

# FUNDING THE CHURCH

A United Methodist Stewardship Newsletter from the Foundation for Lake Junaluska and the SEJ

No. 4

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"Funding the Church" is designed to help pastors and church leaders strengthen the discipleship of their members through a heightened understanding of stewardship and giving. We hope to offer suggestions that will help in the development of solid financial church resources.

We would like your input. Let us know your thoughts and ideas, and if you have a good story, please send it to us.

Please feel free to copy this newsletter and pass it on to others.

Jim Hanna, M. Div., Editor  
Dir. of the Foundation for  
Lake Junaluska and the SEJ

## Tough Times and the Church's Response

People are worried. You and I encounter retired folks who depend on their investments as the primary source of their income. Many have had to tighten their spending, and they worry that they will not have enough to get by. The stock market is not the only concern these days. You probably have people in your community and perhaps in your congregation who have experienced foreclosure or evictions. Maybe you are aware of persons who have lost or fear losing their jobs. This economic crisis is real, and it is scaring people. Adding to the fears, economic pundits on television wag their heads and conjure up The Great Depression.

**Does the Church have a role in dealing with this severe economic crisis?** I believe it has a great role: namely, to help people conquer their fears and worries with the Peace of Christ. The Church—you and I—may not be the experts on economics or how to fix these problems, but we *are* the experts on defeating fear and worry. Now is the time for the Church to step boldly into this dialogue and proclaim the gospel. People may think that fear and worry will go away if we can boost the stock market, or if we elect the "right" person president, or if we give tax money to the right group. They may think that what is needed is to round up the people who perpetrated the crisis and escort them to jail. But fear will continue because the stock market will fall again, good people will make bad decisions, and there will always be greedy con men and con women.

Defeating fear and worry is a Church job, because these are only and always defeated by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Look at the hope proclaimed in Romans 8 or the plain statement in 1 John 4:18 "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." In the closing verses of Matthew 6 Jesus tells us not to worry about the things non-believers seek, rather be confident in the knowledge that God provides for all our needs. Paul tells us to overcome anxiety in Philippians 4:4-7 by rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks. Jeremiah 29:11 reads, "For I know the thoughts I think concerning you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of hurt, to give you a future and a hope."

Those of us who know the powerful peace of Christ that passes understanding (it is beyond our abilities of rational thinking) have a joyful obligation to share that peace that is found in Christ. This is a great gift we have to give to a worried and fearful world that hungers for peace and "a future and a hope." People's fears will not be assuaged by stock market reports or expert prognosticators, but by Jesus, the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease.

**So, where does church fundraising fall out in these difficult financial times?** This is not the time to retreat from church fundraising. It is the time to press forward. The Church is here to present God in Jesus Christ. What should we say, "Sorry, we can't afford to do that now?" In tough times the Church is needed more than ever, and the people of God must be challenged to meet that need. Ask the people to support the work of the church with the full confidence that this work is the most important work in the world. Yes, there will be some who will need to cut back, and we must show understanding and acceptance. But, despite the news reports, the resources are there and most will meet the challenge. Allow these tough financial times to sharpen the focus and ministry of your church—to help your congregation define the importance of what you are doing and to establish the urgency of the high cause you represent.

And please don't lead people into temptation by preaching a prosperity gospel that plays on people's desperation and greed. The message to proclaim is simple: give to the Church whose business is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. That is all you need. God will do the rest.

# Thanking Your Donors

It may seem that saying “thank you” to those who make pledges or donations to the church is just a given. Of course we say thank you. But too many times donors to the church are not thanked for their gifts. Too often we come to the conclusion of our stewardship drive, we send the donors a receipt (maybe), we announce the total and we move on. From a purely self-interested point of view, if a donor does not feel appreciated for her gift, why would she give the next time you ask? To not say thank you is self-destructive to any kind of fund raising program.

But there is a far better reason for saying thank you, and that is the positive message you deliver to those who give. A heart-felt, personalized “thank you” lets the donor know that you appreciate his gift. It tells her that she matters and that her gift made a difference. It affirms his membership in an organization that is dedicated to making disciples of Jesus Christ, and it says that together you have taken a step in that direction. It confirms that someone knows that she is fulfilling the vows she made to the church. It is the personal connection that says “without you we would be less than what we are.” There are so many positive reasons for thanking people who contribute to the church that we should frequently explore new ways of expressing gratitude so that our thank-yous don’t become stale and lose their impact.

Here are some ways we can say thank you to those who give. You and other creative folk in your congregation will be able to think of unique and fun ways to modify these ideas and enhance the ways you can express appreciation to the members of the congregation.

**The thank you letter is fundamental.** Make sure that every *pledge* is properly acknowledged with a thank you letter. There is no need to thank people on a weekly basis for the pledge payments or regular gifts they make. A letter thanking them for the pledge when it is made, and also a letter at the end of the year thanking them for their faithful giving is sufficient. The letter should contain the amount of the pledge made. I believe the letter should be signed by the pastor and should include a personal, hand-written note of appreciation. Giving is a very intimate, personal thing, and many church members will give because the pastor has asked them to give. They will be pleased to know that the pastor is aware of their pledge and has personally thanked them for it.

**Encourage Memorial and Honor Gifts as ways for members to thank each other.** When persons give memorial or honor gifts, be sure to notify the person being honored or the family of the person memorialized. In the note to the honoree or the family of the remembered loved one, be sure to include the address of the person who made the gift so that they can express their gratitude.

**Thank you events or celebrations** are wonderful ways to express these positive messages to your people. At the conclusion of an annual fund or capital campaign have an event that celebrates what the campaign will enable you to accomplish. Emphasize the points listed above: making a difference, enabling disciple making, fulfilling vows to the church, and the value of connecting with each other to accomplish great things. Celebrate with another event when the project is completed or ready to kick-off.

## Let us hear from you!

We want this publication to be a forum of ideas shared by pastors, stewardship leaders, and church fundraisers. Send us your stories, comments, tested ideas, and suggestions for what you would like to see in this newsletter.

Send you comments to Jim Hanna at [jhanna@lakejunaluska.com](mailto:jhanna@lakejunaluska.com). If you would like to discuss a topic with Jim, please write or call toll-free at (866) 256-1079.

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# Writing for Fundraising Purposes: The Case for Support

One of the most fundamental and critical pieces of any fundraising program is what fundraisers call the *case for support*. Think of an attorney presenting her “case” before the jury, trying to convince them of its merits and how it sufficiently defeats the objections presented by the opposition. You are presenting a similar “case.” In a short amount of written space you must convince your readers that your case has excellent merit; you must also overcome any objections the reader might have. Your case answers the question “why should I support your project?”

**When developing your case, place yourself in the mind of the prospective donor and ask what arguments would appeal to you as a donor.** Too often the case is made from the perspective of what the church needs and not what the donor needs or wants. Church members want to give and they want to accomplish specific and identifiable things with their charitable giving. Writing from the donor’s perspective means that the case for support should focus on what the individual donor can accomplish by giving to this project.

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Why would the donor want to give to your project? What would motivate you, as a donor, to give to it? **One of the wonderful things about Christian fundraising is that nearly all of our projects can be identified as disciple-making**, and calling our folks to a task that will help make disciples of Jesus Christ is very motivational. We all want to make disciples but too often we just don’t know how. Tell them how this project will make disciples, and how their financial involvement will mean that they are helping to make disciples. Tell them how a Sunday School building will help make disciples, or a multi-purpose building, or a soup kitchen, or an endowment for your meals-on-wheels. Identify the high purpose or the ideals that your project represents and show how the reader can connect to those ideals by making a gift.

## Elements of the Case for Support

Writing a case for support is very different from writing a sermon which takes time to make points, illustrate those points, and finally build a conclusion. **The case for support is journalistic writing. That is, it should tell as much about the subject as quickly as possible.** Ask yourself “if the reader gave me only 20 seconds what would I want them to know?” Then ask the question again with 1 minute, 2 minutes, etc. Thus, the headline and first paragraph are extremely important. The next three or four paragraphs are supportive of the first paragraph. Sub-headlines, bold-faced text and quote-outs like the ones on this page are important because the reader’s eyes are drawn to them if they are scanning and not fully reading.

*Ask yourself “if the reader gave me only 20 seconds what would I want them to know?”*

**A journalist answers six questions—who, what, when, where, why, and how—to ensure that nothing is left out.** As we said above, the potential donor must be involved and motivated, so the case for support should answer these questions about the potential donor. It must tell who (the potential donor), what (that you want them to make a contribution), when (when you want them to make their contribution), where (at a pledging dinner, as they are visited by another member, at the altar during commitment Sunday, etc.), why (not why the church needs this project, but why the donor would want to give—what benefit the donor will receive by giving.), and how (explain the pledge process if it is multi-year, etc.).

Next you will need to describe the project and this technique is again helpful to follow. Who: the church; what: the project description; when: the project schedule and completion date; where: the location of the project; why: the need and how the project will meet the need; and how: how the church will accomplish the project. You also have a seventh question to answer: how much. This answer should be broken down and detailed if possible, giving donors the opportunity to name rooms or sections of the project. Answer these questions and you will cover everything about the project the donor wants to know.

# The Golden Rule Principle and Christian Fundraising

In Christian Fundraising we can develop an entire stewardship program if we apply the Golden Rule Principle to everything we do. That is, we should develop our program by placing ourselves in the mind of the prospective donor and asking, “What would appeal to me and inspire me to give to this project and afterward to feel good about that decision?”

Too often we design our stewardship programs thinking only in terms of what or how much the church needs and we don’t consider what the people of the congregation need or what might appeal to them. We know, for example, that the church needs to raise \$500,000 for a new education building. To design a proper stewardship effort we have to ask ourselves why the person in the pew needs that building and what would compel that person to give so that it may be built.

**Use the Golden Rule Principle in approaching members for the gift.** If you are going to visit me in my home, think about what you could say or do in that visit that would be most appealing and encouraging to me. If I were to attend a pledge dinner, what would I want to hear and what would stimulate me to make a sacrificial gift? If I were to receive a letter, what would inspire me to return the pledge card with a significant pledge? I don’t want to be pressured by the church, nor do I want to be made to feel guilty; that will just make me mad. I want to receive a blessing. I want to be appreciated for my participation. I want to answer a call from God. I want to follow Christ. I want to be a part of something important. I want to be included. Give me those things and I will answer the call.

**Use the Golden Rule Principle in the planning stage.** The persons most passionate about a project are those who have invested time and energy in planning it. The converse is also true. If I haven’t been involved in planning the project, I have little or no passion for it. If I am going to be asked to support it, give me the opportunity to have some input during the planning stages. I want to be involved in kingdom of God planning. This will give me a sense of ownership and I will want to invest in the success of the project by making a gift that will make a difference.

**Use the Golden Rule Principle in articulating the need.** As the person in the pew I don’t want to hear about the frustrations of church leaders trying to find good spaces for Sunday School classes. I need to know that this project is going to help make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Tell me how it will do this and I will want to support it. More specifically, I want to hear who the project will help and how that will be done. As a parent I want to hear about how we will be able to accommodate a growing nursery or that we will have a great space for youth. If my Sunday School class has to meet in the sanctuary along with two other classes I will be happy to hear that we will have proper spaces in the new building. If I have ever walked in on these classes that meet in the sanctuary, I will be glad to know that they will have a good place to meet. Identifying and explaining why *the donor* needs this project is fundamental to Christian fundraising.

**Use the Golden Rule Principle when the campaign is concluded.** Taking time to thank people for participating is neglected all too often. I want to know that my gift mattered. Send me a letter that is more than just a receipt, but has a personal reference so that I know my gift has helped make a difference. I want to come to an event where I can celebrate with the others who gave and which focuses on our mutual participation, and how by connecting in this effort we were able to accomplish something important and life-changing. I want to hear that connecting with each other enabled us to accomplish this great thing that will be kingdom-building and disciple-making. I want to feel that I made a great choice when I made my pledge. I want to believe that the next time I am asked I won’t hesitate to make a commitment, because this church knows how to be a good steward of the gifts given.

Apply this Golden Rule Principle to the design of your fundraising program and you will discover a multitude of ways that will motivate persons to give without regret.