

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 busyness – “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
 - Check in first about how they are doing; discuss giving second.
 - 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
 - Some churches are using Tithe.ly and seeing growth in online giving
 - Others are getting people signed up for automatic giving through their local banks' bill pay service
 - \$50 incentive works
 - Ask someone who already gives automatically to provide a testimony about the steadiness of giving
 - Join me culture here
- Exude abundance/not scarcity
 - Mike Ward has a book (“Abundance: Creating Cultures of Generosity”); good reading in times like this
 - 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
 - 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.
 - Paycheck Protection Program grant/loan is not a replacement for congregational giving—let it fill the gap so that ministry can continue
 - 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
 - Call one donor per day to thank them for their giving
 - Call when someone increases giving during this time
 - 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