



## Doing Together What We Cannot Do Alone

July 2009

### Stewardship in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

*If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself.*

*But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me.*

--Matthew 10:39

*Hi Pastor Sellers!*

*There was a joint meeting of the stewardship and finance committees at our congregation last night and they asked me to ask you if you knew of anything that would help us raise money to cover a shortfall in our operating budget. Back in January we passed a deficit budget and now, after reviewing expenditures, the treasurer and finance committee have discovered that if the congregation doesn't find a way to raise money/donations, we'll be about \$30,000 in the red. There was a suggestion to stop giving benevolence (which would give us approximately \$15,000) but that was quickly overruled. It was felt that cutting our commitment to the Synod was only passing along our problem.*

*The consensus of the group was to have a congregational meeting, explain the problem and reason for the shortfall and ask the congregation to either make a one-time gift or increase their weekly commitment by say 2%. The one-time gift would be best because we can see results right away but even if someone adds \$2 to their weekly contribution, it would help. I think what they're asking for are ideas for making this appeal that would be the most successful or the best way to go about it.*

*Any suggestions would be most appreciated.*

*Thanks!*

*Ms. Penny Parishioner*

Hi Penny,

Your congregation is certainly not alone! Many congregations are facing the same challenges this year. Here are some thoughts about how you might approach your appeal.

***People give because they have two things:***

- 1) A desire to give; and***
- 2) The means to give.***

One of the things to pay attention to is the anxiety level in your appeal. Many people are already anxious about finances, and anxiety tends to make people focus on their own insecurity and hold onto their funds even tighter. In other words, ***high anxiety reduces people's desire to give.***

***Anxiety is contagious.*** It is common for congregations to "raise the alarm" about the budget in ways that trigger the "fear center" in the brain. This is a VERY counter productive approach. It is important to consider what will ***increase the desire*** that people have to give rather than decrease it.

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Why do people give? There isn't one single answer, but many. Here is a list of reasons that is far from comprehensive:

1. They recognize that God has given enough for everybody, but not to everybody. They see that God has been especially generous to them so they are to be generous too as part of God's plan to care for the world.
2. They want to show Gratitude to God!
3. They want to help other people, and see the church as an effective way to do that.
4. Expectation and duty—They recognize giving is part of being a church member, and they have been taught that giving an offering is what they are supposed to do.
5. They are inspired by the generosity of others and want to think of themselves as a generous person, rather than a stingy person.
6. The Bible says they are supposed to give tithes and offerings.
7. They want to support the organization to which they belong by doing their part.
8. They appreciate the services that the congregation provides to them and feel like their offerings pay for those services. They see offerings as a fee for service arrangement.
9. They believe that giving will help them alleviate their guilt or earn them favor with God. (Not all reasons that people give are theologically sound!)

People do not always give for the same reason every time. More than one kind of appeal can motivate us, and our primary reason for giving often changes as our faith life and understanding of stewardship deepens.

Some motivations result in feeling good when we give. Others just result in feeling less bad when we give. Creating good feeling when people behave a certain way encourages people to want to repeat the behavior. We need to be asking ourselves whether our communications are going to make people feel guilty and afraid or will it make them feel good about giving.

While it is true that one of the reasons that people give is because they are aware that there is a need, anything that as an aroma of panic or desperation will have people reaching for their wallet, not to give, but to grasp it tighter.

In this current economic situation people are being bombarded with information that is raising their financial insecurity and anxiety. The church is one of the few places that people hear that they are blessed, that the love they get is not based on their earning potential, and that their life is built on a rock that will not move. This is good news. Good news is our gift!

Another mistake we sometimes make is ***acting as if the congregation will respond to an appeal as a unit***. For example, we communicate things like “if every member raised their giving by \$5 per week”, or “We can solve this problem if we each increase our giving by 3% ...”

In reality, those statements are being read by three different categories of people:

- 1) People who do not have the desire or means to increase their giving as requested. They are going to either feel guilty or ignore the appeal completely. In either case, the effect of the request will be to create emotional distance from the church.
- 2) People who have the desire and the means to increase their giving by the requested amount. They are likely to respond to the request and may reinforce their feeling of belonging to the congregation.
- 3) People who have the desire, and have the means to increase their giving by a much greater amount. They are likely to respond to the request, but will probably not give a greater amount because the request is being presented as “their fair share” of the need.

Ignoring the means of different individuals is likely to result in the congregation coming up short financially. More importantly the church will come up short by failing many of the members. Members who are already in financial distress will see their membership as a problem rather than a help. Members who could and should grow in their understanding of stewardship as an aspect of discipleship won't be given the challenge, education and encouragement to grow.

***How can you make an effective appeal?***

**First**, recognize that *people have to want to give before they will give*. Do an “appeal before the appeal” with people who are likely to respond. This may include the church leadership (council, stewardship and finance leaders, and leaders of other committees and ministries) and some individuals who either have a track record of generosity in the church or community or who clearly have the means to make a gift. This appeal can be made individually, or by bringing these people together, but it needs to be made before the announcement of the general appeal so that you can learn what motivates your members to give.

When these first responders agree to make a financial gift or commitment ask them, “Why do you give generously to our church?” When you hear answers that are inspiring, or reinforce “joyful” giving, ask if you can share their responses with others, or even better, if they would be willing to share their reason with the congregation when you have the general meeting.

When you make your general appeal, indicate that some have already stepped forward with gifts. If all of your council members agreed to make some kind of gift or increase, say so, and let their leadership show. If you have members ready to share their reasons for giving, give them the floor. If they are uncomfortable speaking publicly, have members of the leadership give reports about the inspiring responses they heard from the lead givers while letting the givers themselves remain anonymous.

**Second**, don't try to shame or scare people into giving. Remind members about the great things your congregation is doing with the resources you have. Remind members about how God is making a difference in the world through their previous generosity. Remind members about how generous and faithful God has been, and still is! Tell the truth about the financial situation, but in the context of confidence that God has not abandoned us and the church has overcome many challenges in the past.

**Finally**, recognize that this is an opportunity for teaching the congregation about two very important things:

- 1. God's faithfulness, and**
- 2. the joy of being part of God's plan, our stewardship.**

Blessings on your ministry and leadership.

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### ***Resources:***

**sepasteward.ning.com** - Join the network so that you can discover the blessings, and be a blessing to others!

**Teaching Stewardship** (<http://archive.elca.org/stewardship/teaching.html>):

“**Ask, Thank, Tell**” is an easy to read book recently published by Augsburg Fortress which may be used as a book study by your church council, stewardship team, or adult forum. Use the above web address for more information on the book and to take you to a study guide for use with this book.

**Awakening to God’s Call to Earthkeeping** is a fully downloadable resource from the ELCA for teaching about stewardship of the earth in your congregation.

**Step by Step** is a downloadable booklet from the ELCA which can assist your congregation in developing an effective stewardship ministry.

### ***Upcoming Events:***

#### **Consecration Sunday Training**

In these uncertain economic times, congregations are asking for leaders who can help them carry out a Consecration Sunday effectively. To meet the increasing need, a training for Consecration Sunday Leaders and Speakers has been scheduled for **Thursday, August 13th, from 7-9 p.m., at the synod office.**

Being a Consecration Sunday leader includes: (1) meeting for one hour with the stewardship team about six weeks in advance of Consecration Sunday to help plan the event, (2) speaking briefly at a church leader dinner about the spiritual and biblical dimensions of giving, and (3) preaching at the regular worship for Consecration Sunday. If you’re willing to share your gifts as leader, preacher, speaker and steward, **please RSVP by Friday, July 31 to Ginny Bailey ([gbailey@sepa.org](mailto:gbailey@sepa.org) or 267-323-3749).**

#### **60 Minutes**

The next SEPA Synod "60 Minutes" stewardship workshop is scheduled for **Thursday September 17th** at the Synod Office. This fast paced workshop begins with opening devotions at 7 pm and then, in a single hour, covers stewardship ideas and concepts in a dozen five minute presentations. Questions? Call Ginny Bailey at 267-323-3749.

#### **Money Leadership For Rostered Leaders and their Spouses**

October 13-14, 2009

St. Francis Retreat House

3918 Chipman Road

Easton, PA 18045

This retreat explores our relationship with money, and helps us understand how attitudes about money, fear, hope, and ownership impact leadership in our congregations. Total cost per person is only \$65-couples are encouraged to attend together. Saved the date!