this:
"The shepherd must be the servant of the church, not a ruler, not a despot. He must not lead the church by force, nor with a heavy hand, but with love, humility, and care. The church should provide for its pastors, but the pastors should not live luxuriously or seek after worldly gain. If they do, they have no part in the true church." - The Schleithem Confession, Article IV

The message is clear: pastors are called to serve, not to rule; to shepherd, not to enrich themselves. The Anabaptists saw financial gain as incompatible with true Christian leadership. They rejected hierarchical structures that elevated clergy into positions of comfort and control, and instead promoted a more communal, accountable model of faith and provision.

2. This conviction was echoed by Balthasar Hubmaier, one of the most prominent Anabaptist theologians of the time. In his writings, he warned against using the gospel as a means for personal enrichment:
"A pastor is a shepherd, not a prince... he is called to serve the flock, not to rule it for gain. If one seeks wealth from the gospel, he preaches not Christ but himself." - Balthasar Hubmaier, "On the Christian Baptism of Believers," 1525

For Hubmaier and the broader Anabaptist movement, the integrity of the gospel was compromised whenever leaders pursued power or possessions.

3. This vision found practical expression in the life of the Hutterites, a communal branch of the Anabaptist tradition that practiced the sharing of goods. Their foundational text, the *Rechenschaft* (c. 1545), reflects this conviction:
"In the true Christian church, there is no mine or thine, but all is held in common, as among the apostles. No one should claim more than another, for greed and inequality are contrary to the Spirit of Christ." - Peter Riedemann, Hutterite Leader

In these communities, leaders were not exalted or enriched—they lived as equals among equals. The church provided for everyone's needs, but no one accumulated personal wealth, least of all those entrusted with spiritual oversight.

In my own ministry, I have encouraged shared leadership by clearly listing responsibilities—such as ushering, preaching, and children’s ministry—and inviting the congregation to volunteer annually. This approach not only strengthens governance but also fosters a spirit of service. I have also evaluated my own contributions with sober judgment, guided by my strengths and grounded in the framework of Romans 12:3–8. This framework is shared openly with both the congregation and the board to ensure transparency and accountability.

Regular feedback is encouraged—including anonymous input when needed—to reinforce the belief that every spiritual gift matters. There is no hierarchy among gifts; each member must be valued and given the space to grow in their calling. The goal is not to create competition, but to cultivate a complementary environment where every contribution builds up the body of Christ.

The church is a body where every member is important (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

Transparency, harmony, and accountability should be shared equally.

However, in our current governance model, 70–90% of collections often go toward staff welfare. How can we justify this as ministers called to pastoral care?

Meanwhile, we spend less than 5% on widows and orphans—sometimes even less—yet we continue asking the congregation to give sacrificially. This is a serious concern that requires reflection and change (James 1:27, Galatians 2:10).

Conclusion

If we are truly called to serve, then we must re-examine our approach to financial stewardship. The early church set an example of fairness, sacrifice, and accountability— not just for the congregation but for those in ministry as well. Our calling is not about entitlement but about faithfulness. If we ask our congregation to give sacrificially, we must first demonstrate wise stewardship, contentment, and a commitment to the true needs of the church. Perhaps, it’s time we return to the biblical and historical roots of pastoral care— one that prioritizes service over salary and faith over financial security.

I would like to conclude with an amazing historical fact that reveals the heart of Christianity and Christ’s intent for His followers. The early Church was not only diligent in financial integrity but also actively supported believers through life transitions. Eusebius, in *Church History* (Book VI, Chapter 32), records an incident where Origen helped a newly converted artist who was struggling with his profession.

This artist—possibly a painter or sculptor—had made a living creating images, likely including pagan idols. But after becoming a Christian, he realized that continuing in this work would go against his faith.

He wanted to stop, but that meant losing his source of income.

Instead of leaving him to figure things out alone, Origen encouraged the Church to financially support him until he could find a new way to earn a living.

It’s a great example of how the early Christian community didn’t just expect new believers to change their ways without support—they actively helped them transition into a life that aligned with their faith. If the early Church could practice such wisdom, fairness, and care, then surely we too must re-examine how we steward our resources today.