

# **Creative Funding of the Church's Work within Biblical Principles**

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## **Introduction & Encouragement**

Mel Rees tells the story of a church member who considered the support of churches, ministers, and missions a “necessary evil.”

“He wished he could find a church that had inspiring sermons, fervent prayers, and beautiful music, but none of this money business. ‘I have great news for you,’ I told him. ‘Last week I attended just such a service.’ ‘Oh,’ he exclaimed, ‘where was it?’ ‘It was a funeral!’”<sup>1</sup>

That man’s wish probably reflects the attitude of not only some of our lay people but also of a number of our pastors. Wouldn’t it be better if we didn’t have to be concerned about funding the church’s work with gifts made by the members? Isn’t trying to increase the giving level of our members a waste of time? My answer to both of these questions is “no” for reasons I’ll give later.

There aren’t many WELS congregations today, and this is nothing new, that aren’t struggling with money matters. Listen to pastors and members alike talk about their congregation, and almost inevitably they’ll mention the congregation’s struggle to meet the budget for the year. Part of this struggle can be attributed to “good” problems. In a feasibility study conducted this past winter for the WELS Conference of Presidents, respondents, including a few hundred pastors and lay people, listed increased staffing in the congregation and support of other ministries such as area Lutheran high schools as the two main factors that put stress on their congregations’ budgets.

Those aren’t the only problems, however. There are also the realities of a low, albeit increasing, attendance at Bible classes, a seemingly low commitment to Christ on the part of a certain segment of members, and a synod-wide membership that is declining. Perhaps dollar problems are also symptoms of other “bad” problems. Speaking of similar troubles in the 1950’s, two Episcopalian clerics wrote bluntly:

“... it is our contention that where the financial program of a church is weak the chances are that other areas of the church’s life are weak also! ... Church finances are only a symptom. They are a symptom of unsound theology and teaching, of irresponsible and inadequate moral commitment, and of an attitude toward the Church which is peculiarly an attitude of the world and not of the Christian faith. The congregation which is “poor” when it has within itself the resources to be otherwise, is in a real sense failing to measure up to the demands made upon it, by its Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rees, *Ministry*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Byfield & Shaw, *Your Money & Your Church*, pp. 26-27.

Obviously, generalities can be dangerous, but it remains for each of us to examine our synod, our congregations and our ministries carefully when we consider the giving problems that we perceive to be out there. What are the real causes for those problems?

Whatever the situations may be in various congregations, pastors and lay people alike need to discuss matters of giving candidly and evangelically. I hope the day will soon be past when a pastor can successfully dodge the issues of money and giving by saying that he is afraid or uncomfortable talking about these matters. Talk about money and giving is common in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, especially in Jesus' conversations and teachings. It is part of our theology. It is part of our walk as Christians. As leaders, we need to address these matters confidently and with authority.

Whether we like the idea or not, the fact remains that as the spiritual head of the congregation, the pastor is the chief development officer of the congregation. Inasmuch as carrying out the Great Commission requires money, and inasmuch as how we use our money is a reflection of our relationship to God who gave it to us, the giving of our members is a concern for the pastor.

“Unfortunately, many pastors resist taking any role in raising money in the church. They hold to a common assumption among pastors, re-enforced in many seminary settings, that money matters will be handled by lay persons in the parish. However, organizing and training lay persons so they can deal with money matters in the church effectively and making certain they raise the needed money are ultimately the pastor's responsibilities. The pastor is the only full-time person in most parishes who can organize, train, and put to work a successful fund-raising team.”<sup>3</sup>

This writer goes right to the actual raising of funds in discussing the pastor's role. There is another task which is even more important than leading fund raising campaigns. That job is the spiritual training of the members in the matters of giving. Any fund raising done without the involvement of the heart will produce bitter fruit.

Right in this line is the concern of some pastors that they remain ignorant of what their members give for the Lord's work. The claim is made that it might affect their ministry towards them. I once felt that way myself. But since a person's gifts to the Lord are an aspect of their sanctification, then it is the pastor's responsibility to be aware of any problems that might arise.

“If we agree that a Christian's stewardship of this world's goods is an important part of his life in Christ, then who is better equipped to deal with a problem in this area than the minister himself? To allow the knowledge that a man is a poor pledger to affect our ministry to him in an adverse way would seem to be the grossest kind of materialism rather than the spirituality it pretends to be.”<sup>4</sup>

The willingness to speak of these matters must come out of our love for those entrusted to our care. They are the sheep over which the pastor has been given oversight. He is responsible to rescue them from any thicket or attack. The pastor knows that God loves those sheep. He, too, will love the sheep because they belong to God.

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson. *Finance in Your Church*, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> op. cit., Byfield & Shaw, p. 79.

That is not always an easy task. However, we have no right to withhold love from the sheep by avoiding speaking to them about their giving or any other aspect of their life in Christ. Although spoken in reference to another part of the ministry, these words ring true in this matter also:

Pastors ... “should remember that the church belongs to God and that God is coming back for it. Pastors should not assume ownership over God’s prized possession. With this sense of stewardship ... pastors should enjoy ministry, enjoy preaching, and learn to love the people.”<sup>5</sup>

Reminders like this are necessary because the pastor’s own sinful nature will sometimes obscure this relationship. Consider the remark a WELS pastor made some years ago to a new pastor on the scene that the members were “the enemy.” Perhaps he was having a bad day. We all have them. The best we can say about this remark is that it gives a powerful lesson in how not to feel about God’s flock.

I speak all these words with kindness and understanding of the demands placed upon today’s pastors. I am well aware that faith must precede sanctification to say nothing of refinement of sanctification. I say these things as an encouragement not to become misled or discouraged. I will also offer some suggestions that should be helpful. Besides, we have the guidance and empowerment of a loving and holy God. Consider what he says about giving.

### **Scriptural Foundations for Giving**

In order for us to approach the subject of giving for the work of the Kingdom, it would be good if we would consider a few truths of Scripture pertaining to the matter. I don’t intend to run a list of quotations using the words “give,” “tithes,” “steward” and so on. You can find those elsewhere.

Instead, let us consider our giving as a part of our relationship to God. That begins with God’s tools of the Law and the Gospel. In order for me to know that by nature I am hell-bound, that I need God and the help he offers in Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit, that I need to live in and for him, God needs to rattle my bones and shake my life with the power of his Law. Once that has been accomplished, God can then surround me with the beauty and energy of the Gospel. As I soak in the Words of this love, my heart begins to sing God’s song; my feet begin to walk God’s way; my hands begin to do God’s work.

Until God has done his justifying work in my heart, bringing me to faith in Christ as my Savior, I can’t begin to respond to him. But once the Holy Spirit moves my heart, then all kinds of wonderful things begin to happen in my life. This includes the desire to give to God my body, my soul, my life and everything I have.

This desire is not self-generated but generated by the love of God. He has provided for my physical needs; He has resolved all my spiritual needs in Jesus. He is my loving and holy Father. As I contemplate this amazing grace, my heart reaches out in joy to share whatever I can with God. The apostle John says succinctly: “We love because he first loved us” I John 4:19 (NIV).

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<sup>5</sup> Schaller, ed. *Center City Churches*, p. 29.

It is the pastor's job to assure that his members are touched by both the Law and the Gospel. This is a never-ending lesson that picks up each person at whatever level of understanding he or she is and instructs them throughout life. Waldo Werning writes:

“Many Christian lives are weak and purposeless because they have not experienced the exposure of the Law or the healing power of the Gospel, or because there was a failure to use the Law to prepare the way for the blessings of the Gospel. To use the Law only for admonishing someone to do acts of sex-vice is like telling a soldier whose legs have been shot off to get up and march. To use the Gospel only to send a steward on God's Mission when he does not recognize his death-rattle is like trying to communicate with a person in a deep sleep.”<sup>6</sup>

When this process is not followed or is contorted by misuse of the Law or Gospel, deep spiritual problems begin to fester. This is true in an individual's personal life as well as in a congregation's life since it is made up of individuals. When a congregation, for example, gets involved in unscriptural methods of trying to get its members to give, there may be responses, but ultimately the overall stewardship of the congregation is hurt.

The proper use of the Law and the Gospel is not only the way to begin a right relationship with God, it is also the way to correct a relationship that has gone wrong. Werning reflects on this relative to a congregation's stewardship:

“Unfortunately, the failure to understand or to distinguish between Law and Gospel creates spiritual patterns and stewardship programs that are humanistic, fearful, confused or legalistic. Confusion has found churches adopting some activist artificial and fleshly devices by which people are stampeded into stewardship action only because of a superficial loyalty to God and the church. There is nothing so sick about a Christian life or a congregation's stewardship program that it cannot be cured though a proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel or use of both. Through them, the Spirit of Christ witnesses to the power of His death and resurrection in us by wounding and healing, by making poor and by making rich, by defeats and victories, preparing us to have a joyful and fruitful Christian life.”<sup>7</sup>

All of my sanctified life then is my worship of God. The word “worship” comes from the Old English word “weorthscipe.” My life in and for God becomes my way of saying what I think of him, how I feel about him and what He is worth to me. Everything I am, my heart, my body, my life and everything I have is to be offered to God for use in his service. When I make such a gift to God, it is a form of worship. The apostle writes: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” Romans 12:1 (NIV).

First the heart, then the body, and with the body everything else will come as well. Paul says to the Corinthians that “... what I want is not your possessions but you” 2 Corinthians 12:14 (NIV). He understood what Jesus meant when he said: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” Matthew 6:21 (NIV).

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<sup>6</sup> Werning, *Christian Stewards – Confronted and committed*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

My giving, then, is something I give *to* God *from* what he has given me. Good stewardship practices will emphasize giving *from* my resources not *to* a program. Professor John Jeske writes:

“It’s the essayist’s opinion that far too many stewardship appeals have an *institutional* rather than a *personal* flavor. Fund appeals address Joe or Jane Christian as supporters of an organization rather than as God’s sons and daughters, who are in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. Have we trained people to *give to*, instead of training them to *give from*? It seems to me that too often we’ve shown more concern for temporary results (for example, relieving some financial crisis) than we have for the long-term spiritual growth of the congregation’s members. Have we had too much budget promotion and not enough sound (Law and Gospel) education? ... In order to restore the act of giving to the high place it deserves, we’ll need to consider it *apart from economic necessity*.”<sup>8</sup>

Giving is primarily a matter of my relationship to God and not of supporting a budget or a congregation or a synod. “A person lives out his or her values by the way in which money is spent, time used, and resources handled.”<sup>9</sup>

This helps explain what Jesus said as quoted by Paul in Acts 20:35 (NIV), “... ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Receiving is good., but when I, out of faith, make a gift, it is better than receiving because it expresses my relationship to God. That is the added benefit in giving.

No wonder that “... God loves a cheerful giver” 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV). A cheerful giver is one who is giving out of faith ... to God ... from what God has given him or her. His or her gift is an expression of faith, something God always loves.

Granted, there are other reasons that people have for giving. Some might give out of a sense of guilt, others from the impression that they can buy some spiritual favor from God with their gift, others might give from loyalty to a person or institution, still others out of fear, habit, convenience and so on. The church has no doubt accomplished great things using gifts made from such motives. But instead of those gifts we want to encourage “good” gifts. Ashley Hale defines a “good gift” as “... one that has a positive effect on the spiritual development and life of the giver.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Realities in Giving in the Church’s History**

Giving “good” gifts for the Lord has been a struggle for God’s people for centuries. Individual instances of giving sins can be found in both the Old and New Testaments. They stand in contrast to the principles that God has given us for making gifts in the correct way, the main one being that more important than the gifts a person might give is the attitude of the heart. “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings” Hosea 6:6 (NIV). The fact that Jesus on two occasions quoted the passage from Hosea emphasizes this point (Matthew 9:13 and 12:7).

While God spoke of the love that was to motivate gifts and sacrifices, he also dictated precisely how the gifts were to be made and the quantities of those gifts. With the coming of

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<sup>8</sup> Jeske, Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Biennial Convention of the Nebraska District, p. 125.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, p. 128.

<sup>10</sup> Hale, *Church Management – The Clergy Journal*, p.14.

Jesus, those laws were fulfilled. The fresh freedom of the Gospel did not prescribe methods or amounts. While both Jesus and the apostles talk about giving, their speech is filled with words like “freely,” “cheerful,” “willingness” and “generously.”<sup>11</sup>

The writings of the early church fathers reveal that during the first three centuries Christians provided for the expenses of their public meetings, the apostles and other traveling missionaries, and the care of the sick and poor by means of giving of tithes (10 %) from firstfruits in voluntary offerings. Endowments of real estate also became a source of support.

Under Constantine the church gained approval and respect. As the leaders of the church became more powerful, they began to dictate how gifts, particularly tithes, were to be made, and by the late sixth century, the church Councils weighed in with their decrees on tithing.<sup>12</sup>

Gregory the Great, who became pope in 590 AD, made major strides in consolidating the power of the papacy, and as the decrees and edicts piled up, the church developed more ways of getting money from the people. It is a fascinating and troubling study to read about the legacies, subsidies, tributes, spoils, annates, expectations, illegitimate fruits, services, palliums, pluralities, taxes of various sorts, procurations, church court fees and 3 fines which the Roman church used to support its purposes.<sup>13</sup>

There were complaints and uproars about these devices over the years, but it wasn't until Julius II published a bull in January of 1510 authorizing the sale of indulgences *without any need for repentance and confession* that matters began coming to a head. Seven years later Martin Luther challenged the sale of such indulgences with his 95 theses.

In the years following the Reformation the church found its support in tithes, church rates which were really a type of tax, and support by the civil government. Many abuses continued or arose in connection with these methods. In fact, to some degree, these abuses eventually drove many people to flee Europe for America.

Given human nature, support of the church also in America was not always gained according to Biblical principles or for Scriptural reasons. When voluntary support didn't do the job, all sorts of methods were introduced or reinvented to encourage, entice or force people to pay their “dues.” Taxes, glebes, pew revenues, subscription lists, lotteries, merchandising schemes, the church farm, the Lord's acre and bingo bring the matter to the present.

In one of my parishes it was the practice at the beginning of this century for the leaders of the church to make levies on the members based on the size and prosperity of their farms or businesses. The records still exist showing how family after family turned in their 25 cents each week with an occasional 50 cent gift among them. Even in the 1980's some of the older members would refer to their offerings as “dues.”

Earlier I stated that I felt the church was at a point today where it was finally “getting it right” in stewardship matters. After tearing roughshod up and down the history of giving for centuries, it seems that the church in many instances is finally recognizing and implementing the evangelical principles and methods of giving found in the New Testament.

*The New Testament principles of giving speak of planned, voluntary, generous, proportionate (percentage) gifts made out of faith (and therefore cheerfully) out of the first fruits of our resources.* The tithe, still often mentioned and used, can serve us well also, but only as a guide or standard in determining the level of our proportionate gift. While the old Testament decreed the tithe, the Christian is free to choose any percentage. However, going back as far as

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 10:8; 2 Corinthians 9:7; 2 Corinthians 8:12; Romans 12:8

<sup>12</sup> The Council of Tours, 567 AD, and the second Council of Mascon, 585 AD.

<sup>13</sup> Read *Money and the Church* by Luther P. Powell for an overview and explanation of all these schemes.

Augustine, it has been pointed out that we who have been set free from the Law by Christ should certainly find joy in going beyond the tithe.

It is not my intent. to analyze these Principles. Again, that has been done elsewhere. Our concern is to encourage the instruction of these principles, also as they provide a setting for creative gifts that can help us provide for the Lord's work in our midst.

### **Developing Effective & Creative Giving ... ... in Our Attitudes**

If the development of positive giving practices is to happen in a congregation, it will require a positive, loving attitude in the pastor. He must look at the situation of the congregation and take a. lead in moving the members forward in this part of their Christian life, not waiting until matters hit a crisis level and then decide that something must be done. He must be proactive, not reactive!

A pastor would do well not to assume too much or too little about his members, knowledge about the Biblical principles of giving or their giving practices. The most unlikely persons can upset your assumption in one way or the other. Instead, take people at the point you find them and teach them the Scriptural principles. Nor should the pastor be judgmental. Just because you assume a person should know more or give more than they do doesn't make them bad. The opposite is true also.

“There is no shortage of money in the church. There is a shortage of good stewardship. One of the obvious needs of congregations and of denominations is to overcome financial crises. Yet, the great predicament in the church is not a lack of finances, but a lack of stewardship understanding of and training in God's Word, which alone provides the direction and power for Christian giving. Provide a person with understanding, and he will likely make a proper response through the Spirit's guidance.”<sup>14</sup>

An important fact to remember in helping people grow in their Christian walk is to avoid saying “no,” for someone else. Don't assume that a person doesn't want to do this or that. Let them speak for themselves whether it involves serving in a certain capacity in the parish or in their willingness to give or to learn more about giving according to Scriptural principles.

This practice sometimes takes the form of trying to speak for people when it comes to giving opportunities. Saying “no” for others is offering them “help” which they may not want or should not get. Such “help” doesn't allow people to confront themselves in their relationship to God. Even though the pastor may think his intentions are good, he is denying his members an opportunity for spiritual growth. Wayne Barrett writes:

“‘Help’ is sometimes not only unnecessary, but it's occasionally even inappropriate. One prime example of inappropriate “help” is the common ploy of the pastor who tries to protect the people of the congregation. “Our people are already giving generously. We can't ask them to do any more,” the pastor states. I am often tempted to ask if the pastor has any idea what the people are giving, generously or not.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., Werning, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Barrett, *The Church Finance Idea Book*, p. 50.

To illustrate this point Barrett tells the story of the boy who came late to school. When the teacher asked for his excuse, he said he was helping an elderly woman across the street. “But you are thirty minutes late!” the teacher replied. “Why did it take you that long?” “She didn’t want to go,” the boy answered.

It is also helpful for the pastor to be consciously aware that not everyone gives in the same way. We all may know this, but perhaps we haven’t taken the time to think it through. We have some members who think door offerings are great and others who don’t. Many are willing to make commitments, others “don’t believe in it.” Some bemoan the fact that they just can’t give to all the appeals that come to them even though they would like to, while others make quick and easy decisions as to which appeals to answer and which ones to discard.

Robert Sharpe who founded the National Planned Giving Institute identifies four kinds of givers.

1. *The Impulsive Giver* – May or may not give, but usually gives only when asked. Needs regular special opportunities to give.
2. *The Habitual Giver* – Seems to like to make commitments because he likes an established routine for his giving. Probably won’t care much for special appeals. Our practice usually tries to train all members to grow into this paradigm.
3. *The Thoughtful Giver* – Rather few in number. He will think through the special gift appeal or the annual budget presentation carefully. Once satisfied will usually be very generous.
4. *The Careful Giver* – Her stewardship is carefully planned and carried out. Doesn’t care for special appeals. Even unexpected needs are provided for in her budget. Rather “scarce” in number.<sup>16</sup>

All that we’ve considered to this point is meant to help prepare us for action. And action is what is needed! Training in the Biblical principles of giving probably won’t happen unless the pastor initiates it. Few members will ask for this because their sinful nature wants them to believe that they will be the poorer for it.

### **... through Our Worship Service**

The worship service is the first place to take action. Too often worship services lack a spark, an enthusiasm in presenting the most exciting, most powerful message of all time. If the worship services we lead are humdrum and boring, members may be inclined to support the Lord’s work in the same way. We need to make sure that our worship services are pleasant, interesting and heart-warming and that we don’t put obstacles in the way of the Word by careless planning. Make worship in your congregation a verb, not a noun! This will go a long way in providing the resources the church needs.

Preaching is one of the highlights in Lutheran worship services. The sermons we preach convey and apply God’s Word to our members. There is both a human part, the preacher, and a divine part, the Word, in every sermon. We can’t improve on the Word, but we can always improve on our sermonizing. Sleepy sermons by sleepy pastors are not an unheard of event. We

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<sup>16</sup> For a further description of these types, read Barrett’s *The Church Finance Idea Book*, pp. 37-38.



also need to guard against sermons that are locked into a rigid mold learned in a homiletics class. We needed those homiletics lessons to train us how to preach effectively. They did not teach us that every sermon has to have the identical structure and approach.

Listen to and read other preachers, good ones, both inside and outside our synod. Learn from, but don't imitate them. A friend of mine who has become a good preacher showed his potential already in the seminary. Back then, however, it was obvious that he admired Billy Graham's preaching style because he sounded just like Graham, right down to the inflection he put into his pronunciation. Develop your own style. Be yourself.

I strongly urge you to study Pastor Joel Gerlach's article "Revitalizing Our Preaching" . one quotation he cites from Paul Scherer is particularly convicting:

“The only thing in God's economy that can ever take the place of preaching is better preaching. And every preacher is capable of that. Not of good preaching. Good preaching may be quite beyond us. But better preaching. That is beyond none of us.”<sup>17</sup>

Some of that preaching should be about the stewardship of money and especially about the Biblical principles of giving. Don't be intimidated by the remarks that you're always preaching about money unless you really are always preaching about money. It might prove more effective to preach about these matters at various times throughout the year rather than just during the fall stewardship drive. Such sermons should be instructive, not an occasion to browbeat the members. Preach the Law if you must but be sure to follow up with the Gospel. Remember, your goal is to produce cheerful givers, not cowed or resentful ones.

### **... in Our Classes**

Another area for training in giving is your classes. Classes may even be better places to teach these principles than in sermons because they allow for interaction between the teacher and the student and for practical illustration. Such instruction should certainly be given in new member classes, whatever they are called. Regular member Bible classes, youth groups and studies in organization meetings all will help reach the members.

Of particular concern should be the instruction of children in Sunday school and elementary school. This could be coupled in practical ways with the gifts that are usually gathered in these classes. I believe that teaching the children about giving, rather than just giving them a box of envelopes or passing a basket around the classroom with no discussion on how to plan their gifts, is critical. When do we expect children to learn the Biblical principles of giving if they don't learn them as children? If you aren't teaching these lessons to your children, what is your plan for them to learn them?

The implications of this reach even further. Consider:

“The church, as it fulfills its educational tasks imbues people with an interpretation of life that is distinct from the popular cultures. The stewardship emphasis in a church program moves far beyond the ideas of sharing taught within a family or a play group. A major difference in the content of the teaching of these groups is that the church is concerned with sharing and giving to those who do not live close by and to those who are in no way

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<sup>17</sup> Gerlach, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, p.274.

like the giver. In blunt language, the church's understanding of stewardship is not bound by the natural selfishness of a family or small group. It bursts the bounds of self-centeredness and makes people aware that God's world encompasses all humans. No other institution has this task or performs this function."<sup>18</sup>

### **... in Our Practices & Programs**

Part of learning Biblical principles of giving involves actually putting them into practice. Teaching a person to drive an automobile involves classroom teaching, reading and studying, but finally the teacher has to put the student behind the wheel. So the pastor and/or teacher must also lead his/her members and students beyond simply studying. We have to provide ways and methods for the Christian to try out what has been taught.

Earlier I recounted the many mostly damaging methods of giving used by the church over the centuries. I did that partly to demonstrate how much difficulty this matter causes Christians but also to caution about too quickly adopting some particular giving method. Do you have an idea about giving in mind? Compare it to the Biblical principles of giving to see if it promotes them or stifles them. Will your idea encourage gifts that are ... 1. Planned ... 2. Voluntary ... 3. Generous ... 4. Proportionate ... 5. Made out of faith and ... 6. First fruits? If it doesn't score six out of six, reconsider whether you should use it.

It is important to provide regular opportunities for your members to learn, relearn and exercise these principles. The principles won't change, but we can certainly vary the way we teach them and particularly the way we exercise them. our synod has offered many good stewardship programs if you don't want to create your own. Use the variety that is put into them. Use an every member visit one year, home meetings another and personal interviews another. Two books listed in the bibliography, *44 Ways to Expand the Financial Base of Your Congregation* and *The Church Finance Idea Book*, have many practical ideas that can be used. One of those ideas, "Miracle Sunday," was so successful when used at Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Houston that it drew attention in *The Northwestern Lutheran*.

To pledge or not to pledge is a struggle that some congregations face. I encourage people to use that approach because it helps them to plan their gift rather than haphazardly dropping something into the plate. Encourage percentage pledging, consider offering the opportunity to pledge time and talent at the same time, and emphasize that the pledging is voluntary and is not a legal commitment. When people see that it is used properly and evangelically, more and more of them will do it. While it can help immensely in planning an annual budget, it is indispensable in a major project.

"The recent Rockefeller Foundation study, "The Charitable Behavior of Americans," endorses the merits of this strategy. The study documents that church attenders who pledge give twice the amount of non-pledgers, and that pledgers who express their commitment as a percentage of income give nearly three times the amount of non-pledgers.

Non-pledging churchgoers – \$440  
Pledgers pledging \$ amounts – \$880

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<sup>18</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, p. 120.

Pledgers committing 96 % – \$1,240”<sup>19</sup>

Placing one’s gift in an offering plate is the standard method by which members give most of their gifts. But there are many other ways of giving, some familiar, some less so, that are used and can be encouraged. At a time when so many organizations, many of them worthwhile, are making appeals to our members for support, we need to make sure that our congregations are giving our members alternate ways of making their gifts to the Lord.

It is almost traditional for our congregations to give out yearly offering envelope packs and quarterly offering reports. But as our society is more and more oriented to monthly statements and bills, perhaps we ought to consider using monthly sets of envelopes and monthly offering reports. I have not used these techniques but would be interested in knowing others’ experiences with them.

The names on stained glass windows, the little bronze plaques and the memorial books which can be found in most of our congregations testify to the popularity of gifts made in memory of a loved friend, family member or called worker. But rather than just letting them dribble in, encourage memorial gifts by reporting them to the congregation and, by offering suggestions for them, a listing sometimes called a “love list.”

This latter idea is important in avoiding hurt feelings and possible anger. One of the first things the church council asked me to do when I arrived at one of my parishes was to decline a gift of a very large painting of Christ in Gethsemane that a family gave in memory of their recently deceased husband and father. It was just, too large for the place where the family wanted it to be hung. Fortunately, the widow was kind and understanding. After I got done with that uncomfortable job, I asked the council to prepare some policies and suggestions for future memorial gifts. They were happy to oblige, and we had no further problems.

### **... with Current Gifts**

There are also certain ways of making current gifts that can help our members support the Lord’s work in ways they might normally not think of. I refer to gifts of tangible property, appreciated assets and life insurance that has cash value. Each deserves a bit of attention.

People often have items of value that they would like to use instead of cash to make their gift for the Lord’s work. Our synod’s gift planning counselors have helped members give gifts of real estate, fields of grain, jewels, investment coins, coin collections, even, an Argyle sock full of old coins! I just recently helped another counselor find a dealer who would buy a gun collection that was given to one congregation.

It is important that the congregation has a well-publicized policy that it has the final right to accept or reject such gifts lest, it be burdened with a gift it can’t handle or will bring legal risk to it. This is especially true for gifts of real estate. Care must also be taken in giving credit to donors for tax purposes.\*

One of my congregations used to save about \$3.65 each year by not having to give Charlie and Rose a box of offering envelopes. They only gave their gift once a year, but they planned it carefully. Charlie had worked much of his career for a large corporation that gave him shares of stock as a benefit. That stock appreciated in value each year. They knew that if they sold the stock they would have to pay capital gains tax at the rate of 28% the amount it had appreciated.

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<sup>19</sup> Op. cit., Barrett, p. 53.

Since it was an asset that they could give easier than cash, they gave the congregation about \$2000 worth of that stock once a year, knowing that the congregation was not subject to paying that tax on the capital gain. As a result, they were able to give a bit more to the congregation.\*

People sometimes have life insurance policies they no longer need. Perhaps it is an old military policy, a policy they bought to provide for their children's college education or to pay off a mortgage should they die. If they bought a policy that builds up a cash value, and the purpose for which they bought it no longer exists, they might want to donate ownership of that policy for the work of the Lord. The congregation might want to cash the policy in for the cash value or, if it is paid up, hold it and collect the death benefit at the donor's death.\*

There are members in our congregations whom the Lord has blessed with more than average wealth. These people often would be pleased to make large gifts for the Lord's work but often don't because they want anonymity or out of concern that they might upset or damage the congregation's stewardship.

One couple I've worked with found themselves in that situation. The Lord blessed one of their business ventures richly, and they wanted to make a generous gift to help students at our seminary. They didn't know where to go, and for whatever reason chose not to ask their pastor, so they opened the telephone book to the heading "Wisconsin Lutheran." Through phone calls and visits they finally found a way to make that gift which is still helping students eleven years later. If you know of someone who has such blessings and interests, you may be the only person who can help them arrange their gift.\*

### **... with Deferred Gifts**

This brings us to the subject of deferred gifts, or gifts that people plan now but the congregation, institution or synod won't receive until that person's death. There are several kinds of these gifts. Most of them can provide significant tax benefits to the donor during his or her life or to the donor's estate after death.

The most common of these is a bequest in a will. While this is common in some congregations, it is almost unheard of in others. Much depends on the congregation's history, both in terms of years as well as in terms of how the congregation has handled prior bequests. If a congregation has no policy or plan in place for handling bequests, or if it spends long hours arguing over how to use them or has actually used them contrary to the stipulations of the will, members will not think twice about naming it in their will.

I strongly encourage congregations to make such plans, possibly even setting up an endowment/trust fund to receive and dispense bequests and special gifts. Wrangle out the details before the gift arrives so when it arrives the congregation is in a position to receive it gracefully and use it wisely.\*

Encourage bequests for the Lord's work or your congregation may seem as if it isn't interested in them. Occasional notes in bulletins and newsletters are good. In one congregation I was able to add a line of text at the bottom of the monthly offering report. Frequently it was "Please remember Bethany in your will." Don't assume that your members will think about this by themselves. Some lawyers will ask them about making charitable bequests when they write their wills, but some don't.\*

There are other simpler and more convenient ways of making a deferred gift that may better serve some members. One is naming the church as a beneficiary or partial beneficiary on a life insurance policy. Another is to name the church to receive all or part of a savings account at

death. This is known as a Totten trust or “payable on death” arrangement. This can also be done with Church Extension Fund accounts.\*

The U.S. government recognizes that charities, including your congregation, institution and synod, provide services to its citizens that it cannot. In order to encourage financial support to the organizations, the government, through its Internal Revenue Service, gives citizens certain tax benefits when they make gifts to these tax-exempt organizations.

We all know about the charitable deduction that is available to us if we reach a certain level of charitable contributions relative to our income. Another tax benefit is the avoidance of taxes on the capital gains of appreciated property when certain properties are donated to qualified organizations. While tax breaks shouldn't be the reason for making a gift, they will help our people do a better job of giving.

In order to encourage savings for retirement, the government allows most of us to place earnings into savings before taxation. The tax becomes due when we withdraw those savings, theoretically, when we retire and are in a lower income bracket. However, if we die before using all those savings, we will pay the tax on it in our final income tax filed after our deaths ... unless it has been designated to your church, institution or synod or other charity.

People with such savings in IRAs, TSAs, 401ks, and certain pension plans can do a better job of distributing their estate if they leave those assets to their church and leave cash to their families instead of the other way around. They, in effect, are “stretching” their estates because they are avoiding taxes by accepting the government's encouragement to support charities.

I would guess that many of your members, if not most, don't know this, or if they do, haven't considered or put to work those options for their own estate plans. Now the job of the pastor or teacher is to shepherd a flock and to teach students. You can't be busy talking about these matters. But you can have someone help you help your members help the work of the Lord with these stewardship techniques. So I direct you once again to this.\*

Charitable gift annuities are neat little packages that allow a person to make a gift to their church even though they can't afford to give that gift away. Sound confusing? The answer is that while they make the gift irrevocably now, during their lifetime, the church doesn't receive anything until after they die. In the meantime, the donor(s) receives a return from the annuity for the rest of his/her (their) life. There are also a number of tax advantages available in certain situations.

One congregation on the north side of Milwaukee has been named to receive gifts from at least two such annuities from members with whom I worked. They love their congregation and want to be as sure as they can be that there is something left after, in one case, the husband and wife die, and, in the other case, the single person dies. Gift annuities are very simple in concept and easy to arrange but not always appropriate for every situation.\*

Charitable remainder trusts and certain other kinds of trusts also can provide members some benefits that can help them make gifts for the Lord's work that they normally couldn't make without paying a hefty price in taxes. People who own real estate or stocks that are highly appreciated are often locked into the ownership of that asset because they would take a sizeable loss paying the taxes if they were to sell it. Charitable trusts can help such people do a better job of managing the blessings the Lord has given them.\*

One other plan that a couple in the congregation of which I am a member recently used is a life estate plan. They gave title to their home to the congregation but retained the right to live in it as long as they wish or can. When they move out the congregation takes possession. In the meantime, they are responsible for maintenance, insurance and taxes.\*

### **... with Advance Planning**

This is a good time to suggest that a congregation might want to prepare for such gifts by adopting an acceptance policy giving it the right to accept or reject gifts. This is particularly important with gifts of real estate. The congregation should be very careful in accepting such gifts because the new owner can be liable for any environmental problems.\*

A congregation might also want to establish a policy to sell immediately any stock it receives. This removes the temptation for any of the responsible people to speculate on the stock. Another policy that is in keeping with our mission is for a congregation to dedicate a portion of special gifts and bequests for work outside of the congregation. One congregation in the area recently shared parts of a bequest with Wisconsin Lutheran College, Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service and the synod. All these policies might be developed by the endowment/trust fund committee.

### **... with Help From Some Friends**

Don't let all these concepts swamp your brain. It is not the pastor's job to know all about these. He should, however, know about all of them so he can help a member who would benefit from one of these plans. A call to your Gift Planning Counselor will do the job. Every district in the synod is served by at least one counselor. Pastor Lee Vaccarella and I serve the Southeastern Wisconsin District. The names of other counselors are in the front of the synod's yearbook. I encourage you to establish an ongoing working relationship with your counselor.

The Parish Services office of our synod offers stewardship programs. Up until recently a stewardship counselor also was available to help congregations with in house stewardship training. Pastor Daniel Malchow, soon to be working under the title Capital Funding Services, has helped a number of congregations plan and carry out the funding portion of major building programs.

The 1993 synod convention called on the Conference of Presidents to look into the matter of declining synod mission offerings of congregations. As this was subsequently studied in two different committees a consensus was reached that any efforts to remedy the situation have to work at unifying our conception of mission offerings so we think and work in terms of their common purpose and use and not whether they come from a congregation or an individual.

Correspondingly, the planned giving ministry will be integrated into the process of funding the Lord's work carried on through our congregations and synod. The resolutions to be acted on at this year's synod convention also provide for greater opportunities for congregations to develop and exercise the members, knowledge of the Biblical principles of stewardship. All this is subject to ratification by this year's synod convention.

Finally, there are also many books and articles on the subject of stewardship. I especially refer you to the two by Barrett and Schaller mentioned above. Read them critically and you will find much to help you. There are also resources available to help improve preaching and worship leading skills.

The crucial point, however, is that you need to do something if you want your members to grow in their understanding and exercise of the Biblical principles of giving.

“Gathering funds for the Lord’s work is a ministry in itself as it enables the work of the Lord and enriches the lives of Christians. It always requires prayer, hard work, good planning, careful communication of purpose and need, ongoing follow-up and the Lord’s blessings. It is a work that always focuses on God’s love for people in Christ and the people’s need of his forgiveness. It happens best when the church is always hard at work achieving its purpose and when members own, embrace, and support that purpose.”<sup>20</sup>

Keep pointing people to Jesus, help them see their potential under the power of the Holy Spirit and commit yourself to doing all you can to help your members grow in the grace of giving. If you do nothing, chances are good that is what will happen.

\*Your district gift planning counselor can help you and your congregation plan and use such methods.

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<sup>20</sup> Roth, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, p. 206.