

# cultivating generosity

by Ruben Swint, Generosity Guy

When I accepted the request to write this article, I decided that this topic would benefit from crowdsourcing. I sent the title to more than 30 contacts, asking each one what they would include about churches that cultivate generosity. What you will read is much better because it includes the perspectives of those who cultivate generosity in their church.

Consider the following experience from one of my article's "conspirators":

*"When I attended my first business meeting as the new pastor, the church was \$50,000 in the red and living off restricted funds. They were funding about 75-80% of the budget. Five years later, we received 99.3% of the budget amount and finished 2016 \$125,000 in the black. The generosity principles I learned and applied helped us change course.*

*One of the realities that I accepted was that people don't have a giving problem. They have a giving-to-the-church problem. So, we made changes that produced a new reality. Last fall, we informed the congregation of the practices of payday lending predators. Three months later, we had \$5,000 in an account. Our payday lending ministry has paid off the loans of three single mothers and we are providing them with financial counseling. I am so proud of our generous members and their big hearts."*

From crisis through faithful stewardship to generous giving and living, that is how I would describe this church's experience. And, I believe this is the transformation that most churches can experience if they will act using effective principles of generosity. What else did my contacts contribute to this topic?

## **Churches that cultivate generosity ...**

### **carry on an active conversation about stewardship, generosity, and giving.**

There is preaching and teaching, articles and story-telling, giving testimonies throughout the year, and communication of ministry that results from faithful and generous giving. People are naturally inclined to help, to console, to care for, to rescue, to befriend, to "be there" for others. So, preaching and teaching generous giving should always include the phrase, "so that in Christ's name we can ...."

**create and deepen connections between people**, participation in ministry, and engagement with the life of the congregation. Research by the Gallup company shows that engagement of church members leads to higher levels of serving, inviting, and giving. Involved members tend to be informed members and their giving is higher. Relationships are a vital aspect of life, leading to gratitude and to generosity.

**have pastors who lead the generosity initiative**; they make it a priority in the life of the church. The pastors reflect that priority by being personally generous themselves. Their generosity is a compelling witness that brings others with them along the giving path. One of the pastors who responded to me delivers fresh-baked bread to people recovering at home and cookies to families waiting at the hospital. He even keeps spare umbrellas in his car to give to people caught out in the rain. These small acts give weight to his preaching and teaching on generous giving.

### **plan, serve, and give with a clear sense of vision and congregational mission.**

The members are singing the songs of generosity and ministry in a beautiful harmony from a shared dream. They know who they are, why they do what they do, and that they are better working together than they are apart.

**trust their ministers, their leaders, and each other.** Personal contributions are accurately accounted for and contribution statements are sent out regularly with a note about a significant ministry outcome from the reporting period. Standard accounting statements are prepared and made available to members. Feedback is prompt for what was accomplished by regular giving or with a special offering. People welcome learning that their gifts are making a difference.

**build a compelling case for generosity:** "Generosity is a lifestyle. It should factor into every decision we make, as it did for Jesus. I am convinced we are most like God when we are generous. It brings the best out of us and does more to build bridges of goodwill, understanding, hope, and reconciliation than anything I know. Pastors and other ministers who model this lifestyle will find it natural to talk about the personal and professional benefits of generosity. Their message will be heard by people who know they are sincere and are truly trying to help them, not merely get something from them."

Now it's your turn. How about crowdsourcing with your congregation? Would it be helpful for you to know the answers to the following questions?

**How is our congregation generous to our community and the world?**

**What inspires you to be generous in church and/or life?**

**Would you be more generous if you believed you could be?**

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# How does your church cultivate generosity, financially and otherwise, among your congregants? How do your congregants express generosity, financially and otherwise?

## **Don Gordon – Ardmore, Winston-Salem**

Our church cultivates generosity by teaching, asking, and leading by example. We teach biblical principles of stewardship, tithing, and sacrificial giving. We have discovered the *New Consecration Sunday* material is a great resource for annual stewardship campaigns. We also encourage our ministers to give public testimonies about their own tithing/giving. Our people give an unusual amount of their time for missions projects, fundraisers, and trips. Our Finance Committee does not view excess giving to the budget as insurance against future droughts in giving. When giving exceeds the budget, the excess is given to our mission partners after a thorough and prayerful conversation with our leaders.

## **David Brooks – Edenton, Edenton**

We have had a “Money Matters” emphasis, with sermons focused on stewardship and a commitment card. We’ve also occasionally had a “catch-up” Sunday in the fall. Periodically, I will write an article in the weekly newsletter to update and encourage financial giving, reminding the congregation that our checkbook register says more about our Christian discipleship than just about any other document. Our church is also generous with the special offerings we collect every year for Baptist ministry partners. Folks give most generously to the CBF Offering for Global Missions. We also cultivate generosity of time and service by encouraging congregants to be involved in various ministries and service projects in our church and community.

## **Andy Jung – First, Albemarle**

When faced with an unfavorable trend line related to financial giving to our church, an ad hoc committee was formed to provide recommendations to cultivate generosity and ensure a

strong financial future for the church. The following recommendations were adopted by the church:

- Sponsor a Stanly County Habitat for Humanity house build with a goal to raise \$30,000 in dollars and pledges, and to provide at least half of the volunteer days required (257 days).
- Implement a “Plus 1 Stewardship Campaign” to increase giving by 1% with a minimum increase of \$10 per week.
- Initiate a capital campaign to start a building endowment fund to assist in maintaining the facilities into perpetuity.
- Implement a congregational education plan that will help develop the spirit of generosity within the membership.
- Develop and implement an action plan to increase membership through evangelism to the unchurched in our community. Increase our church’s marketing in local media, online, and through presentations.

## **Tom Cabaniss – First, Kannapolis**

We cultivate generosity through preaching, telling stories of generosity and/or sacrifice, giving people opportunities to be generous with time, money, etc. We offer *Financial Peace University* from Dave Ramsey. We tithe our budget to causes/places beyond ourselves so we are showing people that we live what we say. Members share verbal or written testimonies about how God is working in their lives. Many express generosity through time commitments to local ministries and/or mission trips.

## **David Helms – First, Southern Pines**

We try to teach periodically throughout the year on some aspect of stewardship. For example, we have used *Thrift and Generosity* by John Templeton over a 6-8 week time frame. We also ask the church members annually to commit to support the church by being present, by praying for the church, by

cultivating a deeper devotional life, by serving others, and supporting the work of Christ. These themes are accented in preaching, usually once a quarter, so that all the stewardship work is not left to one or two weeks in the year. Our church is also generous through participation in local, state, and international missions.

## **David Hailey – Hayes Barton, Raleigh**

We regularly emphasize stewardship, utilizing programs such as *New Consecration Sunday*. We are still working on how to measure generosity of time and talent. Our people are generous givers to the church through our budget and other special offerings. Many of our people are generous with their time and talents by serving on ministry boards and councils, as well as participating in other helping organizations.

## **Greg Rogers – Oakmont, Greenville**

We cultivate generosity by having an annual stewardship emphasis that ties in ministry outcomes and opportunities with an invitation to give in our worship service, by providing online giving options, and by celebrating in many different settings (classes, worship, Oakmont 101) Oakmont’s heritage of beginning in April 1964 with all 42 charter members committing to tithe as a new community of faith. Our members also share time and talent through community and global opportunities to serve and be the presence of Christ with hands-on work.

## **Mark Mofield – Temple, Durham**

We have used the *New Consecration Sunday* model to build an understanding of stewardship as a Christian discipline. We use our offertory time during the worship to emphasize the impact of all aspects of our giving (time, talent, treasure) in our church and our community. Recently, the church was recognized by a local homeless ministry as the largest supporter of the organization, not just financially but in the amount of food donated and volunteer hours. The congregation is always asking, “Is there something that is needed that I can provide? How can we help?”