

## **IN LIGHT OF ENRON**

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Did you look at the latest pension statement and wonder? ENRON has become synonymous with bad business practices, misappropriation of funds, and leaders abusing their positions for personal gain while leadership boards turn a blind eye. ENRON has created a skeptical climate in our country where many are suspicious of how the money they invest is really being used.

That includes members being on alert about the gifts and offerings they entrust to the congregation for ministry. More than ever they are questioning, "Where is the money going?" Do we have our own ENRON here? The deeper issue is accountability.

Much is at stake. If funds and finances are not handled properly and within the law, the congregation's tax exempt status as a 501c3 non-profit is jeopardized. Is it worth the risk of losing that? Both pastors and councils can put a congregation in jeopardy. However, the primary responsibility for sound fiscal practices resides with the council. Here are a few thoughts:

- Don't be afraid to talk about money. Secrecy gives the impression you have something to hide.
- Keep the congregation informed of the financial state and how their offerings are being utilized for ministry.
- Be meticulous about recording donations to special causes or funds.
- Have the financial secretary send out quarterly statements

of contribution.

- Never use or borrow money from designated funds for any purpose other than the stated intent. Even if the plan is to repay with interest, these funds cannot legally be tapped
- Do not pay bills without proper documentation.
- Be aware of the differing implications for the congregation and the pastor of "auto allowance" vs. "auto reimbursement."
- Only the council can enter into con- is, financial or otherwise -- this includes credit card agreements.

It's about more than money, it's about trust. ENRON, on the heels of Sept. 11 and the scandals in the Catholic Church, has left people wondering who they can trust. In light of these public events congregations are seeking more accountability. Open accountability fosters trust.

Pastors play a key role in restoring trust. As pastors honor their accountability to the council, trust is built. When pastors and councils act ethically, trust is maintained. In truly living out God's grace and forgiveness, which we know through Jesus Christ, trust flourishes.

Pastors and congregations are healthier as they mutually observe accountability.