Mission

The Lake Institute on Faith & Giving exists to serve the public good by exploring the multiple connections between philanthropy and faith within the major religious traditions.

Resources

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Seminar: Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity. Learn: (1) how to talk about money with theological integrity, (2) how to extend the practice of pastoral care to care for donors, (3) how to create an organizational climate of fiscal transparency and accountability.

What We’re Reading


Giving USA 2011

Why Flat May Be Up

According to the latest estimates from Giving USA 2011, released just this month, giving to religion was flat last year, with an increase of just 0.8% - actually a decrease when adjusted for inflation (-0.8%). By contrast, total charitable giving increased by 3.8% in 2010 (2.1% adjusted for inflation). Cumulatively, religious giving was relatively static during the Great Recession, decreasing by 2.1% in inflation adjusted dollars from 2008 to 2010, while overall charitable giving decreased by 4.2% in inflation adjusted dollars over the same period. It should be noted that since 1970, giving to religion has increased more slowly than the average annual rate of inflation: 4.49% inflation vs. 1.6% religious giving, adjusted for inflation.

And according to a recent Hartford Seminary study, 57% of the surveyed congregations indicated their income declined "a little" or "a lot." Indeed, the financial challenges confronting congregations have been some time in the making: in 2000, 31% of American congregations reported their financial health as "excellent;" by 2005 that number was 24%, by 2008 it was 19%, and in 2010, it was 14%.

The View from the Pew

Why do people give to their local congregation?

In a 2010 study of two congregations (Evangelical and Mainline Protestant), two different perceptions of giving transformed the mundane act of giving into something sacred. In the Evangelical congregation, the act of giving itself - the giving of God's money - was sacred; the focus was on the individual and a personal spiritual life. In the Mainline congregation, what the money did - the difference it made in accomplishing God's work - was sacred, reflecting a more utilitarian focus on the outcome of giving.
A soon-to-be-published survey by Luther Seminary's Center for Stewardship Leaders of over one thousand Lutherans listed three factors as of primary influence in church giving: (1) Giving out of gratitude for what God has given them; (2) The belief that their giving will make a difference in people's lives; (3) The desire to do their part.

A 2009 survey by the Christian Reformed Church noted a strong correlation between spiritual practices and generous giving. Households practicing daily prayer and daily personal devotions gave a median of 7% to their church, while households who do not regularly practice these disciplines gave a median of 4.2% of their income.

What wisdom do these studies distill for religious practitioners?

The first step clergy should take is to survey their congregation’s pyramid of giving. Clergy need to know who gives what and the personal profile of their top tier givers.

If congregations are going to compete for the religious donor’s dollars, they must learn to tell their story with passion and a touch of panache.

With money tight, givers are increasingly discreet in their charitable giving; they want to know the difference their gift will make in a particular mission before they decide to give.

Faith-based communities can no longer rely on traditional funding patterns to meet their financial needs; once-a-year fundraising drives will no longer pay the bills.

Religious leaders must dare to talk more about money and less about giving. Describe stewardship as the faithful use of the resources with which we have been blessed and less about stewardship as fundraising.

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"Eye-opening, challenging, and some of the best continuing education I've had in 25 years of ministry."

John R. Woodall
Sr. Pastor, Westwood United Methodist Church
Los Angeles, California

Creating Congregational Cultures
of Generosity

a seminar offered by the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving
For more information, visit our website