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IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

Coeditors: Herb Miller, Lyle Schaller, Cynthia Woolever - www.TheParishPaper.com

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Bill Couch

Lay Testimonials Strengthen Financial Giving!

Question: Which of these methods increase financial giving in congregations? (a) Sermons, (b) Effective annual stewardship programs, or (c) Lay people's convictions?

Answer: All of the above!

Many helpful sermon resources* and annual stewardship programs** are available. But how can lay people encourage increases in financial giving?

Monthly lay testimonials during worship that stress "the need of the giver to give for his or her spiritual benefit" increase financial giving far more than monthly reports that say, "We need money to pay the church's bills." or "Please help balance the budget."

Small Congregation Methods

Select lay people who believe in and practice giving 10 percent of their incomes to God's work. Once a month, invite each of them to make a three-minute presentation during worship (prior to the offering) that answers four questions: 1. What is my name? 2. How long have I been participating in a congregation? 3. When and why did I first begin giving 10 percent of my income to God's work? 4. What spiritual benefits have I experienced from tithing?

Larger Congregation Methods

Handpick people who are tithers and good communicators. Write them the following letter.

Below the date, put "TO: [list everyone to whom you are writing]" and "FROM: [Senior Pastor's Name]."

Would you consider being part of something new that can powerfully impact our church and transform individuals' lives?

Beginning Sunday, January 26, I would like you to become one of the laypersons who gives a brief meditation about the joy of giving, right before we take the offering. Before your heart stops beating at the thought of speaking to hundreds of people, let me tell you what I expect!

1. I expect people to listen to another layperson talk about giving far more readily than they listen to me. People expect preachers to speak about giving. They don't expect to hear from people like themselves who have discovered the joy of giving. Your testimony can change someone's life as they begin to follow Christ in the area of giving.

2. I expect to give you specific and detailed training about

how to present your story. We'll meet together on Tuesday, January 21, at 7:00 p.m. in Room S101. I'll help you know "what and how" to say a two- or three-minute message.

3. I expect you to do this no more than once or twice this year. Then, if you want to continue, that would be great. Or, if you decide you would rather not continue, that is fine.

4. I expect us to see giving increase significantly due to these testimonies. Some churches report 10 or 20 percent increases, just by implementing these lay testimonies.

5. I expect you to say "yes!" But, if after prayerful consideration, you do not feel led to do this, please call and let me know. If I don't hear from you, I'll expect to see you January 21.

6. I expect God's blessing upon this important ministry!

The Training Meeting

Prepare a handout agenda something like the one below. At the top print your congregation's one-sentence mission statement and one-sentence vision statement.



A. Opening Prayer/Share Time.

B. Why Witness to Your Stewardship Convictions?

- A planted seed can transform a life.
- The beliefs of laity powerfully influence other laity.
- The need of givers to give is greater than our church's need to receive.

C. Understand What Motivates People to Give Money to a Congregation. A survey of 26,184,335 people from 15 denominations revealed the seven greatest motivations for giving money to a church: (1) I am grateful to God. (2) Giving is part of my spiritual relationship to God. (3) I feel privileged to serve. (4) God asks for an appropriate percentage of my income. (5) I like to help other people. (6) I want to help my church. (7) Giving adds meaning to life.

Items at the top of that list motivate far more people to give than do items at the end of the list. (Douglas W. Johnson and George W. Cornell, *Punctured Preconceptions* [New York: Friendship Press])

D. Group Sharing. In groups of three people, ask these questions, one at a time. Each person shares his or her answer. (1) What motivates me to give? (2) When and why did giving become important to my spiritual life? (3) Can I recall a specific experience when giving impacted my life?

E. How to Write What You Plan to Say. Decide on the *main point* you want to get across. Limit yourself to *one* point. You'll have another opportunity to do this, so don't feel like you have to say everything!

•Your main point is more effective when it comes from personal experience. What motivated you to begin giving? What benefits have you experienced from giving? How has your relationship with God grown through giving? How do you feel when you give?

•Choose *feeling* words that touch the heart: *joy, love, grateful, thankful, transformed, etc.*

•Optional: Choose a Scripture verse that captures how you feel about giving.

F. How to Prepare to Say What You Write. Write it out, word for word. Read it aloud and time yourself. Please respect the *three-minute limit!* Complete this step by Thursday evening.

•Revise as new ideas come to mind. Some people prefer to read their manuscript aloud to their family and ask for constructive feedback. What was my main point? Did I keep your attention? Did anything NOT make sense?

•A day later (Friday) get by yourself and read the manuscript *aloud*. Read to absorb the content, without trying to put expression into it.

•Read the manuscript *aloud* again. Underline nouns and verbs that sound like strong emphasis points.

•The next day (Saturday), get by yourself and read it *aloud* for a third time. Try to *visualize* the picture-words and action-sentences. *See* what is happening in your mind's eye and you sound conversational in a speech.

•In these practice readings, raising your voice slightly higher than normal releases nervous tension and helps you to sound more natural. Read slightly faster than seems normal. You sound slower to others than you sound to yourself.

•Read your manuscript out loud, by yourself, once or twice on Sunday morning. Warning! Practicing your manuscript more than four or five times may cause you to work too hard at emphasizing specific words and thus reduce your ability to sound conversational.

G. How to Say What You Have Written. Sit in one of the chairs behind the pulpit. Concentrate on relaxing your hands, fingers, and facial features. Before you walk to the pulpit, take two deep breaths and smile. This feeds the brain needed oxygen and makes you look relaxed even though you don't feel relaxed.

•Go to the pulpit, armed with your notes, prior to the offering. Adjust the mike so it points directly toward your mouth. Say, "Will the ushers please come forward as we prepare to worship with our tithes and offerings."

•Begin speaking as the ushers come forward. They will stand at the front of the aisles until you finish speaking.

•*Smile* during your delivery. Make eye contact with congregants as much as possible. *Don't* concentrate on reading the words with feeling. That produces a preachy-sounding "pulpit inflection." Instead, try to visualize every picture-word and action-sentence in your mind as you say it. This brings you close to a conversational style.

•Close with a two- or three-sentence prayer, thanking God for His blessings. *Never* pray: "Lord, bless this *small* portion we are returning to you."

•Place your contribution in the plate as the usher comes to the platform.

The Bottom Line. In one congregation, these lay testimonials increased total annual giving 23 percent!

*Bill Couch, *How to Talk with People about Financial Giving: Biblically Based Messages that Motivate* (this is Volume 30 of the *Herb Miller's Nuggets Series*). To obtain a contents-description and order form, go to the www.TheParishPaper.com Website. (Note: the contents-description and order form is available ONLY from www.theparishpaper.com and NOT in response to requests by E-mail, U.S. Mail, FAX, or telephone.)

***New Consecration Sunday, Revised Edition: Stewardship Program with Guest Leader Guide and CD-ROM* (Nashville: Abingdon Press); www.cokesbury.com or telephone 800/672-1789.