

Transforming Money into Ministry

A Fundraising Guide for St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Rationale:

For decades churches have encouraged parishioners to "Give to God," to express their gratitude to God for all we have received. Parishioners are asked to give money, to practice tithing, and to engage in "stewardship." This approach has resulted in churches continually on the brink of financial instability, of their cutting programs or staff, deferring maintenance, and dwelling on lack of resources instead of building God's kingdom.

Churches have lagged far behind other charitable institutions in not recognizing the changed circumstances around providing services and their effects on fundraising. Churches were once the principal institutions providing charitable, educational, health and welfare programs. Much of this responsibility has now been assumed by government or other not-for-profit institutions.

The growth in number and influence of secular providers of services previously provided by churches has pushed churches to the periphery. Hospitals, food stamps, homeless shelters, public schools and more have taken over church activities. As these institutions raise money to support their programs, churches have lost part of their *raison d'être*. The competing organizations (and they are competition) have adopted language and operations that do appeal to the new donor: providing clear descriptions of proposed programs, establishing defined metrics, evaluations and monitoring, and ensuring frequent progress reports to donors. They celebrate their accomplishments, calling attention to the number of people fed or housed, the medical facilities opened, the number of students enrolled. By communicating their commitment and their successes, they ensure a continued stream of financial underwriting.

In contrast, churches have a misplaced unwillingness to be seen "tooting one's horn." Misreading Jesus' admonition regarding giving alms in secret has led churches to think that they should never call attention to the good that they do. The Biblical charge to "let your light so shine" belies this approach. Churches are supposed to proclaim all that they are, and do, to let others know of God and God's purpose for mankind.

Financial support of the local church was once deemed a vital part of community participation. Peer pressure ensured that most people attended church on Sunday, when stores were closed and sporting events relegated to weekdays. Such universal attendance meant more donors. Today most people do not go to church; even those who are regular attendees may attend no more than half the time. Church plays a far less significant role in the lives of even the more devout, with implication on the level of their church donations.

At the same time, much of the church work previously done by volunteers is now, by necessity, done by paid staff, increasing the church budget commensurately.

More recent generations - the millennials, the Generations X and Y - are far more skeptical of unsubstantiated claims of effectiveness, asking for verified results, wanting to be sure that their contributions actually make a difference in people's lives. The old way of raising money in most churches, in effect saying, "Give us some of your money and we will do something with it," just

doesn't resonate with these donors. And these are the very people who we will depend upon in the future to ensure the financial health of our churches.

Among this younger cohort the word "stewardship" refers to care of the environment, not one's annual financial pledge to the church. We must be careful to speak the language of the uninitiated in our church communications if we are to reach these potential donors.

As governments impose taxes for welfare programs, as secular not-for-profits fundraise for myriad programs for the needy, potential church donors are beset on all sides for donations that once were given to the church for these activities. After paying taxes and contributing to various fundraising appeals, potential church donors may not see much need for significant financial commitment to church. Many churches still fall back on encouraging their parishioners to tithe to support the church, but also to support its many outreach programs. With the government or other groups now taking on that responsibility, and with the lowest tax rate now well above the tithe 10%, appeals to church members to tithe appear anachronistic and, frankly, somewhat scary. And who really understands "proportional giving"?

In light of the above, St. Paul's must jettison its old "give in gratitude to God" fundraising modus and adopt a new way of communicating with its parishioners regarding financial support. Why do people not give more to St. Paul's? Because they don't know what we accomplished with their last contribution and they don't know how we would build God's kingdom with another one.

Proposed Program:

To increase giving, St. Paul's should adopt a year-around program centered on the theme of Miracle on 4th Street: Transforming Money into Ministry. The two components of this program are:

Demonstrating what we do, and
Defining what we are called to do.

Demonstrating what we do entails a conscious, continual effort to celebrate the success of the programs of the church and to acknowledge and thank those who are responsible. Every committee or organization in the church should have its moment in the spotlight.

However, only if each committee or organization develops, at the beginning of the year, a written plan of action for the year, with deliverables, timetables, budget and ongoing metrics, can we know what they plan to achieve and whether or not they have done so. With money tight, the church cannot afford to underwrite programs that are ineffectual or haphazard. Every committee should be charged with contributing to the theme of Transforming, demonstrating how it supports the work of others in the church.

By recognizing the accomplishments of the church throughout the year, parishioners will gain a better understanding of the importance of St. Paul's to the community, to the needy, and to the spiritual growth of its members.

Defining what we are called to do requires the vestry and clergy, with input from other key people in the parish, to select a few over-riding initiatives from all that the church could do. Once these initiatives, limited preferably to fewer than five, are selected, they must be described

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in detail, with written plans, budgets, personnel assigned, evaluation criteria and timelines. Finally these priorities must be communicated clearly to the entire parish: the rationale for their selection, their cost/benefit, and projected outcomes. Regularly scheduled updates to the full parish must be incorporated into the plan.

Ideally all activities of the church would fall under one of five Focus Areas:

- Worship
- Christian Education
- Pastoral Care
- Parish Life
- Outreach

Organizing St. Paul's activities in this way provides clear accountability and coordinated effort. A member of the vestry would chair each of these areas; the remaining vestry members would be charged with oversight of management issues such as personnel, building and grounds, finance, etc. A key vestry role would be to ensure regular, ongoing and compelling accounts of successes in each of the four focus areas so that parishioners can share the excitement of progress toward goals.

When parishioners have a firm, clear understanding of how their money is being used and its impact, they will be far more willing to support future efforts.

The fundraising program: Once all this is in place, the fall fundraising program will build on the previous activities, culmination with an "I'll Do my Part" campaign. We will present firm goals, recent accomplishments and future programs. We will invite parishioners to be partners in this effort. We will institute processes to immediately acknowledge donations and find various ways to thank those who have joined in the partnership.

Implications:

While this approach would seem to be aimed at current parishioners, no fundraising program would be attempted without a major yearlong effort to bring in new donors. Therefore a new member ministry must be reinvigorated; leaflets and flyers about St. Paul's must be always in the pews and distributed at any event that might bring in newcomers (such as the silent movie or the ECU music recitals); enticing newspaper advertisements for St. Paul's should be developed; and secular programs appealing to a new audience should be developed (perhaps a First Friday Jazz at St. Paul's using the chapel).

This approach would appear to burden current clergy, staff and volunteers with additional duties. In fact, an initiative that is clear, narrowly conceived, coordinated, integrated and yearlong would actually result in less wasted time and effort. It would produce more effective and more rewarding results, both programmatically and financially.