

The Watford Word

www.watfordchurchofchrist.org

What's on

- Sunday 30 June** - 10:30AM. Malcolm speaking
 Women's meeting, 1pm Morrisons Supermarket Cafe
- Saturday 06 July** - 8AM. Men's breakfast at the church building
- Sunday 07 July** - 10:30AM. Church service (also Wellington country park service in Thames Valley)
- Sunday 14 July** - 10:30AM. Speaker Kerry Mathurin
- Sunday 21 July** - 10:30AM. Speaker Olyden Johnson.
 Annual church meeting
- Sunday 8th Sept:** A 'thank you' service
- Saturday 14th Sept:** AIM UK&I - "Family Life"
- Sunday 15th Sept:** Congregational vision workshop
- Saturday 7th Dec:** AIM UK&I - "World Views"



Paying for church workers

Introduction

I recognise that writing about about employing church staff — as a paid church staff person myself — carries challenges. Will I be objective and fair to the Scriptural evidence? You will have to be the judge! Whether you agree with my analysis or not, we can all learn together.

The topic of paying church staff has been a matter of discussion and debate among

Christians for centuries. There is no explicit, universally mandated New Testament (NT) pattern for compensating church leaders and staff. However, both Old Testament (OT) and NT Scriptures offer insights that can help guide our decisions here in Watford. It is my understanding that congregations have the freedom to determine how, or if, they employ staff for pastoral or administrative work.

Old Testament Examples

The OT provides several examples and principles regarding the support of religious leaders. The Levites, who were responsible for Israel's religious duties, did not receive a land inheritance like the other tribes. Instead, they were supported by the people's tithes. Numbers 18:21 states, "I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting."

This system ensured that those who dedicated their lives to spiritual service were provided for by the community. Similarly, Deuteronomy 18:1-2 states, "The Levitical priests—indeed, the whole tribe of Levi—are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel. They shall live on the food offerings presented to the Lord, for that is their inheritance."

The principle of supporting religious workers with community resources has roots in the OT.

New Testament Teachings

Several references in the NT imply support for those who work in ministry. However, no explicit, detailed pattern is established for how this should be done, leaving room for interpretation and application by individual congregations.

Jesus' Teachings

Jesus and The Twelve were supported by other people, "These women were helping to support them out of their own means." (Luke 8:3). He also hinted at the appropriateness of supporting those who work in ministry. In Luke 10:7, He said, "Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for

the worker deserves his wages." He underscored the principle that those who labour in the gospel can be supported by those they serve.

Paul's Instructions

The Apostle Paul provided more specific guidance. In 1 Timothy 5:17-18, he wrote, "*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'*"

In 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, Paul also stated, "*Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.*" Here, Paul parallels the OT practice of supporting Levites and the NT practice of supporting those who preach the gospel.

There were, of course situations in which Paul did not make use of this right — including Corinth (read the rest of 1 Cor 9 - see also Acts 18.3). In Thessalonica he asked the church to recall, "*...our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.*" (1 Thessalonians 2:9) Again, in Thessalonica (a church planting) he took no salary, even though he claimed it.

No Universal Command

These passages suggest it is appropriate to support church workers financially, but no uniform NT command prescribes precisely how this should be done. Each congregation is free to decide whether and how to employ staff for pastoral or administrative work.

Historical Development

Early Church

The Didache, an early Christian document, suggests that travelling apostles and prophets should stay only briefly and receive minimal support.

"Receive everyone who comes in the name of the Lord. But examine him while he is with you. Then as you get to know him, you will know if he is a true or false

Christian. If the one who comes is just passing through, assist him in any way you can. But he is not to remain with you for more than two or three days. If he wants to settle down among you and has some sort of skill or trade, then let him work for his food. If he does not have some kind of skill or trade, decide among yourselves how he is to live among you as a Christian without being idle. If he does not want to do what you have determined, then he is a freeloader, using the name of Christ to let others support him. Watch out for people like that!" Owles, R. Joseph. *The Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (p. 23).

Medieval Period

During the medieval period, the church's structure became more formal, and the clergy was often supported through tithes, offerings, and church lands. Monastic communities, in particular, followed a model of communal living and shared resources, with support coming from both internal production and external donations.

Reformation and Beyond

The Reformation brought significant changes, including a critique of the wealth and corruption of the church. Reformers like Martin Luther emphasised the importance of accountability and proper use of church resources. Protestant churches developed various models for supporting pastors, often through direct congregational giving.

Conclusion

The Bible provides foundational principles for supporting those who work in ministry, but it does not prescribe a specific, universal method. This allows us the freedom to determine whether and how to employ and compensate staff according to our unique context. Ultimately, the scriptural call to honour and support those who labour in the gospel remains a guiding principle. By adhering to these biblical principles and remaining flexible in their application, congregations can effectively steward their resources to support their ministry and mission.

Your brother in Christ, Malcolm

[YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCj9Qa8D9zumJZdoAtARDUww](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCj9Qa8D9zumJZdoAtARDUww)