

GENEROSITY BEYOND THE STATUS QUO

13 TIPS

To Help Church Members
Increase Their

GENEROSITY



by Barbara Dunlap-Berg

INTRODUCTION

During the Sunday offering, are you asking your congregation to “give money” or are you inviting them to participate in what God is doing in the world?

Consider the typical stewardship strategy that exists in most congregations today:

1. Take a weekly offering.
2. Ask for additional money periodically for missions or youth projects.
3. Launch an emergency appeal when confronted with a significant budget shortfall.
4. Preach on giving and tithing when preparing the budget.
5. Send a letter reminding people how much they gave last year.

If this approach to giving is continued, year after year, the results are very predictable. People want to make a difference. So, when we share about the vibrant ways that The United Methodist Church is serving Christ locally and around the globe, we allow our members to join God’s ministry in a tangible way.

Here are some simple proactive solutions that will help you share generosity principles with your church members.

1

Have a bold vision with meaningful results.



Now is not the time to shrink from pursuing neighbors in need. The church that vividly tells its story and challenges Christ-followers to live beyond themselves attracts financial resources. Evidence shows that in down economic times, many church members do not treat giving as an expendable luxury. They are inclined, however, to become more selective in their giving outlets. The church that consistently and creatively articulates a compelling vision and celebrates successes will attract giving.

2

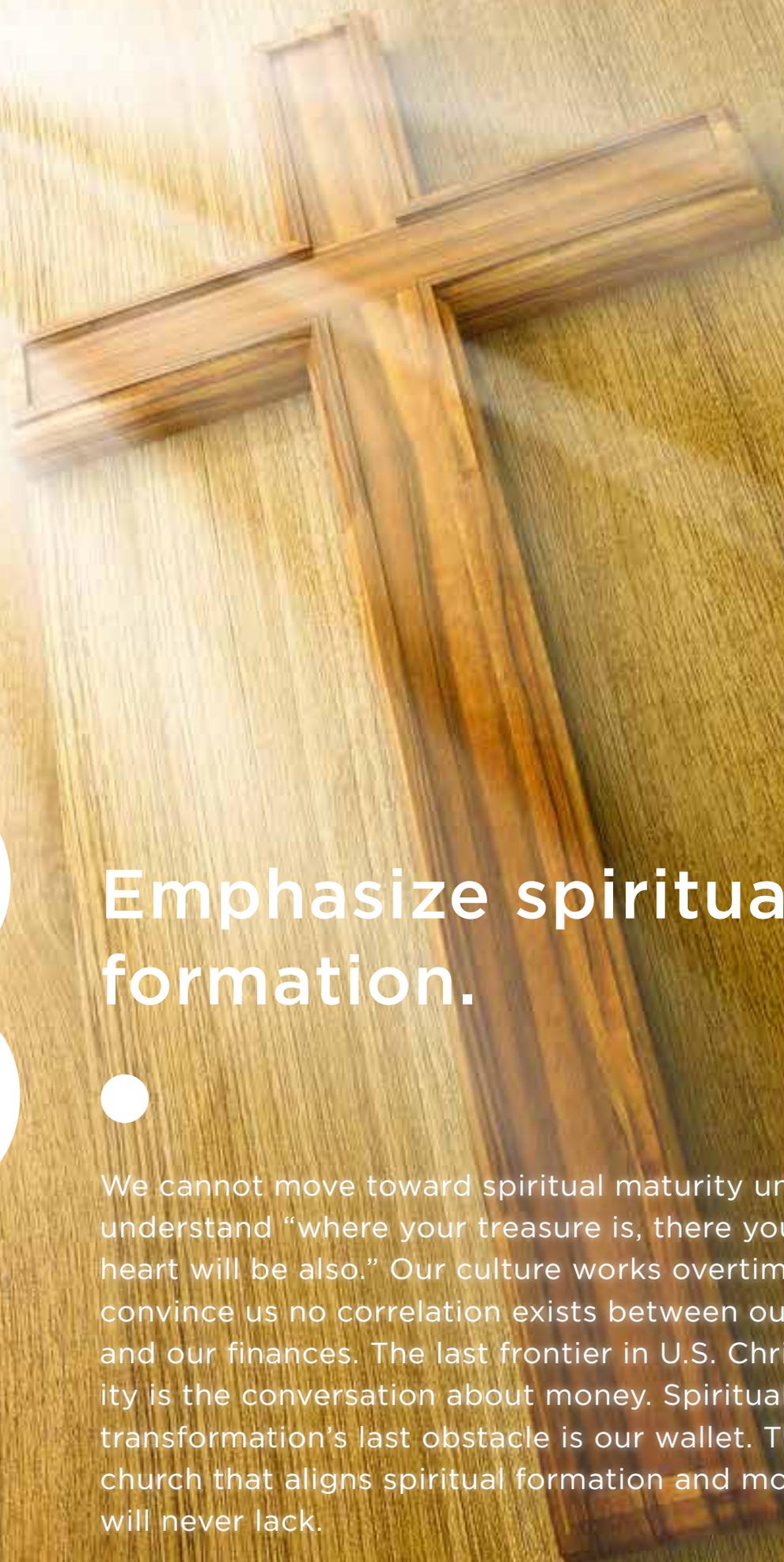
Put your money where your vision is.

Vision — not need — motivates people. However, most vision statements do not connect clearly with the church's daily programs.

Does your spending match your words? If people understand what their church is about, where it is going and how it plans to get there, usually they will choose to be part of the financial engine that makes it happen.

Do you spend more to encourage healthy giving than you do to track spending? You should!



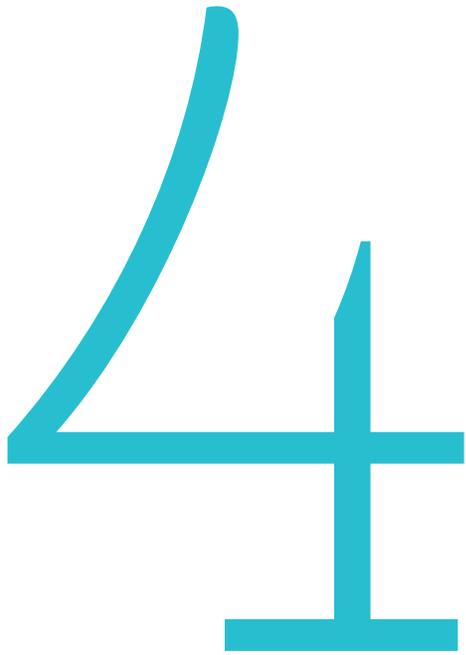


3

Emphasize spiritual formation.



We cannot move toward spiritual maturity until we understand “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Our culture works overtime to convince us no correlation exists between our faith and our finances. The last frontier in U.S. Christianity is the conversation about money. Spiritual transformation’s last obstacle is our wallet. The church that aligns spiritual formation and money will never lack.



Stress generosity, not stewardship.



The term “stewardship” is passive and hard to understand. In their hearts, people want to make a difference and to be generous to the point of giving up something good in exchange for something better. Churches that celebrate generosity become more generous. Try a vocabulary shift. Replace “stewardship” with “generosity” and unpack the stories about how your church’s generosity changes lives. Watch giving flourish.





5

Speak intentionally about finances.

● One source reports Americans save, on average, less than 1 percent of their income. How can we expect people to give generously? Be daring in your coaching.

Teach people how to get out of debt. Teach them how to save. Inspire them to live above the roar of our consumer-driven machine. The church that preaches and teaches about sound, biblical financial practices will create a long-term culture that gives abundantly to match its compelling vision.



Encourage questions.

Your congregation wants to be part of the process. Their giving affects decisions about projects and ministries. Survey a handful of people to get their questions about the church's finances. Provide brief, direct answers in a printed Q-and-A handout, on your website site and in a special email.

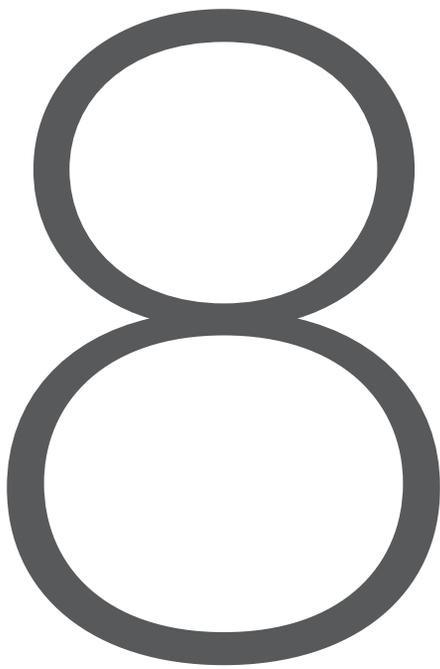




Don't be afraid to tackle major projects.



Eager, generous givers look for certain qualities in a project. They seek specific benchmarks and ask hard questions to validate. Does the project make sense? Is the reason to give sacrificially clear and compelling? Have leaders thoroughly researched this project? Will my investment directly help people? What gives this project meaning? Avoid the words “capital campaign.” Call your effort a “mission-expansion project.” Share gripping stories using videos or in-person testimonials from members and recipients about how generosity is at work in their lives.



Build greater trust.

How often and how creatively can you build the trust connection that gives people instant freedom to say “yes” to a spiritual investment?

Tell people how their financial gifts are used.

Teach how they are building treasure in heaven. Celebrate generosity at each offering.

Help people understand financial accountability is a big deal. Maintain an open atmosphere about finances. Unapologetically spend money on an annual, independent audit and proclaim the results. Say “thank you!”





9

Be transparent.

Is there a sense of openness about the church's needs and opportunities? What communication vehicles do you use to accomplish this? The decision-making process about programs and budgets is a mystery to the average parishioner. Needless confidentiality about "official" matters only clouds the issue. Pulling the veil off such discussions will go a long way to loosen purse strings. Let members know what church leaders are discussing. Ask them to pray about upcoming decisions.



10

Coach potential large-gift donors.

Often when we find someone with financial capacity to give large sums, we go into silent mode. Churches that coach and elevate the gift of giving contribute vast resources for God's work. Potentially large-gift donors often are ill equipped to know how to give wisely and where to give. Appropriate financial guidance can multiply a gift to your church while legally minimizing tax liabilities. Churches that coach high-capacity donors multiply vast resources.



11

Encourage leaders to model sacrificial giving.

We cannot lead people where we ourselves are not going. Our people are hungry to view authentic leaders who live and give in the context of faith. Leading by example inspires. How we model and demonstrate generosity can be tricky. It is done with integrity and humility in generous churches.

12

Include the human element.

Most people are less concerned about facilities and more concerned about human needs. It is the new norm to include the human element in vision-expansion projects. People like major projects that focus on planting churches, offering multiple ministry sites, providing clinics in Africa and working with the homeless in the community. A clear connection on how personal giving reduces human need kindles a fire of generosity.



13.

Embrace change.

Generosity is finding its way into church values.

The paranoia so long associated with money and church is being replaced by healthy attitudes of giving and mission that bless both givers and recipients. Some churches are even creating “generosity” ministries to help their members give in God-honoring ways. This positive approach to stewardship is the key to adapting to giving in the new economic climate.



SUMMARY

We want to equip you to tell people how to move generosity beyond the status quo. So we've provided Mission Moments and More to help you find compelling stories, litanies and prayers to inspire generous giving. These resources connect congregations with people who are making a difference, on their behalf, as they reach out to help communities locally and around the globe. You can download videos and other communication tools as well as request brochures and other printed materials for your church, district or annual conference.

We are here to help you communicate faithfully all that God is doing in the world through The United Methodist Church's generous giving.

Learn more at www.umcgiving.org

Download resources at
<http://www.umcgiving.org/pastors/resources>

Adapted from articles by Brad Leeper (www.nacba.net) and John A. Bash (www.churchsolutionsmag.com).

--Barbara Dunlap-Berg is editor, general church resources for United Methodist Communications.

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