

CHARITABLE PERSPECTIVES

3 STUMBLING BLOCKS TO CHURCH-NONPROFIT COLLABORATION: PERSPECTIVES FROM A PASTOR AND NONPROFIT DIRECTOR

MARCH 9, 2022





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I love pastors. Of course, I have to say that **because I am one**—but this time, I mean it. I *really* love pastors. Before I became a pastor, I led **a Christian non-profit ministry** that I still lead today. In serving in both roles, I've come to realize that there are tensions between these two that I wasn't aware of until I wore both hats.

Leading a Christian non-profit, I've had the opportunity to spend time with other Executive Directors: women and men who believe in the mission of the Church and look for the support of local churches to help them in their mission. I found that there was consistent frustration that was not talked about openly. It wasn't gossip or criticism but a painful recognition that churches—pastors, really—do not easily partner with outside Christian ministries. Before becoming a pastor, I assumed this was a one-sided issue. I assumed that pastors lacked concern or maybe didn't understand the biblical mandate for serving the marginalized. At best, I just assumed they were too busy to listen.

Of course, becoming a pastor has changed that perspective. I now realize that pastors do not have the luxury of just focusing on the problem my non-profit is trying to solve. They are responsible for the “whole counsel of scripture” including the things that my charity is not built to support. This is true for the church planter that has 30 congregants or the Outreach Director at a church of 3000. Realizing this makes me more loving and patient in those relationships and has helped our team foster healthier church partnerships.

While my experience in the clergy has given me a more empathetic view of pastors it has also shown me what pastors can do better. In fact, in my years of church alliances and pastoral relationships, I've come to find that many pastors have three unhelpful tendencies. And because I'm a pastor and believe there is no better communication friend than alliteration, I call these issues “The 3 C's”. These are the three things I look out for when I work with churches and pastors that may prove to be stumbling blocks for our relationship.



1st C: Control

The first “C” I encounter is usually the issue of **control**. What I mean by control is the insistence that, despite the subject matter expertise of the non-profit leader, a pastor may not be willing to be pliable in how the ministry gets done.

As a pastor, I understand that church leaders have a responsibility to arrange ministry partnerships in a way that protects their church from harm. As a pastor, I have a considerable responsibility for the ministry relationship, resources, and reputation of our church. I answer to a board of elders that asks me questions about how the activities of the church align with our mission and holds me accountable to those decisions.

As a non-profit leader, I’ve learned to take my time and never lead with a request for financial resources. The opposite of control is trust in these partnerships and both parties, the church and non-profit, need to commit to a process of listening and learning. The pastor will eventually see the heart and competency of the charity, and the non-profit leader will find a way to arrange the relationship that is workable for everyone—including the families we serve.



2nd C: Convenience

The second “C” I’ve experienced is the expectation of **convenience**. American culture highly values convenience, and we have come to expect that, if there is an easier way, we’ll find it. We like quick, easy, and simple.

As a pastor, I’ve found that the expectations consumers have for service companies easily spill over into the church, so I’m tempted by solutions that are quick, easy, and simple.

As a non-profit leader, I know that the deep physical, emotional, and spiritual problems we face do not have convenient solutions. This means you can’t reduce an outreach to families experiencing poverty to a two-hour event on Saturday mornings once a quarter. Transformation takes time, relationships, and trust. Oversimplifying complex problems can yield **help that hurts**. These Instagram-able outreaches may make the giver feel good while leaving the receiver feeling ashamed and embarrassed.



3rd C: Credit

This leads us to the final “C”, **credit**. When serving families in the shadows of society, the *way* we serve them is very important. What I mean is that the end does not justify the means, and just because they showed up to get whatever we’re giving away, does not mean that they don’t leave feeling patronized or exploited.

As a pastor, I understand the benefit of communicating to my congregation and community about the work our church does. However, as a non-profit leader, I know the impact of sharing these stories may build our brand at the expense of someone else’s dignity. In the Tik-Tok time that we live in there is tremendous pressure to share imagery that “tells a story.” But “the story” belongs to the single mother sitting in her car for 30 minutes getting the courage to come and get her children’s Christmas gifts only to be met by a well-intentioned pastor doing a Facebook live post with her in the foreground. These are not our stories to tell or take credit. It’s her story and the story God is building in her through the way she interacts with your church—a testimony for her to give about God’s goodness and *not* about my brand. Let’s not tell the story in a way that costs her; instead, let’s exchange today’s credit for tomorrow’s Godly reward.

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have

received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:3-4)

My point in laying out the issues of control, convenience, and credit is not to heap hot coals on the heads of my fellow pastors. It's the opposite. I want to help you build better, longer-lasting, more impactful relationships with Christian non-profits already in your community. What I've experienced is that, when pastors and non-profit leaders take the time and energy to build ministries that last, our communities benefit and the name of Jesus is made famous.

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