

Raising Stewards in the Local Church

by Redina Kolaneci

Senior Fundraising & Stewardship Consultant

McConkey • Johnston **international • UK**

“Blessed is the individual who belongs to a church that faithfully teaches the biblical message of stewardship and offers its members opportunities to practice generosity.”

Having spent some time observing how different churches address stewardship issues, I have concluded that many church leaders do not have an ongoing strategy for growing Christian stewards. Often they talk about stewardship and encourage people to give to the church either when the church is in financial trouble or before an appeal for a building project, a mission activity or a youth worker.

When the financial trouble passes or the giving targets are reached, everyone seems to welcome the relief, and stewardship is forgotten until - well, the next financial crisis.

Why should your church have a strategy for promoting stewardship?

Firstly, developing a strategy to lead members of your congregation to greater commitments as Christian stewards will encourage them to responsible discipleship. Paul’s challenge to Corinthians still needs to be heard in churches today. *“But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”* (2. Cor. 8:7) By encouraging people to grow in the grace of giving and by providing opportunities for them to give to the church we are helping them to honour God with their wealth and to reach out to others.

Secondly, developing a stewardship strategy will enable you to increase the financial base of your church and release more resources for Kingdom work locally and abroad. Evangelistic outreach, youth and children ministries, community initiatives do not just happen – they are the result of prayer, planning and efforts from congregation members. In a similar way, increased giving can not happen without a plan for teaching stewardship principles to all age groups and providing opportunities for giving to church’s ministries regularly.

Another reason for developing a stewardship strategy is in order to exercise good corporate stewardship of the church's funds and providing the best environment for growth and discipleship for its members.

Understanding stewardship patterns in your church

The first step in developing a stewardship strategy is analysing the giving patterns of your church members during the last three or five years. You might want to ask the church treasurer or a member of the finance committee to prepare a short history of the designated and undesignated gifts to your church and discern whether real progress, in terms of gifts over inflation, has been made during the last five years.

In your analysis, focus on the years with unusual increases and declines, and determine the causes for the response on those years. It is important to remember that this kind of analysis is beneficial to the degree that you learn from it.

Two helpful resources for shaping a church's stewardship strategy are '*How to increase giving to your church*' by George Barna and '*Generous People – How to encourage vital stewardship*' by Eugene Grimm. Both books contain stewardship principles and practical ideas for encouraging faithful giving in the local church.

Essential elements of effective stewardship strategies

Here are some measurable aims to include in your strategy for effective stewardship:

- 1. To increase the number of persons giving a tithe or more than a tithe to the church.** Some research we conducted amongst evangelical Christians in the UK several years ago indicated that three out of ten evangelicals tithed to their local church. How does this statistic compare with the church you serve? Furthermore, how many people give in a committed way to the church monthly or weekly? How many of your congregation are 'spontaneous givers'?

If people in your church have not been challenged to commit themselves to tithing, or proportionate giving the results will invariably show that. People need to understand the importance of sacrificial giving to the church. So, what can you do to encourage people to give generously to the church?

- **Preach about giving.** Your congregation members need biblical guidance if they are to grow in the grace of giving. Opportunities abound for the minister to include examples of individuals and communities from the Old and the New Testament who used their giving as a concrete way to express their love and commitment to God.
- **Teach stewardship to all age groups.** Plan Bible studies on various aspects of stewardship. Use available educational

materials to raise awareness about stewardship issues amongst congregation members.

- **Use visual illustrations.** Prepare some stewardship posters with information about the church's ministries and the budget and place them in the church hall. Use stewardship reflections in the church bulletin. Prepare a board with pictures of activities in the church and mission projects emphasising how generous giving from church members has enabled these activities to happen.

2. To increase the number of congregation members giving to the church on a regular basis. Broadening the base of givers is one of the desired results of a stewardship strategy. However, enlisting more givers to the church is not an easy task and may require an increased awareness of what keeps a person from giving.

A review of the following question might help you identify some of the reasons for the lack of generous giving to your church:

- Are you teaching biblical principles of stewardship to your congregation members on a regular basis?
- Do your congregation members understand giving to be an expression of their role as stewards of God given resources?
- In your stewardship teaching, are presenting Christian giving as an integral part of discipleship, or an economic necessity to meet the needs of the church?
- Do your church members see their giving to the church budget as enabling the church to carry out its mission and ministries in the local community?
- Are there opportunities for congregation members to receive debt counselling advice or any teaching on how to manage their finances effectively?
- Are there attitudes or circumstances within the church that are making it difficult for some people to give?
- Are advice on tax effective giving and legacy giving easily available to your congregation members?

Some of the reasons for the member's lack of giving are personal. Other reasons may be related to your approach of stewardship or the way the treasurer presents the annual budget. Without evaluating your response and the responses of the congregation members to the above-mentioned questions, the situation is not likely to change.

3. To increase the number of people growing their regular giving to the church. Ron Snider in his book '*Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*' shares about how he and his wife decided to increase their

giving every year. He referred to growth experiences in their attitude towards giving and the percentages they gave.

Many Christians have taken up seriously the challenge that Snider presented in his book and adopted plans for increasing the percentage they gave annually. However, many more people in our churches still need to grow in their giving.

On one hand, standing orders have made it easy for people to give regularly. On the other when people use standing orders, they are less likely to review their giving and increase the amounts they give in proportions with the financial blessings they have received. An effective stewardship strategy should contain challenges and opportunities for growth in giving.

- 4. To provide a comprehensive stewardship emphasis.** When stewardship is understood as more than (but including) raising funds for the church's mission and ministries, other aspects of stewardship should be emphasised. Such events as: money management workshop, or time management and gift assessment seminars, spiritual growth retreats or Volunteer Open Days to learn about opportunities of getting involved in the church's ministry in the community should become important to the spiritual development of Christian stewards.

These events can equip church members to live confidently in our materialistic society. They will become better stewards of their time, skills and money as well as their giving to the church.

If you want to increase giving to your church and are looking for fresh biblical perspectives and new ways of communicating about giving with your congregation then drop us a line at: info@mconkey-johnston.co.uk