

One Change in Your Financial Approach that Changes Everything

Many pastors tell me they hate fundraising. I think there's a legitimate reason for that. You see, the call of the pastor is to cast, carry, and shepherd the vision of the church. Meanwhile, it seems that the call of the fundraiser is to merely collect funds when resources are low. It can then be difficult for the call of pastor to be transformed into that of fundraiser.

I know the topic of money has a challenging history in the church, which is another reason pastors may be averse to the idea of fundraising. While we can't change our history, understanding it can help a pastor transform his approach from fundraising to one of surplus and generosity. We can build a generous culture more closely tied to the call of the pastor and avoid establishing a culture of fundraising — which neither the pastor nor the church enjoys.

The History of the Church Fundraising Model

Here's a brief overview of the traditional fundraising model in the church.

The first professional capital fundraising firms specifically focusing on the church can trace their roots to the 1960's. Drawing on secular marketing influences, these firms helped churches create highly marketed, highly emotional, short-run appeals for large amounts of money (i.e. [the campaign Charles Sumner created for the YMCA](#)). These efforts for the church were very successful, and the church campaign industry began in earnest.

Fast forward to the 1980's when church scandals involving money and impropriety took center stage. Oral Roberts told his church he would die if he didn't raise \$8 Million. Jim Bakker was accused of adultery, and conning people out of millions through his televangelist ministry. Jimmy Swaggart was accused of misappropriating funds, having affairs, and blackmail. These very public falls from grace led to church silence on money. We stopped talking about money or asking for money. We went from campaigns to scandals to silence.

By the late 1980's and into the 1990's, pastors like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels ushered in a new way of talking about money. They encouraged first-time visitors, or nonmembers, to let the offering plate pass them by. Even though Hybels is known for being a frugal money manager and Warren is known for his generous lifestyle, their passions for stewardship and generosity did not translate to the church. Most pastors adopted the "let offering pass" statements for newcomers, but never embraced the financial generosity plans behind the scenes of these two great churches. As a matter of fact, in many churches passing the plate is a thing of the past and the offering is now collected in a box hanging on a wall. Thus, the silence on money, in many congregations, persisted.

Meanwhile, church capital campaigns were still status quo. A positive culture around money no longer existed, yet churches produced marketed, emotional appeals for funds every three years or so.

The first 10 years of the 2000's brought money back into the social conversation, perhaps more than it had been for quite some time. 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the 2008 market crash, the Iraq War, and other national catastrophes meant everyone was talking about the need for resources. Celebrities began stepping into the conversation with philanthropy and acts of service. Shows focusing on resources started to hit the airwaves: Oprah's Big Give, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, American Idol Gives Back, etc. Generosity had become a national conversation, yet the church was still silent. We had simply never recovered from the scandalized 80's. We had not redeveloped a positive culture around generosity. If we aren't talking about money, it is difficult to talk about generosity.

Generosity in the Church Today

Today, several influential pastors have helped spur on a new conversation about generosity for the church. Rick Warren's Peace Plan and Andy Stanley's book Be Rich are two examples of that. Pastors like Robert Morris of Gateway Church in Dallas, Texas and Craig Groeschel of Life Church in Oklahoma City, OK have continued to highlight the model of generosity through their churches. Quite possibly the church with the strongest financial policies, principles, and practices is Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, AL where Chris Hodges serves as the pastor. Yet even with these strong generosity leaders in the church, we are still very far behind the national conversation and cultural expectations of generosity. Many churches are still, by and large, running emotional, short-term capital campaigns in three year cycles while otherwise remaining silent.

The Generosity Tides are Changing

What if I told you we didn't have to fundraise this way? What if I told you there was another path to resource vision? It can be tempting to recreate your previous year's budget with an increase of 5-10% each year, it can be tempting to rely on capital campaigns to create margin and drive funding, but relying on capital campaigns often stands in the way of leading with vision and cultivating generous disciples.

A recent survey done by LifeWay Research of 500 large churches (over 1,000 in weekend worship attendance) noted several trends. 100% of these churches had conducted a 3 year capital campaign in their past. Still, they had major financial concerns of debt load, aging donor base, and lack of a generosity strategy. The commitment to capital campaigns was not solving their long-term challenges. It was only meeting their short-term needs.

Here's are my suggestions:

1. **Begin with a year-long generosity strategy.** At LifeWay Generosity we have created a year-long Generosity Cycle consisting of six modules: Believe, Lead, Teach, Practice, Celebrate, and Thank.
2. **Engage in a comprehensive digital giving tool.** Your digital giving platform should enable your people to give anytime, anywhere, and almost anything. Generosity by LifeWay's digital giving platform allows you to do just that.

3. **Train your people to live ready and to respond generously to God's leadings.** We call this the Generosity Pathway. All the resources you need to grow a thriving generous culture where you are experiencing freedom and surplus can be found at LifeWay.com/Generosity. Check it out.

I would love to hear your thoughts and know what you are learning about generosity and how it is applied in your church. You can connect with me on [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).

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