Clergy Conversations: Stewardship in Uncertain Times
With Rev. Mike Ward of GSB Fundraising
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Congregational “Open Stewardship” conversations

To encourage generosity during the pandemic, share positive stories, for example:
- Through a matching grant challenge, a church received the $750 matching amount in 42 minutes -- and more than $4,000 was raised a food ministry
- A parishioner told his pastor, “I’m not sure what’s going to happen with my job; there’s a good chance I will be furloughed or laid off. But what I do know is that it’s April, and I’m okay. For April, I’m going to double my giving to my congregation because I can, and I know others have experienced financial crisis. For now, I can make up for their giving.”
- A church received unsolicited gifts for pastor’s discretionary fund

Check out Mike’s blog -- https://gsbfundraising.com/category/news/ -- for more stories, information and resources.

Communication
- People join in generosity – need to let people know generosity is happening!
- Share the Impact/outcome of efforts, not how busy we are; tell the story of what happened because of the giving -- not just that “we did this,” but “it made a difference this way.” Tell stories about specific people. Telling about the busy-ness – “look at everything we did” – leaves people feeling exhausted. Telling the impact leaves people feeling hopeful and refreshed.
- Virtual gatherings don’t provide the same natural forum for sharing impact stories. We don’t hear the affirmations in the moment – so we need to share them in other ways/times. Tell the outcome/impact stories.
- People invest in things that make a difference.
  - How/where
    ▪ Weekly email, but add a direct mail piece at least monthly until we are back in person worship for at least two months (Include an envelope)
  - Tell the stories of Generosity happening in your place
  - Invite people to discover ways to grow in their generosity.

Historically, in recession, giving goes up proportionately to income.

Check in with top 10 donors in your congregation
- Not to be elitist; to help you to understand giving patterns and know what to expect.
- Start with pastoral care – how are you?
- Many people will share giving plans on their own.
- If they don’t, then ask – what they expect
- If things are hard – don’t assume they will reduce giving. Ask. “It sounds like things are difficult right now. What do you think that will do to your giving?” Don’t answer for them – ask them. Then encourage generosity. Dollar amount may decrease, but percentage might actually increase. They may feel shame and guilt for cutting back – help them reframe it. “You are giving fewer dollars, but it is now 3% of your giving rather than 2%.”
- Listen; don’t assume you know what they are going to say.
• Check in with church council members/church leadership
  o Check in first about how they are doing; discuss giving second.
  o Let people know they can grow in generosity even if they have to cut their giving for job loss or other reason
• Automatic giving—people want to know they keep control
  o Some churches are using Tithe.ly and seeing growth in online giving
  o Others are getting people signed up for automatic giving through their local banks’ bill pay service
    ▪ $50 incentive works
  o Ask someone who already gives automatically to provide a testimony about the steadiness of giving
    ▪ Join me culture here
• Exude abundance/not scarcity
  o Mike Ward has a book (“Abundance: Creating Cultures of Generosity”); good reading in times like this
  o Your ship can only sink once! Telling people the ship is sinking will NOT inspire them to give to you in the future!
• Have an offering time during online services—tell stories of how ministry is impacting lives in the church and community
• CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stimulus) Act
  o Don’t let an announcement that you’ve received a loan/grant be the first thing your congregations hears about financial generosity! That could be perceived as permission to not give.
  o Paycheck Protection Program grant/loan is not a replacement for congregational giving—let it fill the gap so that ministry can continue
  o Asking for part of individual stimulus checks: Lead with “I am going to tithe my stimulus check to the church. Will you join me and do the same?”

Quarterly reminders
• Improve how you say thank you
  o Call one donor per day to thank them for their giving
  o Call when someone increases giving during this time
  o Do more than a “transaction receipt” when sending out quarterly statements
    ▪ Put a personal note of thanks on what you send out at the end of the quarter

Donor advised funds – check you get comes from organization rather than individual – $110 billion in these funds nationally – these may be the major gift source for the future

Transition from crisis to longer term:
• Notice who hasn’t made a gift since face-to-face meetings stopped. Do I need to check in? May signal a need for pastoral care.
• Continue to send monthly letters sharing outcome stories and a mail-in envelope. Don’t assume that everyone gives online or by automatic giving.
• Acknowledge that not everyone is digital. Use the postal service to communicate.
• Pay attention. Watch response patterns (especially when they change giving habits). Find out what’s going on.
• Easier for people to stay current than to catch up, so follow up sooner than later. Don’t let too long go by before making a call.
• Stewardship for All Seasons—a 2-year journey with GSB – changing the culture of giving in your congregations
• Beginning the Generosity Journey – fall stewardship appeal & year end giving focus, providing templates, 6 Zoom sessions plus 8 videos to watch - $450/congregation cost (information will be shared on Conference website in the future)

**Information shared during Question & Answer Time:**

Pastoral Support is a great impact story right now – pastor is providing leadership and care during this crisis; the impact stories are about online worship services, pastoral care through crisis, etc.

Most banks and credit unions offers automatic bill pay as a free service – donor controls the amount; great opportunity for consistent giving

Celebrate those who are on fixed incomes – may be able to continue same level of support through this crisis

Recognize that people may not be asset-giving right now