



EQUIPPING FOR... **ELDERSHIP**

Encouraging Generosity in Ministry

Janice Meighan, Development Manager, Stewardship and Planned Giving

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 congregation.

Form a theology of abundance

Begin by examining your theology of money. 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 Too often, in our culture and churches, we convince ourselves that resources are too scarce for people to be generous.

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.

In *Babette’s Feast*, Babette, a French refugee, becomes a housekeeper for two sisters in rural Denmark. While she is a trained chef, she doesn’t let them know, because the sisters want their meals prepared the way they’ve always had them to honour their deceased father. After many years, Babette wins a lottery. She decides to use all her wealth to cook a wonderful French dinner for the sisters and the village elders. Babette’s extravagant generosity



Babette’s Feast is a metaphor of generosity.
(©1987 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc.)

changes her life 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 has run out. Can you feel the panic not only in Mary but in the guests and the hosts? When we feel 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.

A theology of abundance – not our abundance, but God’s abundance – leads to acts of generosity. With this in mind, here are some practical tips for ways to inspire, ask, and thank your congregation.

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

Inspire

Before there is an invitation for donations, consider how you are inspiring people to contribute. It is challenging to raise funds when donors are not inspired.

- 1.** Does your congregation have an inspiring mission, vision or specific project? Ask why your congregation exists? What is God's mission for you? How are you fulfilling that mission and ministry in your congregation 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 will cost and how long it will take; what the 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 congregation is answering God's mission and you have an impactful story, think about how you want to ask or invite people to give. Are you speaking 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, face-to-face meetings.
- 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 youth program going," consider saying, "God has called us into a ministry with youth. 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! 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 for the past year? Session members should not know the amounts given by members, only their names and phone numbers. This is a simple and cost-effective way to say thank you and enjoy a conversation with people in your congregation. You may also ask members if they have any questions about the church or what they are enjoying about the congregation. When donors are 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 can empower the generosity that already exists in every human heart.

¹ Burk, Penelope. "Saying Thank You the Donor Centred Way." Thanks!: A Guide to Donor-Centred Fundraising. Burlington: ON, 2000. 46.

The Stewardship of Finances

Session Starter

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Prayer:

We gather today with the power of God to guide us, the might of God to uphold us, the wisdom of God to teach us, the eye of God to watch over us, the ear of God to hear us, the word of God to give us speech, the hand of God to protect us, the way of God to direct us, the shield of God to shelter us, and the host of God to defend us. Bless us, O God, as we offer to you our service. Amen.

(Based on a prayer by Frederick MacNutt)

Introduction: Book of Forms 113

The session is responsible for all aspects of stewardship and mission, both spiritual and material, within the congregation.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:9 (*The Message*)

Honour God with everything you own;
give God the first and the best.

A Brief Commentary:

Proverbs 3 encourages the listener to trust God completely and to devote one's life to wisdom and integrity. Part of that wisdom and integrity acknowledges everything in our hands belongs to God. We honour God when we generously offer our very best in all of life.

Reflection:

M.T. Banks looks around the table at the other elders. "Well, there's a deficit. Offerings aren't keeping up with expenses."

"I can't believe it", says Shirley Knott. "What should we do?"

"Get the Board of Managers in gear. It's their job to balance the books", says Banks.

It is true that, in general, the board devotes significant time and expertise to keeping an eye on bricks n' mortar as well as the dollars n' cents while



the session focuses on pastoral care and discerning God's mission for the congregation. Sometimes, in the midst of the ebb and flow of congregational life, sessions forget they are ultimately responsible for stewardship within the life of the congregation.

For example, the session is to encourage the congregation to participate in the global life and work of the church through prayer, service and gifts. (113.1) The session is to ensure the congregation contributes to ministry according to its ability. (113.5) The session is to decide when and how financial needs are presented to the congregation. (113.6)

While the session is ultimately responsible for these important aspects of stewardship, it is expected the session and the board will work closely together to encourage the generosity of the congregation in support of the church's whole ministry. (113.6.4 and 162)

Stewardship involves deep faith, a clear vision for worship and ministry that is faithful to our calling. It should excite the congregation to reach out to one another, and the world, with deeds and words of faith, hope and love.

Follow up:

1. How might we take a greater responsibility for the financial stewardship of this congregation?
2. How could we work more closely with the board (finance committee)?
3. How can we better describe our mission to each other and the world as a way of sparking interest and encouraging further support of time, talent and treasure?

What's on your mind?

What should be considered when establishing a new fund?

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Congregations establish funds as a way of accumulating financial support for a specific project. Here are a few ideas to keep in mind before donations are received.

The terms of reference for any fund should include a description of why the fund has been created and how the money will be received, invested and spent.

A fund may be established so that the capital remains invested and only the interest is used. For example, with the permission of the presbytery, a congregation might sell its manse and start a fund with the proceeds. Decisions might be made to use the interest generated to support the housing allowance for the minister or an ongoing mission project. The terms of such a fund should make it clear how the capital is to be invested, how additional donations to the capital can be made and how the interest may be spent.

In this example, it is also important for the terms of reference to explain how the purpose of the fund can be changed to allow the interest to be used for another project or to permit capital to be accessed so that it is not locked in forever. (Note: Any change to the use of proceeds from the sale of a manse would normally require presbytery approval.)

A fund might also be established for a specific purpose and then closed. For example, a fund could be created to buy instruments for a congregation's praise band or for a Presbyterian World Service & Development project such as supplying a rainwater tank for a certain village. Once the instruments are purchased or the tank is installed, the fund would be closed.

In this example, the terms of the fund should spell out what to do if there are leftover designated donations. Perhaps the praise band folds before it gets started. How can the \$10,000 already donated for musical instruments be spent on something else?



Or maybe \$50,000 is raised for the rainwater tank and only \$5,000 is needed. How can the extra \$45,000 be spent on another project? Well, the terms of the fund could state that surplus money will be used “wherever it is most needed” or “for a similar project”. The terms should also name who has the authority to decide when an alternative use is needed. This would provide the fund with helpful flexibility. Donors should be told about the potential alternative uses for their gifts before contributions are received.

These ideas are important for at least two reasons.

1. When money has been designated for a specific project, it is not used for any other project.
2. Once a person has been issued an income tax receipt for a donation, the person no longer “owns” the gift and cannot redirect it. The church has an obligation to honour the intention of the donor. (If the session disagrees with the intent of the donation, the gift may be refused.)

New funds should only be established after receiving the approval of the session. This is because the session is responsible for all aspects of stewardship in a congregation. The session may choose to consult with the board of managers and congregation before approving a fund or stating alternative uses for surplus funds.