

# A Telling Secret?

## Suppressing Generosity by Hiding Information and Keeping Secrets

PRESBYTERY OF JOHN CALVIN

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SHELL KNOB, MISSOURI

CHARLES SPENCER

EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER HEARTLAND PRESBYTERY

## Every Congregation Has Culture of Giving

- ▶ The concept was introduced by Robert Wood Lynn, former director of the Lily Endowment
- ▶ Bob identified that each church has a culture of giving
- ▶ He determined that these cultures impact giving and that some produce greater generosity than others
- ▶ The cultures can be changed

## Elements of a Congregation's Culture of Giving

- ▶ Openness and honesty vs. silence and secrecy
- ▶ Abundance vs. scarcity
- ▶ Trust & Accountability vs. distrust & doubt
- ▶ Stewardship as Spiritual Exercise vs. Administrative/Financial Necessity

Create a culture that promotes generosity!

- ▶ Openness and honesty vs. silence and secrecy

## What is the level of secrecy in your congregation?

- ▶ Do you publish every member's contributions by name and amount? Some congregations do.
- ▶ Does no one know ? One California congregation had an elaborate system of counting, involving numerous counters and code numbers, so that no one knows what another gives.
- ▶ In most one person knows or perhaps two or three.

## The Widow's Mite

Mark 12:41-44 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in every thing she had, all she had to live on."

# The issue isn't who knows

THE ISSUE IS THE PRICE WE PAY FOR THE SILENCE AND SECRECY

My transition from a pastor who didn't want to know to one who does

- ▶ What I mean by "know"
- ▶ Otterville, Knob Noster & Tipton
- ▶ First Union
- ▶ Do we attempt any other pastoral ministry with so little information?

## Why move away from the secrecy?

- ▶ The spiritual care of our members
- ▶ The pastoral care of our members
- ▶ The Christian witness of our members and congregations.
- ▶ Change the power dynamics and giving potential of a congregation
  - ▶ Experience of First Union

## How could we build comfort for a faithful money conversation?

- ▶ Start where the congregation is today
- ▶ Have the conversations they can have
- ▶ Take baby steps toward openness and transparency
  - ▶ Could we share how many give how much?
  - ▶ Could we thank donors without mentioning amounts?
- ▶ Share what could happen if the money started to move
  - ▶ Could we talk about what a tithe on our community's average income could do in mission and ministry?
- ▶ Start with thank you and celebration
  - ▶ Could individual thank you notes be signed by the whole stewardship/endowment/giving team?

## Say Thank You

- ▶ Possible opportunities to say thank you
  - ▶ In the newsletter, Announcements
  - ▶ Postcards/thank you notes
  - ▶ Be inclusive of all types of good stewards, those who give time, talent & treasure
  - ▶ Use the stewardship word, i.e. don't just thank the session members or Sunday school teachers for the time they gave, but for being good stewards of their time and teaching.

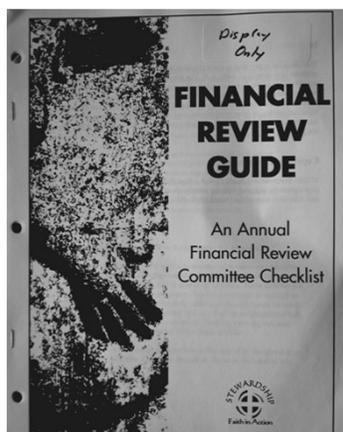
## Say Thank You

- ▶ Always say thank you in the financial giving statement
- ▶ Use the Visa Card model
  - ▶ Thank you
  - ▶ Here's where your money went
  - ▶ Here are opportunities that are coming up
- ▶ Be inclusive in your list: note accomplishments and opportunities for various age groups and interests, for program, mission and capital items, for presbytery, synod and General Assembly.

## Create a culture that promotes generosity

- ▶ Trust & Accountability vs. distrust & doubt

## Trust & Accountability vs. Distrust and Doubt



- ▶ Financial Review Guide
- ▶ Helps Sessions comply with Book of Order requirement for annual financial review
- ▶ Simple checklist format

## Trust & Accountability vs. Distrust and Doubt

### Nature of the Review

The purpose of the review is not to catch someone in the act of misusing or stealing funds. Though it may protect a congregation and treasurer from these things, the primary purpose of the review is to insure good financial procedures and to help the congregation have confidence and trust in the stewardship of their contributions. A financial review includes becoming familiar with every aspect of the church's financial procedures. The committee should evaluate the church's financial operations, reports, policies, and procedures. The committee should use interviews and firsthand observations to determine, to the best of its ability, the answers to the following questions. The answers received and the judgment of the committee will then affect the sample size of transactions and documentation selected for examination and independent verification.

The checklist is a way of identifying areas that are strong and those that need attention. An explanation of the items in the checklist appears at the end. It is expected that the checklist be used before the instructions and explanation section is consulted. This sequence speeds up the process and increases efficiency. The section on instructions and explanations is not designed to be exhaustive.

## Trust & Accountability vs. Distrust and Doubt

- ▶ What is the number one stewardship interpretation tool in most congregations?
- ▶ The budget
- ▶ Columns of numbers do not speak to most people
  - ▶ Many folks report their eyes glaze over
  - ▶ Others try to fix the numbers
- ▶ Congregations generally use fairly poor line item designations

## Trust & Accountability vs. Distrust and Doubt

- ▶ The narrative budget works better
- ▶ Determine areas of emphasis for your congregation
  - ▶ Christian Education
  - ▶ Worship
  - ▶ Nurture
  - ▶ Outreach
- ▶ What percentage of each line item is spent on each area of emphasis?
- ▶ Describe the work accomplished in each area

## Create a culture that promotes generosity

- ▶ Abundance vs. scarcity

## Abundance vs. Scarcity

- ▶ “The church has raised up a whole generation of leadership that understands faithfulness as eliminating expenses rather than expanding ministry and mission”
  - ▶ Lyle Schaller
- ▶ This yields the stewardship as budget balancing, cutting, eliminating, and reducing
- ▶ Good stewardship as doing church on the cheap

## Witness: Abundance vs. Scarcity

- ▶ “Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when his disciples saw it, they were angry and said, ‘Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.’ But Jesus aware of this, said to them, ‘Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me.’” Mt. 26:6-10

## Abundance vs. Scarcity

- ▶ People invest in success
- ▶ People give to success
- ▶ People respond to the pattern of giving/generosity modeled by the session/church as much as they respond to the message of the church
- ▶ Consider who is really served by the secrecy and the assertion of scarcity

## Create a culture that promotes generosity

- ▶ Stewardship as Spiritual Exercise vs. Administrative/Financial Necessity
- ▶ How do most churches approach stewardship?

## Treating Stewardship as Spiritual Exercises Changes the Culture in Most Churches

- ▶ It invites Stewardship Education
- ▶ It changes who wants to be involved
- ▶ It changes the nature and the timing of the messages
- ▶ It changes the receptiveness of the hearer

## Treating Stewardship as Spiritual Exercises Changes the Culture in Most Churches

- ▶ Stewardship is a spiritual matter – Matthew 6:21 “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”
  - ▶ The church tends to reverse this.
  - ▶ Your members' giving is one measure of their spiritual maturity.
  - ▶ The spiritual growth of your members is essential to effective stewardship.

## Treating Stewardship as Spiritual Exercises Changes the Culture in Most Churches

- ▶ Genesis 1:27 “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created.”
  - ▶ We know God to be generous, giving life and all that sustains it, giving the Christ for our salvation, and the Holy Spirit for our strength.
  - ▶ We are called, individually and corporately, to reflect the image of God, including God’s generosity to the world.

## Stewardship – Spiritual Exercise of Faithful Christian Witness

- ▶ II Cor. 9: 7b “For God loves a cheerful giver.”
  - ▶ We’ve often heard that, but why?
  - ▶ Does God need the money?
- ▶ II Cor. 9:8 “And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.”
- ▶ It is our witness of Christian faith, and the mission and ministry the giving sustains, and our confidence to give cheerfully, that pleases God.

## Stewardship – Spiritual Exercise of Pastoral Care

- ▶ John Mulder, former president of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, argued that members come to the church seeking values and standards for the living of their lives. A large portion of our lives is financial life, earning, investing & spending. Our silence leaves members without meaningful care for this significant portion of the lives.
- ▶ Proverbs 22:7b the borrower is the slave of the lender.
- ▶ The stewardship health of your members impacts their overall health, lifestyle, personal ministry, family relationships, etc.

## Treating Stewardship as Spiritual Exercise Changes the Culture in Most Churches

- ▶ The task becomes primarily about raising disciples, not raising the budget.