

University of Notre Dame

Institute for Church Life – Fall 2012

Unleashing Catholic Generosity: Explaining the Catholic Giving Gap in the U.S.

- On average, American Catholics are less generous in voluntary financial giving than other Christian groups in the U.S.:
 - Less likely to give 10% or more of income as voluntary contribution
 - Less likely to give money to the Church (only 1 out of 5 give)

- Biggest reason for “giving” gap – lack of “spiritual engagement with money”:
 - American Catholics tend to separate money from matters of faith and think money/possessions have little to do with religious issues
 - Conversely, American Catholics that do see money as a religious matter and see their money as God’s money, are much more financially generous

- Parish culture discussing money:
 - “Pay the bills” culture focusing on parish needs has less parishioner spiritual engagement with money and less financial giving
 - “Living the mission” culture focusing on spiritual growth/personal & world transformation increases spiritual engagement and more financial giving
 - Catholic parishes are more inclined to talk in terms of “paying the bills” versus “living the mission”

- Parish mission and vision:
 - Catholics report a lack of communication regarding mission and vision of their parish
 - Catholics report a lower level of “ownership” of their parish

- Conclusion:
 - Help parishioners see that their money/possessions are ultimately gifts from God and meant to be generously shared – develop stewardship (generously sharing gifts of time, talent and treasure)
 - Parishes/priests talk more frequently about money in terms of “living the mission”; focusing on spiritual growth and personal & world transformation, not meeting parish needs. (Money is a spiritual matter, priests should talk more about money)
 - Encourage parishioners to be part of the planning and vision of the parish; excitement created when parishioners hear the great things done with money collected; leads to sense of ownership and more generous giving
 - Develop homilies that discuss money (“living the mission”) and focus on compassion/empathy while challenging materialistic values help foster “spiritual engagement with money”
 - Catholic generosity has the potential to reshape the world!