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“Why People Give”

In September 2007 my friend Tom Butts, pastor emeritus at FUMC, Monroeville AL wrote an article that answers the question “why are some people generous?” Our Stewardship Education Series this year is titled “**Celebrate God: Return God’s Gifts!**” Tom Butts offers us some good things to ponder.

This is the time of year when churches plan their projected budget next year. This essential procedure lacks exactitude, but when done correctly and published to the membership everyone gets a birds-eye view of the scope of the mission of the church.

The next step taken by most churches is to conduct a campaign for pledges to that budget. Many ministers and church leaders do not look forward to this annual task. We are reluctant to ask people to give, even to so worthy a project as the church. For the most part I have always found this exercise to be potentially spiritually enriching. I believe most people want to give to causes which represent the betterment of society in general and individuals in particular.

There are at least 3 essential ingredients to a stewardship campaign with integrity. The first is a clear understanding of the sacred nature of the cause for which money is being raised. This is God’s money. It is to be used only for promoting the gospel and helping people. These are two things to which Jesus called his followers when he was here in the flesh. “Go ye unto all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). After a laundry list of ways, we are called to minister to the poor and oppressed, Jesus said: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren (and sisters) you did it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). Having established the holy nature of the effort we go to step two.

People tend to give generously when they know their leaders are giving generously. I recall a phrase from a stewardship campaign many years ago which I find to be true: “Financial influence runs downhill.” No minister or church leader should ask others to do something they are not doing. One of my friends was asked by a local church to direct the annual stewardship campaign. Early on he was told that the pastor of the church had never pledged, and had no record of giving. He went to the pastor and asked if this was true. After some stuttering and fancy footwork, the pastor admitted this to be true, but said he gave to other undocumented causes. My friend said to him: “You will either make a pledge worthy of your means right now or I will pack my bags and go home. I will not ask people to do something their pastor is not doing.” [As an aside if you want to know what I give to the church, then please ask me and I will be happy to tell you].

The third important element: “Do not be afraid to ask people to give.” When the cause is beyond our own interest—when it is for the highest purpose, be bold.

Robert Macauley, founder of AmeriCares Foundation, a humanitarian group that provides relief efforts at home and around the world, recalled an experience he and Mother Teresa had on an airplane flying to Mexico. As box dinners were being passed out, Mother Teresa asked how much the airline would donate to her charity if she returned her dinner. When she found out, she soon had everyone, including the crew, returning their dinners.

But it didn't stop there. When the plane arrived at its destination, Mother Teresa asked the crew if she could have the dinners to donate to the poor. And, when the airline provided the dinners, she asked to borrow one of their maintenance trucks to deliver them. She was an amazing woman!

These are reasons people give:

1. People realize that everything belongs to God.
2. The people who are our leaders are generous—and we follow their good example.
3. We ask people to give because it is part of our faith and we do good work!

Come, Worship
Stay, Learn
Go, Serve