



Encouraging generosity is ministry ... Inspire, Ask, Thank **By Janice Meighan**

Has your congregation been wondering how to encourage giving? Has “our offering this month is behind budget” become a common refrain?

If so, you are not alone. I want to share some practical tips for how your communications with members, adherents and friends can help build a culture of generosity and increase support for your church.

Inspire

Before your congregation makes any kind of “ask” for donations, you need to first consider how you are inspiring people to give.

1. Does your church have an inspiring mission, vision or specific project? It is very challenging to raise funds when donors are not inspired. Ask yourselves why you exist? What is God’s mission for you? How are you fulfilling that mission and ministry in your church and community?
2. Draft some statements. Test out your vision, mission or project idea on an intergenerational (if possible) group. Amend what doesn’t work. Celebrate what does.
3. If you don’t have a stated vision or mission but your congregation has a compelling project, clearly articulate the reasons why someone would want to give. State the purpose of the project; why it is needed; what you hope it will accomplish; how much it costs and how long it will take; what the benefit / impact of the project will be; and how many updates on the funding of the project you will provide.

Ask

Once you have a clear understanding of how your church is answering God’s mission for you and you have an impactful story, you can think about how you want to ask or invite people to give. The way we ask or invite people to give is very important.

I’ve always loved the movie *Babette’s Feast*, for the same reason that I love the parable of The Wedding at Cana in the Gospel of John 2: 1-12. These two stories are about the theology of abundance. As eminent scholar Walter Brueggemann notes, the greatest contradiction in the West is that we are accumulating more and more wealth and becoming less and less generous.¹

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. "The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity." www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=533. Accessed 22 November 2016.

In *Babette's Feast*, Babette is a French refugee who ends up on the door step of two sisters in a small town in rural Denmark. Babette becomes their housekeeper/cook. While she is a trained chef, she doesn't let them know, because the sisters want Babette to make their meals the way they've always had them in order to honour their deceased father, a harsh cleric. After many years, Babette wins a lottery. She longs to return to France, but decides to use all her wealth to cook a real French dinner for the sisters and the village elders. Babette's extravagant generosity changes both her and the lives of everyone in the village.

Similarly, The Wedding at Cana gives us a glimpse not only of the first *sign* of Jesus' power and God's presence in him, but of God's extravagant generosity with us. The wine had become scarce, in fact, it has run out. Can you feel the panic not only in Mary but in the guests and the hosts? When we feel that there is not enough to go around we tend to panic and lose sight of the abundance that surrounds us. Instead, Jesus turns the water into wine, and there is not only enough to go around, but it is the best wine of the evening.

So, when you are encouraging people to give to your ministry are you speaking in the language of abundance or scarcity?

4. Use different ways to ask people to give. Invitations from members of the congregation during worship, letters to members, adherents, friends, posts on social media, personal meetings with people.
5. Examine the language in your communications. Are you extending an invitation to participate in generously supporting the mission and vision of your congregation? Or is your language more of a plea? Instead of saying, "we've only raised \$80,000 of our \$100,000 budget," consider saying, "Hurray! We've raised \$80,000 (or 80%) of our budget so far – thank-you! We look forward to meeting our budget in the coming months." Instead of saying, "we are behind budget and need to keep the X program going," consider saying, "God has called us into a ministry / mission of X. We invite you to come on the journey with us. Will you financially support us and share in this exciting mission?" Can you feel the difference?
6. If you have a compelling story or testimonial, share it in your communications. Pictures of projects and people impacted by your mission and ministry are extremely helpful.

Thank

Always say thank-you! The traditionalist generation (born 1920-1946) tends not to want to be thanked for their donations. However, everyone should be thanked. Research

shows that 91% of donors would appreciate a simple phone call thanking them for the donation.² Consider:

7. Does your session call everyone in January thanking them for their time, talents and treasures from the past year? Session members should not know the amounts given by members, only be provided with the names and phone numbers. This is a simple and cost effective way to say thank-you and enjoy a conversation with people in your church. You may also ask members what they like best about the church. When donors are respectfully and honestly thanked they are likely to contribute more when asked again.
8. Personal, hand written notes can be sent out with annual tax receipts.
9. Letters thanking the congregation can include photos or stories of the impact the donation is having.
10. And remember - never combine a thank-you with an additional "ask." Never! You want your thank-you to be sincere and genuine, and not seen as a way to ask for more money.

Just as God has been abundant and generous with each one of us – we, in our fundraising ministry, empower the generosity that already exists in every human heart.

Note: Previously published in the PCC's Equipping Newsletter, January 2017

² Burk, Penelope. "Saying Thank You the Donor Centred Way." Thanks!: A Guide to Donor-Centred Fundraising. Burlington: ON, 2000. 46.