

# THE PARISH PAPER

## IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

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### Five Effective Stewardship Programs: Which One Should We Use?

*Fact #1:* Sixty-five percent of mainline congregations use stewardship methods that limit rather than encourage financial giving.

*Fact #2:* Eighty-three percent of clergy and lay leaders say they need information regarding how to motivate greater financial generosity among church members.

*Fact #3:* Most mainline clergy and lay leaders have heard about stewardship education programs that increase annual giving 10 to 30 percent.

John Steinbeck wrote that one of the triumphs of humans is their ability to know a thing and still not believe it. (*East of Eden*) *Why is Steinbeck's quip so applicable to annual stewardship programs?*

#### 1. Small congregations are especially resistant to the use of effective annual stewardship campaigns.

- Protestants in churches whose membership totals 100 to 200 give, on average, 1.8 percent of their income to the Lord's work through their church.

- Protestants who attend churches with more than 1,000 members give, on average, 3.7 percent of their incomes—twice as much.

What causes this difference? In smaller churches, one or two influential, outspoken laypersons *often* block the use of an effective annual stewardship program; in larger congregations, that blockade *less often* occurs. (Robert Wuthnow, *The Crisis in The Churches* [Oxford: Oxford University Press])

#### 2. How congregations ASK people for money dramatically influences how much money they GIVE!

National research tells us that congregations ask for money in three different ways:

- ◆ One kind of church takes *offerings*: no annual financial stewardship campaign. People in those churches give an average of 1.5 percent of their income.

- ◆ Researchers call the second kind of congregation a *pledging* church: The leaders build a proposed budget each year and ask parishioners to complete pledge cards. People in these congregations give an average of 2.9 percent of their income to their church.

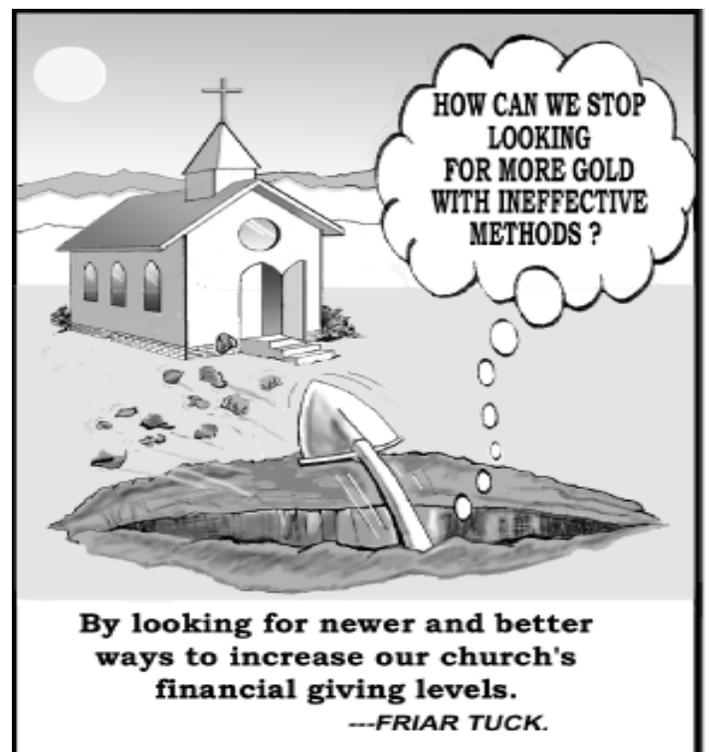
- ◆ Researchers call the third kind of congregation a *percentage-giving* church: These churches conduct an annual stewardship campaign that asks people, "What percentage

of your income do you feel God is calling you to give?" Parishioners write their answers on a card. People in these congregations contribute an average of 4.6 percent of their income to their church.

*Summary:* People in percentage-giving churches contribute, on average, three times more dollars per year than people in churches that only take offerings. (Dean R. Hoge, Charles Zech, Patrick McNamara, and Michael J. Donahue, *Money Matters* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox])

**How can we move beyond spiritual-pigmy giving and financial insufficiency?** Ask the governing board to appoint a special task force that obtains and studies information about the five effective stewardship programs listed below. Select the one that best fits our congregation.\*

**1. Effective Stewardship: Building on Biblical Principles.** Authored by Ken Williams, this year-around stewardship program often works well in churches that resist any type of classic-style annual stewardship campaign. The program has been used in more than 2,000 churches in 22



denominations in 38 states and Canada (ranging in size from 35 people to over 5,000).

*Effective Stewardship* uses the printed page and lay people as the primary spokespersons to heighten parishioner awareness of what God's Word says concerning money, material possessions, and giving.

Each month, the program provides the following: a small "box" in the bulletin each Sunday contains a principle and a Scripture verse; a lay person gives a three- or four-minute presentation that explains that month's principle; a newsletter article examines that month's principle from another perspective; and one Sunday each month, Sunday school classes and youth groups receive a discussion sheet and a request that teachers spend five minutes leading students in discussing it.

For a free video and explanation of materials, visit the [www.klwenterpriests.com](http://www.klwenterpriests.com) or telephone 800/805-8702.

**2. *Quill*:** Authored by Gary Arnold, this program works especially well in large congregations in metropolitan areas where few members know and associate with one another during the week. However, *Quill* has a positive track record in churches of other sizes.

Congregations that purchase *Quill* receive this written warranty: *Use it without variance and your church will achieve at least a 20 percent increase in pledging, or your fee is refunded.*

An ad hoc committee comprised of the congregation's largest givers meets for two evenings to personally select a few names of other, relatively good givers and hand-write each one a letter. (*Quill* provides specimen letters.) Typically, about 50 percent of a church's present givers receive that handwritten letter. The other 50 percent of parishioners receive a word-processed letter.

For three consecutive Sundays, one of the committee's members witnesses regarding his/her giving decisions during worship (*Quill* provides idea scripts), followed by the dedication of pledges on the fourth Sunday.

A detailed manual guides the process of preparing personalized stationary, pledge cards, and other details. Obtain information from [www.quillinc.com](http://www.quillinc.com) or 800/826-2048.

**3. *Cycles of Discipleship*.** Authored by Jack Phillips, a United Methodist layperson in Ohio, a revised edition was published in 2007 by Discipleship Resources, Nashville. This program combines the "every member in ministry" approach with stewardship education and a Bible study designed for all ages. Helpful in congregations that have been unwilling to conduct any type of annual stewardship program.

The focal point is on building a Budget of Ministries, not on attempting to underwrite a church budget. This approach seeks to inspire Christians to "excel in the grace of giving" by educating them with regard to the multiple ways the church serves its families, its community, and the world.

Cycles is introduced with a four-Sunday program high-

lighting (a) *Celebration*, (b) *Vision*, (c) "A Place for You," and (d) *Commitment*—after considering the ministries of their church and its value to their own families, members and friends make a "Discipleship Promise" of their financial resources.

Order from the [www.UpperRoom.org](http://www.UpperRoom.org) Website.

**4. *New Consecration Sunday, 2007 Revised Edition: Stewardship Program with Guest Leader Guide and CD-ROM*.** Authored by Herb Miller and published by Abingdon Press, Nashville, thousands of congregations in twenty-five denominations have reported (a) 15 percent to 30 percent increases in total congregational giving the first year and (b) 10 percent to 15 percent increases in total giving during each of seven or more subsequent years of use.

The *2007 Revised Edition* provides (a) a user-friendly CD that contains an audio overview, a downloadable PowerPoint presentation, and several printed letters for congregational use; (b) greater clarity in how-to instructions; and (c) information regarding a free on-line service for guest leaders who wish to e-mail questions to Herb Miller.

The program unfolds during four weeks of multifaceted communication and a concluding worship service.

Order from [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com) or call 800/672-1789.

**5. *Grow One Sunday*.** Authored by Herb Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press), this program uses the same principles as *New Consecration Sunday* and some similar procedures.

*Grow One Sunday* is valuable in (a) small congregations of fewer than fifty in worship and (b) large churches that find the "celebration luncheon" in *New Consecration Sunday* logistically difficult due to lack of space.

Hundreds of user churches indicate giving increases of 5 percent to 15 percent, with some congregations reporting much higher increases.

Download at the [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com) Website.

**The Bottom Line.** Jack Phillips expressed frustration during a stewardship committee meeting: "We keep singing the same old song, with very little success."

A committee member responded, "Jack, this is the only song we know."

Which of these five stewardship programs can help our congregations learn a new song?

\* For a comprehensive three-session study/discussion resource, see also *Herb Miller's Nuggets, Volume #5, "How to Increase Financial Stewardship."* Go to [www.theparishpaper.com](http://www.theparishpaper.com) for a free contents-description and an order form (available only at [www.theparishpaper.com](http://www.theparishpaper.com) and NOT in response to requests by E-mail, U.S. Mail, FAX, or telephone.)