

Supporting the Lord's ministry through honorariums

By Rod Arters

Honorarium (pronounced: "on-uh-rair-ee-uhm")
a fee for services rendered by a professional person

Whenever you invite someone from the outside to come speak to your group, one question eventually surfaces, "*What should I pay them for their ministry to us?*" It was a question I asked myself often before I became a speaker. What factors should be considered when giving an honorarium to a communicator of God's Word? No honest Bible teacher teaches God's word to build a financial empire. Since their investment of time is assisting the ministry the Lord has entrusted to you, it is important to generously thank them for their labor of love. The next time you invite an outside speaker to minister to your group, you may want to consider the following:

- 1) **Time away from their family.** It is a significant sacrifice to be away from one's family. Every day they are not home with their own family is priceless. Every day they are absent can never be replaced. Though no honorarium can change this, it is important for you to recognize their sacrifice and think through how you can reimburse them for their time away from their primary ministry to their family.
- 2) **Time away from their ministry.** Is your speaker employed by a church or organization? If so, he has made another significant sacrifice to be with you – stepping away from his current flock to do so. Often times, when he is finished teaching your group he must go right back into a hectic ministry environment at home. If he is going to return tired, make sure he returns well fed. Just because he is paid elsewhere, does not mean he does not deserve to be paid well for his time ministering to you. Remember, ministering to others is how they earn their living. Could they be sustained each month if everyone else gave them what you are giving them? If not, you are not giving them enough.
- 3) **Speaking schedule.** If you are hiring a speaker to deliver just one message on one day, pay him accordingly. If you are hiring him for a series of messages over several days, pay him handsomely. Teaching God's Word is not merely talking, it is an emotionally draining exercise since the Holy Spirit is speaking through him. Every message takes time to prepare and takes energy to deliver, even if they have delivered it before somewhere else.
- 4) **The 3 E's - Education, Experience & Expertise.** Is this person a trained communicator? How long has he been teaching? What level does he teach at? Just like you would expect to pay for the education, experience & expertise of a doctor or lawyer, you also should pay according to a speaker's level of education, experience and expertise.
- 5) **Giftedness.** Not all communicators are equal. Some have a higher level of giftedness than others. Some have a deeper anointing than others. Just as a star athlete is paid a star salary, so you should consider your speaker's level of giftedness that they are sharing with you. If you want a rookie, pay them a stipend. If you desire to have a gifted teacher, reward their giftedness.

- 6) **Pay for what you do not see.** There is much more to speaking than just what you see at your event. There are hours of study and prayer. There is travel time to and from your event. There is the time at your event investing in your flock. Be sure your honorarium includes more than just the time spent delivering the message.
- 7) **Do the math yourself.** Calculate the total number of hours your speaker will have invested into your event. Assume at least 3 hours of study time per “talk”. How many messages are you asking him to deliver? How long will round trip travel take? How many hours/days will he be away from his family? Think through the number of hours they have invested into your event. For example, a weekend retreat is a 60 hour endeavor (at least) once you calculate study time, travel time & time at the event. What would they get paid after 60 hours at their “normal” job? Is your honorarium comparable? Divide your projected honorarium by this number and see if it seems fair based on the guidelines in this article. If, after you do the math, you find you are paying your speaker minimum wage, you better hire a rookie or start studying. You might have to speak at your own event.
- 8) **Your peace of mind.** If you are organizing an event or planning a conference you soon recognize you have much on your mental plate. The details concerning the transportation, leadership, conference center, food, activities, students, etc. is more than enough to keep your head spinning. Securing a speaker you trust to deliver God’s Word faithfully and effectively is worth the financial investment. What I have found is that when I try to do it all (planning, leading, teaching), what always seems to suffer is the teaching. If you have the budget, hiring a teacher makes sense. After all, there are many who can teach your group but only you can effectively shepherd them.
- 9) **Your budget.** Do you budget for speakers throughout the year? If so, is it a generous allotment of funds? What can you afford? What do you have left for the year? Are there other churches that are benefiting from this teacher as well? You do not want to break your budget on a speaker. However, what better way to spend the Lord’s money than on the teaching of His Word?
- 10) **Creative options.** There are many ways to afford a gifted and experienced teacher. Here are 5 ways to expose your flock to an excellent communicator of Truth.
 - a. Add the cost of the speaker into the cost of the event.
 - b. Invite other churches to join your event and thus share the load.
 - c. Have a local Christian business underwrite the cost. Free advertising might be a win/win for them.
 - d. Create this expense into your budget for the year.
 - e. Ask a wealthy individual (or a Sunday School class) in your church to cover this expense.
 - f. Encourage another group to use him while he is in town. You might be able to split his expenses.
- 11) **Expenses.** Unless you are using a local teacher, there are usually some expenses to bring in someone from the outside. Airfare, rental car or mileage reimbursement, gasoline, hotel costs, and food are among the most common expenses. Every speaker assumes (and rightly so) that you will take care of all these expenses to bring them to you. For some churches, just getting a speaker to them would drain their budget. If this is the case, you need to consider teaching the event yourself or bringing in a local communicator. It is not

fair or right to simply cover a speaker's expenses leaving him with little to no stipend for his time, study, etc. If you are able to pay for his expenses before hand, that is best. If you cannot (or it is not practical to do so), then be sure he keeps all receipts and you can reimburse him when he arrives. It is best that the reimbursement check is given to him sooner than later. After all, he is doing you the favor by teaching.

- 12) **A ministry to him.** Consider the ministry you can have to your speaker. He has invested countless hours studying the Bible to teach your group. He has been praying for your event, your students, etc. In many cases, when he is finished at your event he will turn around and head another direction to do it all over again with another group. Just as you would not desire him to get burned out at the event before you, you do not want him to be burned out (or frustrated, exhausted, taken advantage of) at your event. Consider how you might best minister to him. Things like a generous honorarium, covered expenses, his own lodging at the camp, etc. can make a big difference as to his ministry to you. He is providing the most important part of your event. It only makes sense to treat him right.
- 13) **A ministry to his family.** Much attention is given to a speaker but few ever regard the sacrifice of his wife and children that allows him the freedom to minister. Billy Graham would not have been Billy Graham if it were not for Ruth & kids supporting him behind the scenes all those years. Though the honorarium certainly reimburses a man for his expenses, time, education, experience & expertise, it also says "Thank you" to the loved ones who gave him up to be with you.

- 14) **Make a statement.** Every honorarium check makes two statements;

- a. the value you place on the teacher and
- b. the value you place on what he is teaching.

Though a warm, heartfelt handshake and words of appreciation are important, nothing says "Thank you" to a speaker more effectively than a generous check. Most speakers recognize the privilege it is to handle God's Word. They are grateful for the opportunity to co-labor with you in the ministry. They are humbled to know that God may have used them to eternally impact your flock. To return home with that knowledge and a check that reflects your appreciation for that and makes a statement – especially to their wives who gave them up for the week/weekend.

- 15) **God's Word endorses honorariums.** In a letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul broaches the subject of receiving materially for what he provides spiritually. He asks,

"Do we not have a right to eat and drink?...Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING". God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more?..."

Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” (I Corinthians 9:4, 7-14)

- 16) **The check.** Be sure to have the honorarium ready for your speaker before he departs your event. There is nothing worse than for the teacher to have to “track you down” and awkwardly ask you to pay him. NO ONE becomes an itinerant teacher for the money so to have to ask for it is not only embarrassing but bothersome. Be sure to include his reimbursement for expenses in that check or have another check prepared to cover his expenses. When covering his expenses, make sure you have covered his expenses **to and from** your event as well. To neglect to cover his expenses on the way home means he just paid out of his own money to serve you. If you are able to reimburse him for all his expenses before the weekend is over, that is ideal. That way when his ministry to you is complete, so are his expenses. If you must reimburse him after the weekend, make that clear and be sure to handle this first thing on Monday morning. The speaker should not have to remind you to reimburse him for an event that occurred four weeks ago.

Speaker Honorarium Checklist

- Did I book a speaker for my upcoming event?
- Have I communicated to him (in advance) what I can pay him?
- Have I communicated to him (in advance) that I will cover his expenses on top of the honorarium?
- Does the amount of the honorarium adequately cover:
 - His time away from his primary responsibility (family)?
 - His time away from his primary ministry / job?
 - His time of study and prayer for my group?
 - His time & hassle of travel to get to us?
 - His time of being with us for the week/weekend?
 - His education?
 - His experience?
 - His level of giftedness?
 - The value I place on God’s Word?
 - A material blessing in proportion to the spiritual seed he planted (I Corinthians 9:11)
 - My commitment to help him continue in this ministry (I Corinthians 9:14)
 - His expenses – to and from my event?
- A generous “Thank you” to his wife and children who gave him up?
- Express my gratitude to him for investing in the ministry the Lord has entrusted to me?