

Generosity: Pushing The Limits Of Church Funding

I'd like to frame our conversation this morning around the topic "Pushing The Limits Of Church Funding." There is a lot to say and some of it I will not be able to cover in as much detail as you'd like. There is a "Keynote Consult" after this session. It is part of Session D. I will be in S304/305.

A couple of things I want to get out of the way before we get into the meat of my comments.

Some of you came here thinking the economy is your problem. For a few, it might be. For the rest of you, it is not.

- Much fear about the effect of the economy on giving
- Some of it warranted, some of it not
- There is a difference between non profits and churches. Church has a 52x per year opportunity for face-to-face communication
- Economy might affect your giving, might not
- Show of hands at conferences
- Empty Tomb study
- Recent research (generally --- 2 of every 3 churches either flat or up)
- Reality is you are at a much greater risk financially from factors inside your church. A messed up church is not going to be a generous church.

Some of you --- maybe some of the same people --- came here thinking you can't talk about money in your church without causing problems. We have to get past that.

- With all due respect, you have to get over your inhibitions related to money and acknowledge they are YOUR problem.
- Talk about money from the perspective of the person in the PEW, not the person in the PULPIT.
- Forget about what YOU need. It's not about you. It never was. It never will be.
- Will a few people in your church get uptight or upset? Absolutely. But a few people in your church will get uptight or upset no matter what the sermon topic.
- **Start talking. We have to start talking.**

With that behind us, let's move ahead.

The challenge of giving is that you can't just press the generosity button and make it happen.

Generosity is systemic.

Everything matters.

The main challenge of the church in this area is we have gone astray.

- It has become too much about filling the bucket and not enough about what God wants us to do next.
- In the struggling economy, it is more about what do we have to cut to survive not what would we dare attempt in God's name.
- It has become what the church wants from you not what the church wants for you.
- We have accepted "just enough" as good enough. We will never be able to push the limits of church funding as long as that is okay.
- **We have to change that.**

The Bible describes generosity as a spiritual matter. Nothing more. Nothing less.

- Acts of charity and compassion mark the life of the mature disciple.
- Our giving reflects our faith
- We are invited to become God's partner in the grace of giving. Not that He needs our money, but we need to give it.
- It is not about what the church needs, it is about the giver's needs.
- When we treat the spiritual discipline of generosity as an exercise in raising a budget or funding capital needs, **we nominalize what God intended as a means to grow us.**

Our focus must be on growing givers' hearts. What does that look like?

- Preach – regular teaching from the pulpit
- Teach – in Sunday School, small groups and other formats where your people grow. Worship in rows and grow in circles.
- Celebrate – encourage your congregation by celebrating victories.
- Model – I have never seen a generous church led by a pastor who is not generous.

In addition to growing givers' hearts, we have to take a long look at our church. Reality is people do not have a giving problem, they have a giving to your church problem.

Givers in your church are asking themselves, "Why should I give to my church?" In our day and age, the church has to put itself in a position to be deserving of the gifts of its people. It is not enough to just say, "We're the church."

Several things are key for the church. I was asked recently, if you had to boil it down to three, what would they be? Here they are.

1. Vision

The reality is that givers have many choices for their funding. It is not unusual for me to hear a church leader lament that a certain person in their church gave a large sum to a charity, often an alma mater. When gifts like this occur, it is now clear that the person has the ability and willingness to make a gift like that. Gifts to one's alma mater are noble, but why did the person not think of the church?

When faced with choices to allocate their resources, givers will almost always choose the

place where they can see the highest impact. The fact is that the college or university took seriously the relationship with the alumnus and helped them understand the impact their giving could have. In other words, they found the place I call “**the intersection.**”

What is this place? Simply put, it is the place where the vision and mission of a church intersects the passion of a giver’s heart. Find this place and the result is always generosity. It is the place where givers will release resources again and again as long as the church remains faithful in stewarding the gifts. This intersection is the place where generosity flows! Said another way, if you cannot find this intersection, it is generally fruitless to think the giver will participate significantly. It’s just not a fit.

Givers want impact. It is the responsibility of the church to do that. You cannot just expect givers to keep filling the annual budget bucket. You have to make the case that a gift here is a worthy investment. If you can’t show it, I promise you another charitable cause can! Impact = “ROI” and givers pay attention to that.

Can you show how a gift to your church will impact the life of a hurting, hopeless, helpless person? If you cannot, it might be worth taking a hard look at what you’re doing.

2. Strategy

Church Centric vs. Giver Centric

- Church Centric = all about the budget
- Giver Centric = all about the giver
- Need some of both

Cover all the bases -- three on ramps to giving

- Everyday
- Opportunity
- Legacy (big jar/little jar)

Good metrics

- Measure and track the right things so you know whether you are making progress or not.
- Opportunity
- Legacy (big jar/little jar)

Information (head)

There is no question that for a lot of people the issue is a lack of information. What do I need to do to be seen as a faithful steward?

- Financial Peace University
- Crown
- Good Sen\$e
- Managing Our Finances God’s Way (Sadeleback)

Transformation (heart)

Have no idea of the spiritual implication of managing (or not managing) well

- Discipleship
- Small groups/Bible study
- Teaching curriculum
- Preaching

3. Culture

The third thing is this --- culture. As important as vision is, culture is even more important. Culture, according to dictionary.com is defined as “the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular group.”

Culture is either a headwind or a tailwind to everything you are trying to do.

Why do I say this? You can have the greatest vision on earth, but, quoting Dr. Sam Chand, “it will die in a toxic culture.” Bad culture trumps good vision every time.

The culture in a church does not happen overnight. It is an accumulation over the years. Some pastors inherit it when they go to a new pastorate. Other pastors see it get shaped around them. Others, like new church planters, get to create it from day one. No matter which category you fall into, culture will play a significant role in what you can accomplish.

If vision is the Ace, culture is the Trump Card that beats it! You will never advance your vision beyond what the culture will permit and the result will be that the potential for generosity will be restricted.

In closing, let me offer these summary thoughts.

If we are to push the limits of church funding:

- Get beyond small thinking. The God we serve is too big for us to be limited by small thinking and minimal vision.
- Get out of survival mode. That place when churches STOP innovating, being creative, looking for new opportunities, new ventures. And they simply exist.
- Break the silence. We have to talk about it. Pastor, that starts with you.
- Check your numbers. Have short list of key numbers that you are always tracking to measure progress. Tom Peters, the management guru, says “What gets measured gets done.”
- Build investors, not just donors. Investors expect returns. Make sure you can demonstrate the full impact of a gift to your church.
- Change the conversation. STOP ASKING “What do we have to cut to survive?” START ASKING “What does God want us to do next?”

But above all else, grow your givers' hearts. Cultivate in them the spirit of the Macedonian people as described in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

¹And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

No budget. No campaign. No ask. Just a bunch of believers with hearts on fire who begged to be a part of what Paul was organizing. Wow!

That would blow away the limits of church funding.

God bless you.

Jim Sheppard, CEO & Principal
GENERIS | generis.com
P: 800-233-0561, x227
E: jim@generis.com
Twitter: Jim_Sheppard
Blog: jimsheppard.net