

The Pew Rental Dilemma



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Introduction

Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's motto is, "If money can solve the problem, then you don't have a problem." I thought about this motto while reading the truly inspiring story of George Muller. Muller, the son of a tax collector, was born in Prussia in 1805 and dramatically converted when he was twenty.

Not long after his call to the ministry, he went against tradition and allowed his parishioners to attend church without paying the customary pew rent. His faith grew strong as he leaned on God for all his needs. By the time he died at 93, he had become one of the best-known Christians of the Victorian era, having raised \$4,500,000 in answer to prayer alone (the equivalent today of \$225 million). He saved thousands of orphans from lives of appalling destitution.

The purpose of this parable is to help solve the problem that money can't solve.

Once upon a time, nestled against a hillside, there was a little church. Every Wednesday evening, Pastor Jay and some of the church members would meet to pray for church growth. They wanted everyone to know about Jesus and that He would soon return.

And the Holy Spirit moved gently in response to their prayers, impressing the townspeople to come to this little church.

After the next church service, two guests asked to join. The church members were ecstatic and quickly started giving them Bible studies. The guests were so enthusiastic about what they were learning that they went and told their friends, who told their friends, who told their friends. "You must come and see our new church, " they urged.

Pastor Jay's baptismal robe barely dried between baptisms as more people joined the church. The little church was soon filled, a joyous testament to the power of prayer.

As was the tradition at the time, this little church charged a pew rent. However, the dilemma was that the church had not been charging its guests or new members. They had been so happy to find anyone interested in their message that they forgot to mention the pew rent. Some church members began to resent the growing congregation.

"You know," they said to one another, "Pastor Jay is a salesman. That's the only explanation I can think of for our church's rapid growth."

"Yes, and he's letting some of them come to church for free! If they don't pay a full pew rental, they shouldn't be allowed in; it's unfair to the other members paying full pew rent."

It soon became apparent that the church had more attendees than pews. The church board met and discussed the problem but couldn't agree on a solution, so

they took a “wait and see” attitude.

Meanwhile, at prayer meeting, they continued to pray for church growth. They wanted everyone to know about Jesus and that He would soon return.

And as the Holy Spirit moved gently in response, the townspeople continued to come to this little church.

Pastor Jay now trembled each time he’d have to call John, the church board chairman, to tell him another person wanted to be baptized. The conversations began something like this.

“Hello, John. This is Pastor Jay. We have another person who wants to join our church.”

“Will the member be a full pew-rental-paying member?” John asked.

Pastor Jay knew the routine; if the new member couldn’t pay the full pew rental amount, there would be several committees to go through. Often, these committee meetings would end in heated debates, with the head elder guaranteeing the pew-rental amount and the treasurer yelling, “That’s not fair to all the rest of us who pay a full pew-rental!” And then the treasurer would stomp out.

The church board eventually gave Pastor Jay the green light to welcome another member into the “fold” if the head elder paid their pew rental or donations came in.

At the next prayer meeting, they decided to stop praying for church growth and focus more on nurturing the existing members. After all, the church was packed; pews had been made and placed in every available space.

Others heard about the little church’s mission and sent in donations. For example, more than \$10,000 had come that month to offset any possible pew-rental shortfall. But there was still the dilemma of what to do with the latest people who wanted to become members. There was absolutely no more room, no more pews,

and no more space.

Pastor Jay requested an emergency board meeting to address the issue. All the appointed church board members and a few interested members arrived promptly. After the opening prayer, the church board chairman began the meeting by saying, "God has certainly blessed our church. The problem is we don't have any more room, and we still have people who want to come. Tonight, we need to decide on a solution to this problem."

One of the pillars in the church, an elderly lady, raised her hand. "In all fairness, we should be good stewards of our resources. Only those who pay a full pew rental should be allowed; in other words, there should be *no more subsidizing!* We would have more than enough room if we made that our policy." A few nodded in agreement.

"That just doesn't make sense," countered the head elder. "We've been praying for church growth, and now that we have it, we act like it's a problem. We should be praising the Lord! We could go to two services." This time, a different few nodded in agreement.

"But with two services, we'd have to use more heat, electricity, water..." countered a lady.

She hadn't finished her sentence before the head of the decorating committee chimed in, "And think of the wear and tear on the carpet."

After much discussion, a motion was made. "I move that we put all prospective members on a waiting list. As old members leave or die, these prospective members may join. After all, people tend to value what they wait for."

"That makes sense; I second the motion," said another. "We won't have to enlarge our church or build a new one." And so it was decided.

And then Jesus came! The little church had quite a long waiting list to give Him.

The End