20 Ways to Leave Your Love

Marketing Endowment Funds in Your Congregation
A *Travel Free Learning* Article

By
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Two weeks ago the Travel Free Learning Article and Dialogue was around the topic of congregational endowment funds. I mostly wrote and talked about setting up the funds. The article this week assumes you have created the endowment funds. I suggest twenty ways to begin and continue a conversation with your congregation about helping to build the endowments with estate gifts.

1. Develop and distribute a brochure. An endowment funds brochure is the foundation of your marketing strategy. Unfortunately for most congregations, it is the only strategy they use. Include in the brochure the reasons for endowment funds in the congregation, the past and present benefits to the church of any current funds, and a vision of how the funds will enhance the church's mission in the future. A statement of support and encouragement from the senior minister, a listing of current funds, a story from a person committed to funding endowments, and contact information are also needed.

2. Schedule an annual wills emphasis. At the same time every year, in January, around April 15, or another appropriate time, emphasize the necessity of an up-to-date will for each household in the congregation. A Christian's will provides an opportunity for people to establish a lasting witness of their faith in Christ. Schedule a will-making seminar that will prepare congregants to create or update their wills with their own legal advisors.

3. List resource professionals in the congregation. Many members have not made their wills and some do not have an attorney. Assist them by developing a list of resource professionals in your congregation or community who have agreed to provide an initial no-cost interview to assess the work needed to be done and who will provide a price for their work. In no way should the church be a party to giving legal advice through subsidized fees, or otherwise.

4. Preach and teach on the stewardship of assets. Worship and sermon planning should include teaching and preaching on the stewardship of assets. The senior minister is chief steward of the congregation's mission in the world. Calling for faithful support in this life and beyond is a call to discipleship and maturity in Christ.

5. Acknowledge publicly all estate gifts. As a part of the normal communication flow, keep the congregation informed of gifts received from members' estates. In some cases, the deceased will have made a request for the gift to be anonymous. Still, acknowledge the gift amount and its designation, if any. Remind congregants that they too can leave a legacy of faith and ministry beyond their lifetimes.

6. Provide for Named Funds. Develop procedures for the establishment of named funds. These are funds that are named for donors or others they choose, i.e., their family members. It is wise to establish a minimum gift amount for named funds that are accounted for separately and can be designated for specific purposes consistent with the mission of the church. All such funds can be co-mingled for investment purposes.

7. Explain how a member can endow their annual giving amount. Members can endow their annual giving by giving an amount equal to 20 times their annual gifts. A fund of $20,000.00, created with gifts during a lifetime and/or completed with an estate gift, will distribute $1,000.00 per year in perpetuity. With competent investment management, the annual distribution will grow to keep pace with inflation. Combine this strategy with a named fund opportunity.

8. Schedule a retirement planning seminar. The largest demographic group in our nation is beginning its retirement years. The target group for this seminar is the baby boomer generation. Many in this generation will be recipients of the largest transfer of wealth from one generation to another over the next 20 years! Help them see how careful planning will enrich their retirement years and their gifts of a lifetime to the congregation.

9. Plan Events. Endowment Sunday, Memorial Day, All Saints' Day. Use special days on the civic and church calendars as times for drawing attention to the stewardship ministry of the endowment funds. A special Endowment Sunday can become a regular event.

10. Consider donor recognition strategies, such as a premium or a legacy society. In ways that are appropriate to the congregation, create recognition actions, such as a legacy society or heritage fellowship for all members who inform the congregation that the church is included in their estate plan. Give a small item to remind the members of their decision. Consider a dinner event annually for these members and invite those members interested in becoming members of the group.

11. Write newsletter, or e-news, articles. Use the church's regular news media for articles on how distributions from endowment funds are sustaining programs, ministries and mission activities. Highlight the personal involvement of members and those they serve.

12. Promote memorial gifts. Regular publication of gifts received in honor of or in memory of others will stimulate interest in more significant gifts to endowment where these gifts go to current or new endowment funds.

13. Publish frequently asked questions. Congregants will benefit from regular reminders of the basic facts of endowment funds in the congregation. For example,

- Who owns the endowment funds?
- Who is in charge of the endowment funds?
- How does money get into an endowment fund?
- What happens to money once in an endowment fund?
- How does money come out of an endowment fund?

14. Offer sample bequest language. In accordance with the laws of the state the church is in, publish sample language for a bequest to the church. Strongly encourage members to consult their own legal advisor.

15. Schedule an annual estate planning seminar. An estate planning seminar can benefit senior adults and their children. Issues of estate management, conservation and distribution should be covered. Often charitable trusts are used for addressing these estate issues. Competent legal and financial professionals may be available from denominational agencies to lead the seminar.

16. Ask members to tithe their estate value. A bequest could provide that 10% of one's estate, after expenses and debts are paid, go to the person's church. Another method is to stipulate that all or a portion of the residue (what is left after expenses, debt payments and other bequests) go to one's church.

17. Mail an annual report. Mailing an annual report summarizing the receipts to, investment management results of, and distributions from endowment funds is very helpful. Competence, effectiveness, credibility and trust are key components of successful endowment marketing.

18. Develop a speaker's bureau. Enlist and train a group of speakers from the endowment board or trustees to regularly visit the church's small groups to give encouraging reports on the endowment funds.

19. Publicize types of gifts possible. Regularly inform the congregation of the vast array of gifts that are possible to the endowment funds. Current gifts can include cash, financial assets, personal and real property. Life income gifts include gift annuities, various charitable trusts and life estates. Gifts deferred to after one's death include bequests, beneficiary designations and trusts. Be certain that a comprehensive gift acceptance policy is in place to protect donors and the church.

20. Utilize your web site. Provide information on the church's web site about the church's endowment funds. Much of the brochure can be reproduced. Also available are turn-key planned giving web sites that can be linked to the church's site. These sites provide regularly updated information and examples regarding giving that can be channeled to endowment funds. The cost is negligible given the long-range benefit to the church's mission.

Important Things to Know

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