



Why Do People Give?

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For some of us in the church, giving really is embodied in a concept, a belief, a philosophy called Stewardship. It is the answer to the question, "Why do you give?" For others, stewardship is a reason, although not the only one. And for still others, while they may agree with the basic concepts embodied by stewardship, it is, in and of itself, not so compelling.

Are there other reasons? Are they important? Are they compelling? Yes, I believe they are.

Why do we want to know what really motivates people to give? Because if we know why people give, we will know how to ask.

Stewardship

Lets start with Stewardship. Certainly, it is a motivating belief for many Christians; for some it is even a way of life. The concept itself is based on acknowledging that:

- All that we have is a gift from God.
- As stewards, we want to manage and wisely use these gifts.
- We use these gifts to honor God and to serve His will.
- We do this with gratitude and thanksgiving.

Those who embrace and live this philosophy can find a warm satisfaction in giving to the church. Many congregations base their financial appeals on teaching and advocating that their members embrace this stewardship message. In doing so, they are driven by the conviction that their members will see giving as a natural extension of the belief that stewardship calls them to give generously to the church, its programs and its ministry.

The two great commandments about giving

As we build on stewardship as a reason why people give, let's take our lead from Christ Our Lord. Jesus gives us two great commandments, as we read in Matthew 22:37-40, when He tells us to *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Our Lord is telling us why to give ... To love, honor and serve God. And to help and serve others by fulfilling their unmet needs.



Why Do People Give?

Page 2

Congregations would do well to base their appeals for financial support on these two great commandments, for they are at the very heart of our beliefs as followers of Christ. We understand them, we embrace them, and we believe them. They motivate us to give.

Pride of association

Let me suggest two more reasons. Dr. Lawrence Kolb, former chairman of the psychiatry department at Columbia University, was an expert on human motivations. He said that what people want most is simply “to be sought. We want to know that somebody wants us, cares about us, needs us, wants to listen to what we have to say.”

Dr. Dorothea Leighton, after a long study of underprivileged Indian tribes in North America, concluded that everyone “needs to feel that he is a worthwhile member of a worthwhile group.”

Why do people give? In his classic book, *Designs for Fund Raising*, Si Seymour builds on these two basic motivations identified by Drs. Kolb and Leighton. He tells us about pride of association, a logical corollary to wanting to feel needed, and to being a worthwhile member of a worthwhile group. Pride of association. People give more readily and more generously to causes if they are regular worshippers, if they are members of the Vestry, or if they are chairing the committee. They give more generously because they feel proud to be associated with the cause, because they are actively engaged with it, because they feel valued and needed.

What else influences why we give? Giving is influenced by the way we are asked: What method is being used? Who asked, and how. Learning what you need the money for. And knowing who else is also giving.

How we are asked

Perhaps you heard about a compelling need by watching a story on television. Americans gave hundreds of millions of dollars to support the Tsunami relief efforts, largely because of the word of mouth explanation of the great human need for our support. ... Or perhaps your daughter asked if you would give to a project at church that is important to her. ... Or the Junior Warden visited with your spouse and you and asked you to consider a multi-year pledge to a special program at the church.

Were you asked in person? By phone? In a letter? Or were you asked indirectly, seeing a message on a billboard or reading an article that inspired you to give. There are lots of ways to ask, and the best way is almost always in person. One thing is clear: we give a lot, or a little, or not at all, depending on how we are asked. So think carefully about selecting the best method for asking because it is a big influencer of why people give.



We give because of who asks us

Who asked? This too is important. It is best when we are asked in person by someone that we know, someone that we like and respect and feel close to. It might be my neighbor or my boss, the Rector or the Presiding Bishop, my wife or a community leader. Asking is optimized when we carefully match the prospective giver with the best person we can think of to ask him or her to give. As a prospective donor, I want to honor that person's gift request if I can; I want to strengthen our relationship; I want to share his or her interest in a cause that he cares about.

We give because of the need

Giving is influenced by what we are being asked to support. What, specifically, will my gift be used for? A fund to cover deferred remodeling of the church hall. ... Additional staff to grow our youth programs. ... Creating materials to use in evangelization. ... Expanding the music program.

What is the need? What will it cost? Who will it serve? How best can it be presented, in compelling and fact-specific terms? Balancing the budget or having a rainy day fund may not be bad reasons, but they are not very compelling for most people. We want to give to help and serve others, and to fulfill unmet needs. Answer these questions, whether they are directly asked or not, because this hugely influences why people give.

We are influenced by knowing who else is giving

We want to do our part. And we appreciate knowing that others are giving their part too. Organizations often publish the names of those who give, in part because people appreciate being acknowledged. But more, they do so because it inspires people to give when they know that their neighbors, their classmates, the other parishioners, their fellow committee members are also giving. Causes do well to give everyone the message that they are asking everyone to join in giving. Prospective donors are influenced by knowing that most others are helping as generous givers right along with them.

There are also a number of other basic motivations that are important to everybody, and that we do well to recognize as we design our fundraising appeals.

We follow leaders who have our confidence

Confidence is the key, for leaders and causes alike. Fundraising success is built on the shoulders of respected leaders. Happily, within your church there are probably scores of such people. Look to them for leadership. Ask them to lead, recognize them, and put your confidence in them.



We go with winning ideas

Many often think that others will rally around if you tell them that things are going badly. But, they won't. Support flows to promising programs and great ideas, rather than needy causes. It's not about budget relief or debt retirement. It's to triple the number of children in the summer camp program, to launch the Stephen Ministry program, or to enhance the music program. Put your focus on positive messages and great ideas.

We act under the pressure of deadlines

There has to be a fairly imminent time limit on whatever you wish to persuade people to do. Deadlines are your friends. Use them.

We strive for measurable and praiseworthy attainment

Causes need measurable objectives. If you really want people to get out there and play, there simply has to be a way to win. Set and announce your goals. Keep score. Tell me what it takes to win.

We want to imagine

Leave room for dreams. People can always fashion in their own hearts a far better rationale for their support than any of us could ever devise from a whole pile of facts and figures. We can get bogged down in the details, timelines, and implementation plans. It's all important stuff. But ultimately, fundraising success hinges on what people can imagine will happen with their support. Leave a little room for the imagination. Share your dreams, and help others to dream with you.

We relish earned reward and recognition

The pins awarded for long service, the diplomas, donor names on buildings and programs, recognition dinners, and other evidences of personal involvement in worthwhile groups all have a message. They help people to feel that they are an important member of a worthwhile group. Recognize and honor those who give. Even if they tell you it is not important that you do this. They may truly not seek such recognition, but nonetheless, such expressions of gratitude inspire meaningful achievements.

We seek unity through group action

Most of the parades for causes are not so much for the purpose of impressing those who watch as for unifying those who march. That is one of the great values of committees – they foster group action. We feel more confident to ask others to help when we know we



are not alone in the enterprise. When we know, for example, that all the Vestry members have made early reaching gift commitments we feel that we are on a winning team.

We repeat pleasurable experiences and vise-versa

As with good hospitality, if we have a good time, we don't want to leave. Make sure everybody has a good time. At the Commitment Sunday dinner. At the annual fund committee planning meeting. Make it fun to help.

How then to ask?

If these basic motivations are applied to giving, then we know the formula for successful fundraising. Si Seymour summarizes it thusly: "Any program seeking popular support should have top leadership, lofty purpose, a challenging goal, deadlines, a simple message, maximum involvement, an atmosphere of optimism, proper rewards, and, above all, a feeling of confidence and pride of association." That's why people give; that's what motivates people. So that's how to ask.

Love God, and serve others

In his book titled *Give to Live*, Douglas Lawson writes about the complex motives for giving. And then he adds, "In the final analysis, an act of generosity is an act of love." Even beyond Si Seymour's sage fundraising advice on giving, here is really why we give. Let's not ever lose sight of this basic human motivation.

Leo Tolstoy tells us, "The sole meaning of life is to serve others." For us, as Episcopalians and as Christians, we would amend Tolstoy to say that the meaning of life is to love God and to serve others." The two great commandments.

Mother Teresa says, "Our work brings people face-to-face with love."

If you want to know how to ask, know why people give!

Within the church, for many of us, it is that essential stewardship message. We give to honor God, with gratitude for all He has given us. And as Our Lord's two great commandments tell us, we give to support the ministries, the activities, the plans, the outreach of our local church. Because giving is built on wanting to help other. It is about caring for – indeed, showing love for – others.

At its core, that is why people give.