

Growing generosity: stewardship best practices

Session and Stewardship  
Session Starter #21

Why do congregations have trustees?

August 2010 (Updated Nov. 2021)

## Growing generosity: stewardship best practices

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Many studies suggest that there has been a generational shift in the way people give. One of the current challenges for congregations is to talk about giving in a culture that doesn't like to talk about money. Barbara Fullerton identified six best practices in year-round congregational stewardship in her doctoral thesis *Growing Generosity: Identity as Stewards in The United Church of Canada* (Washington, D.C.: Wesley Theological Seminary, 2009). The practices go beyond what many think of as typical stewardship activities, including opportunities for spiritual growth and involvement in social justice outreach. UCC congregations that engaged in these practices had higher per capita giving than congregations that didn't.

### Best Practice One:

*Provide excellent operational management*

People are more likely to give when they can see where their gifts are going and what they are accomplishing. Fullerton found that sound operational management increases people's confidence that their gifts are being well managed. Congregations with good operational management

- were confident and clear about their mission;
- used a narrative budget to tell their story;
- connected dollar amounts with the ministries;
- held an annual stewardship program that asked members and adherents to commit to what they will try to give in the coming year;
- ensured people can give in many ways (regular offering, pre-authorized remittance/automatic debit, special offerings, fundraising events, planned giving);
- thanked and updated givers regularly.

*Note:* Excellent operational management was *only* effective when done in conjunction with best practices two and three. Fullerton found that congregations who neglected to incorporate stewardship into worship or do stewardship education actually experienced decreased giving even though they had sound operational management.



# Growing generosity: stewardship best practices *(cont.)*

## **Best Practice Two:**

*Integrate stewardship into worship year round*

People give when their hearts are touched by the overwhelming gift of God's love and grace, and when they appreciate how they can participate in God's mission. Talk about stewardship throughout the year through preaching, bulletins and children's messages. Use offering invitations that invite people to give as one way to connect their lives with God's work in the world.

## **Best Practice Three:**

*Teach about stewardship*

Create a culture of gratitude and generosity by teaching about generosity and stewardship through Bible studies, Sunday school lessons, personal-finance training and budget counselling. Also teach how to arrange major gifts and end-of-life gifts through planned giving.

### **Most long-term potential:**

- Preaching stewardship
- Conducting personal-finance training
- Nurturing new stewards (young people and new members)
- Offering multiple ways to give
- Saying "thank you"

## **Best Practice Four:**

*Get involved in leadership*

Interestingly, churches with clergy and lay members involved in wider church roles (presbytery, synod, General Assembly, etc.) experienced per capita giving around 50% higher than most other churches!

## **Best Practice Five:**

*Provide opportunities for spiritual growth*

People growing spiritually, and seeing themselves as stewards and disciples, tend to be generous with their lives and their money. Encourage spiritual growth by providing opportunities such as Bible studies and small group ministries.

## **Best Practice Six:**

*Engage in social justice*

People who care and speak out for the most vulnerable and show a concern for the environment also often give more financially. Fullerton found per capita giving was 18% higher in churches with five or more active involvements (beyond financial involvement) in social justice issues.

**Almost any biblical text has stewardship implications. The subject of money and possessions was Jesus' second most frequent topic for preaching and teaching.**

## **Check out PCC resources:**

- *Mission Moments* – short highlights about mission and ministry to include in your bulletin or to project on your screen every week:  
[www.presbyterian.ca/resources/mission-moments](http://www.presbyterian.ca/resources/mission-moments)

## **Contact**

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For more resources and information visit  
[www.presbyterian.ca/stewardship](http://www.presbyterian.ca/stewardship)

**Greatest impact:  
Operational management practices when done  
with worship and formation components.**