

Don't Mention The 'M' Word

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I feel I can speak with confidence about how much people hate talking about money because I'm in that boat too. A few weeks ago I had a leak in the bathroom. After the plumber had finished, he showed me what he'd done and we walked downstairs.

Then came the inevitable and really awkward bit. Stalling for time, I asked if he wanted another cup of tea. He had his tool bag in his hands and was ready for home, but thankfully he said yes. We talked and talked. Ten minutes passed. I hoped my husband would come home soon so he could deal with the situation. He didn't. It was up to me. Conversation had run dry and he said 'Right' as he stood up, which of course means 'I'm off'. So I had to do it. **We had to talk about money.** It seemed vulgar and rude, but he had to be paid for his work. I didn't want to use the 'm' word, so I opted for 'So... what'll it be?' and I made a smiley face and raised my eyebrows which I hoped would hide my embarrassment, but it probably didn't. He told me the amount, and I paid him, and it was all over. Phew.

We don't have a problem with *paying* for things in Britain. But we do have a problem with *talking* about it. When I was in the Army and working in Afghanistan, I learned that when people introduced themselves, one of the first questions a stranger will be asked after "What do you do?" is "What do you earn?" In Afghanistan it's a perfectly legitimate question, and no-one feels shy about it. It's like asking someone their height. Here in Britain we don't discuss our income with our friends and often not even with our family.



By Edward McGowan

We can feel awkward about money in church too. I've felt really embarrassed in churches before. Once I visited a church for the first time and the collection plate was at the back, and I missed it altogether.

I'd given nothing! This made me feel awful. Another time I was at Salisbury Cathedral and had given all the money I was carrying during the offertory. After the service, when I was at the front of the queue to get coffee, I realised that I couldn't contribute, so I left the queue empty handed because I couldn't bear not contributing (or having to explain myself).

These examples are silly but true. I've since been told that the church is a place of grace and love and no-one would have judged me at all. This is true. The problem didn't lie with other people. It was all my own embarrassment about money. Why is it embarrassing? Some people don't like talking about money because they don't have much of it. Other people don't like talking about money because they have too *much* of it. Whatever the reason, there's something within us that makes the topic of money something we want to avoid *at all costs*.

The thing is, if we are going to respond to God's love by giving, which is what we are called to do, then we have to face it. We have to talk about **money**. Why? Well contributing **money** (however much) to our church funds helps our parish church to continue its work. We give **money** to our church because God loves us and we want to share that message of love with our neighbour. It seems simple enough, but the act of handing over **money** or talking about handing over **money** or even *thinking* about having to talk about handing over **money**.... Makes us pretty uncomfortable.

Jesus spoke specifically about **money** 33 times in the gospels. Maybe we could learn something from that. If we're going to make a change, if we're going to see our churches and communities transformed by God's love and generosity then we have to say it: **MONEY MONEY MONEY**. And imagine if we could embrace conversations about **money**. I wonder how it would make our vicars feel when preaching about **money** if they knew we weren't squirming in our seats.

Next time you walk into church, look around and feel blessed that it exists *for you and for your community* because of the **money** (donations big or small) you and generations before you have given. Next time you are praying, pray for the people in this Parish, that they may feel peace when talking about **money**, and to those whose lives are a struggle because they feel they don't have enough, or they are embarrassed about having too much.

God thank you for loving me and for all the gifts you give me. You give freely, without condition, and without embarrassment. You do not hold back. Please teach me to follow your ways. Forgive my embarrassment God; please don't let it get in the way of my giving. I am like a child, O Lord, and I need direction and strength. I pray you will fill my heart with your Holy Spirit, and enable me to talk about money with grace.

Amen