Peace River Presbytery

Presentation by Allen Walworth (allen@generis.com)

11-19-2020

We’ve been punched in the gut by the pandemic, many non-profits and some churches just hunkered down waiting until this blows over, circling the wagons just trying to survive.  In April 2020 survey of PCUSA churches revealed that 90% reported Q1 giving down from one year ago. Overall in US, Center for Philanthropy reported that giving to churches down 6% in Q1, but up 7.5% in Q2, compared to comparable quarters in 2019. One third of churches in real trouble, one-third holding their own, and one-third thriving, moving forward.  Jeremiah 29:11 in context of making Babylon their home during the exile.

But challenges do not just build character, they reveal it (“whatever you’re full of sloshes out when you are bumped”). “In fearful times we need a fearless church.” “When the world pressed pause, the church pressed play.” So how can we make sure we don’t waste this crisis?

Overarching considerations:

Rooted in our theology—God is the great giver, established creation around generous abundance (Walter Brueggemann essay, “The Liturgy of Abundance—the Myth of Scarcity”)

Very frequent topic of Jesus teaching

“It’s not what we want from them, but what we want for them.” Andy Stanley

Emphasis and communication needs to be giver centric (actually God centric), not church centric.

So this topic is important, and it is our business, and not just because giving is how the church pays the bills

My Top Ten “best practice” practices from churches that are thriving in 2020:

1. Healthy church generosity culture anchored on a three-legged stool, consistent generosity (budget), special occasion generosity (capital campaign), and legacy generosity (planned giving and bequests).

2. Identifying generosity as a core value of the church, gives permission to talk about it, normalize the conversation, integrate into mission of the church for discipleship and spiritual formation

Not just an embarrassed topic rolled out once per year to raise a budget. Year round, but vary the intensity and messaging throughout the year (sprinkler/drip/hose, or meat and potatoes/salt and pepper)

3. Pastoral involvement and priority:

Importance that spiritual leaders lead by example with their giving

The pastor should know what people give? Confidentially is not the same as secrecy

Should giving maturity be expected for church leaders?

4. Core activities to build discipleship in giving:

teach,

thank,

celebrate (inspire, connect the dots, stories),

ask

5. Different reasons people don’t give:

Unable (some givers are stifled, some are steady, and some are surplus)

Unwilling

Uninformed

Uninspired

Unasked

6. How to build and strengthen a generosity culture?

Pay attention, and tailor ministry response to giving patterns(may need to invest in software analysis tools, e.g. PushPay, Gloo, or Mortorstone):

First time givers (surge of these in 2020)

Lapsed givers

Variances in giving

Large gifts

7. Leverage the offering moment, stories of life change, different nuances and messages, requires and deserves careful planning, even in virtual services with no offering plate passed

8. Continue to open new on-ramps for giving

Not “Time to let the old ways die” Bradley Cooper, but time to let the new ways live. Covid only accentuated that.

Technology (but be careful not to allow auto-draft to become automatic) how to invite, inform, and engage in offertory, such as reusable “I gave online” cards

9. Year-end 2020 emphases to consider:

“K-shaped economic crisis”

First time givers, first time online

Discipleship of giving with online worship

CARES act provisions only this year

RMD giving now permanent

Appreciated asset giving

10. What would a maturing giver look like?  Not just more money, but growing in how they think about it, and the maturing of their discipleship around giving:

Searcy’s Generosity Ladder

First fruits (Abel, not Cain)

Disciplined, premeditated, percentage (including moving beyond tithing), three-legged stool, joyous (not a tax levied against your will, not a tip if you like the service, or only motivated by emotional need, “giving FROM not giving TO”)

Further reading:

The spirituality of fund-raising, Nouwen

Not Your Parent’s Offering Plate, Cliff Christopher

Contagious Generosity, Willard and Shepard

Giving and Getting in the Kingdom, Mark Dillon

Free online resources at www.generis.com/2020