



Leadership Vignette

A pastor in her first year at a congregation tells of a lesson learned the hard way in working with a volunteer treasurer.

Last fall I discovered that the various money accounts of the church had not been audited for the year. I was going to get everything done and look good when the district superintendent came for the annual Charge Conference. I began handing out the necessary report forms, including the audit forms. I was not prepared for the assault I received when I gave the audit form to the treasurer. She informed me that "her accounts" had never been audited in the twelve years she had been treasurer and that she "had a good lawyer."

When I talked to the pastor-parish relations committee and to various other members, I began to understand her reaction. The treasurer did not have any accounting background and had not received any instruction on how to do her job. Her records consisted only of a very incomplete checkbook. She was feeling threatened. The rules of the denomination and good accounting practices mandated an audit of the books. However, if I had done my homework a little more thoroughly, I may have discovered a better way to approach her that would have helped her save face and avoid the blowup.

As it turned out, she and her husband left the church. Thank goodness, I had already intuitively begun to earn my cultural capital with other folks. I had been there helping with their projects, visiting the shut-ins, and being present at events. Members understood what was going on with the treasurer, comforted me, and stood beside me because they were beginning to see me as someone who cared about them and spent time with them. While the change in the treasurer has been a good thing for the church, I still grieve the loss of this couple and hope that I have learned a lesson that will serve me well in years to come.