

Ineffective Clergy pt 2

Contributed by Administrator
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See part 1 of this multi-part series of posts regarding the UMC's study that found ineffective clergy the biggest obstacle to overcoming the denomination's 40 year decline.

2) My question today is: Does low pay effect the quality of pastors? Disclaimer: I am not arguing that clergy pay is low or that it should be raised. I am not arguing that we have a majority of ineffective clergy. I am, for the sake of argument, agreeing that there are ineffective clergy in the UMC.

If the UMC's problem is ineffective clergy, then why does there seem to be so many? (See part 1 [link] for background information)

As I pondered this, I began to wonder if issues of clergy pay could be an issue. Usually pay has a correlation to effectiveness. The most effective employees usually end up being the best paid. This isn't always true, but it usually is.

Are clergy underpaid? The question has been asked before and we could gather statistics, etc. It is difficult to judge what 'fair' pay would be. I guess it depends on a pastor's effectiveness, but even that is difficult to judge.

Salary is an issue when individuals decide to leave the ministry because they don't feel like they can provide for their families on the salary they receive. If there was a really talented individual, s/he could probably make more money elsewhere. A friend of mine left the pastorate (for reasons other than pay) and ended up making more than s/he ever did being a pastor. Most pastors don't join the UMC to become rich, but could it be that some [effective] pastors have left because they could find better opportunities elsewhere? Could it be that some [ineffective] pastors have stayed because they couldn't do anything else?

Also, we don't have an over abundance of individuals seeking to be clergy. It isn't like we have two hundred show up and we take the best ten. While there are some who are denied ordination, most, with hard work and determination, can end up being ordained (As long as their psychological tests turn out okay).

Could it be that one of the reasons we have ineffective clergy is the more effective persons will find employment where the pay matches their skills? I was told when I started my D.Min program that it would not equate to more pay. Where else is that the case? What other 'industry' tells its employees, 'You can go back to school to learn new skills and improve your current ones, work hard, study, take time out from your life...but...it won't equate to a better salary.' Basically I was told there would not be a monetary reward for hard work and trying to become more effective in ministry. I did not go back to school to increase my salary, but to have a DS come out and say the above really causes me to wonder if this type of attitude, in the end, hurts our churches. What motivation is there to increase effectiveness other than internal intangible motivations?

So, here is the situation we find ourselves in. Instead of having two hundred people 'apply' and ordaining the top ten, we have twelve apply and take most of them. So, we really don't have much of a choice.

Some who may be effective, even if they have a call to ministry, might feel they can't survive on the salary. They also have a lot of other options. Some after years of frustration and low pay decide to do other things. What if, the two (pay and effectiveness) were related some how? That could explain the 'ineffective clergy' we have in the UMC (again, if the study is correct, I believe they are saying that most of the UMC clergy are ineffective).

I admit that more study would have to be done to discover the answer to these questions. The point I'm trying to make in this series of articles is this: The issues of UMC decline are deeper and broader than simply saying it is ineffective clergy. If we are satisfy saying that, then we need to ask why we have so many ineffective pastors? Salary could be one reason. If so, what could we do to address the issue? I believe there are deeper issues that have caused our decline. My fear is we will be satisfied with the answer of 'ineffective clergy' and move on never taking time to look at the deeper issues of our denomination, culture and people. Perhaps now is the time we begin looking at these other more complex issues