



Convictions

For Growing Generosity in Your Congregation

A Travel Free Learning Article

By

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Conviction is a fixed or firm belief. Success in growing generosity in your congregation is limited by or empowered by your fixed or firm beliefs; by your convictions. Convictions have great influence on whether a congregation will reduce ministry, struggle to maintain ministry, or expand ministry in times when the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of people are soaring.

A congregation's ministers and lay leaders are the stewards of congregational convictions. How leaders teach, write, listen, preach, plan and act portrays the convictions that they hold. And it is their acted upon, convictions that result in reducing, maintaining or expanding ministry.

What would ministry be like today in your congregation if the following convictions were held, acted upon and celebrated?

1. Your Church has no needs. People have needs. Your church has solutions. This is probably the hardest conviction to accept, that the congregation as an institution, the church, has no needs. We all have financial obligations as individuals and families, and the church is no different. The church does need to pay the gas bill in order to have a warm sanctuary for worship. There are other real costs as well.

It is also true that churches have ministries that meet or solve the needs of people. The church offers its solutions in the name of Christ as Good News to a fearful and hurting humanity. To ask for contributions so that the church can pay its bills is the weakest appeal you can give. To ask for contributions so that the church can continue and even expand its witness and service is one of the strongest possible appeals you can give, especially if you include an illustrative story.

When the stress (and fear) of not having enough money appears, and it will appear, your best appeal is for money that enables the congregation to carry out its God-given mission. Putting the focus of your appeal on the survival of the church as an institution only hastens its demise.

2. There is more than enough money for every good deed that God calls to be done. This is also a difficult conviction to hold and practice. Basically it calls for an answer to the question of whether we live in a world of scarcity or one of abundance. Walter Bruggemann has written an essay entitled "The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity." In it Bruggemann points out again and again the generosity of God who is ever creating an abundance from which we can live and do ministry in the name of Christ. You will do well to click the link and read, [The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity](#)

3. Regular giving is a spiritual discipline that benefits first and foremost the giver. It is more blessed to give than to receive. And receiving is not a bad thing. Receiving is a good thing for it provides people with comfort, sustenance, safety, education, health, competence, and confidence. What we allow ourselves to receive very often influences what we permit ourselves to give. Having received the gift of the Holy Spirit, how can we not benefit from generous giving?

Giving as a spiritual discipline can be like walking a giving path. The giving path is a parallel track to one's spiritual journey. Progress on one track is mirrored in progress on the other track. The two tracks work together to enable forward movement toward God. Spiritual wisdom fuels giving and giving produces even more maturity in Christ. And the movement is achievable because it occurs one step at a time in the development of mind, heart and soul.

4. Christians are more God's child and they are more like Christ when they give. If we are created in the image of God, then we should reflect characteristics of God. The creative drive is one of those characteristics most often mentioned. What if we have some spiritual DNA inherited from our Creator and this spiritual DNA contains a generosity gene. Living in the image of God means being generous. Living in the Way of Jesus, means walking two miles when only one is required; it means forgiving someone so many times that you lose count; it means not considering that anything is your own, but that all you have is shared gladly and generously with anyone who has need.

5. Congregations as institutions may survive but as movements they will thrive. The pastor and church administrator wanted a new approach for the fall stewardship emphasis. They accepted the concepts of generosity and planned increases in members' giving for their new approach. Letters segmented by life stage were mailed to the congregation. Generosity was included in the program theme. A logo of an open hand was used on banners and all correspondence. The first two of three generosity sermons dealt with generosity and stewardship as spiritual practices.

Then the third and final sermon was preached and out it came, "Folks, our budget next year is four million dollars and that is a lot of money. We are going to have to give more and begin to tithe as the Bible says we should if we are going to reach that goal." Sometimes the stress of institutional reality is too much and the old, yet familiar patterns are more comfortable. Will the church survive? Yes. But they could have thrived with an external focus on the outcomes they were trying to achieve rather than an internal stare at the budget headlines.

6. Asking for money is ministry that enables even more ministry. We often get hung up on the activity of "asking for money. If giving benefits the giver and it does, then why not ask people to engage in an activity that benefits them? We have no problem asking people to exercise if they need to, to eat healthy, to read a good book, to see an inspiring movie, to pray without ceasing, to listen to great music, or to increase their Biblical knowledge. Could it be that we have mixed emotions when it comes to money? Could it be that we are afraid of money, not just the asking?

Money is a created thing, an idea really, but it is a creature nevertheless. And as a created thing, it is subject to the same spiritual dynamics as all other created things. God owns it. We manage it. And our management (stewardship) is best accomplished when money goes to where it can do the most good: for the Kingdom, for others and for us managers also.

If we are not asking for money, then we are not hoping to get much done in ministry. And we certainly are not helping people to break free from the idol worship of materialism and become the faithful managers (stewards) they are called to be. If you want to really minister to your members, then ask them to give money, to give time, to give their unique contribution to the mission of your congregation. They will be blessed if you embrace the vital ministry of asking.

7. People will give generously to a spiritual vision connected to human need. Last year the church had its first mission offering. The members gave \$30,000 and that was a very good result, given it was the first offering of its kind beyond giving to denominational missions offerings. But this year, two opportunities appeared that seemed way beyond the church's ability to respond and the needs were now. So a process began that resulted in attempting to raise \$300,000 in the second year of a new missions offering.

The church gave over \$270,000 this year, nine times more than last year. The vision they gave to was "HOPE;" hope that would meet the spiritual and physical needs of people.

8. Wealth properly used is never stored, parked or hoarded; it is always in motion. In *The Soul of Money* Lynne Twist writes that money is like water, it needs to flow and be directed in loving and not lustful ways. “Money is a current, a carrier, a conduit for our intentions. Money carries the imprimatur of our soul”. Twist challenges people to be known for what they allocate, not what they accumulate.

The rich young ruler could not give up his wealth to the poor and follow Jesus. The rich farmer could only think of the option to build bigger barns in which to hoard his windfall harvest. The rich man feasted at a banquet every day and did not give consideration to Lazarus who was dying at his door. These folk would die taking none of their wealth with them. In fact, they were already dead because they had chosen to remove themselves from life’s true wealth which is found in right relationships with God and with people.

9. A congregation with converted wallets and purses can change their world. Fifty years ago it was not uncommon for congregations to give 50 percent of their contributions to missions. Today many congregations struggle to give 10 percent of contributions to missions. Also, fifty years ago members’ homes were much smaller, cars were more functional than stylish and luxurious and clothing was practical and long lasting. With all of our getting in the last half century, did we gain any wisdom?

The church in North America has contributed to its own funding crisis by appealing to people as consumers of religious experience rather than as people in need of a savior and a cause. The unwritten contract that churches have adopted in the hopes of attracting a crowd has required a costly infrastructure in buildings and staff. The church house is also bigger than it was. The mission giving percentage is down because churches’ “fixed costs” are up. It’s the American way, but not necessarily the Kingdom way. Once the church finds its way to simplicity and generosity, then it will be able to lead its people there as well.

10. God’s Kingdom has an unshakeable economy built on giving ourselves away. We find ourselves in a culture that celebrates the go-getter. Our model is the early bird who is up and out looking for the next big deal, the profit, the score, the ten to one or twenty to one or gazillion to one leverage that will make him or her rich. If a rich person can’t make it in our society, then who can? And right now we are waiting to see if our highly leveraged economy will survive.

So we have to decide, do we live in society’s world or do we live in the world of God’s kingdom where it is the go-giver who is cheered, emulated, listened to and remembered? Many churches, church leaders and church members have not yet answered this question. And yet the answer is available; God has left not only clues but also big bold signs for us to see. Life is not measured in how much we have. Life is found in God and in being a neighbor to others.

Your Action

These 10 convictions if acted upon can create a flowing river of funding for the witness and ministries of your church. These 10 convictions also point to potential barriers to growing generosity in your congregation. Read the list again and ask, “Is this where we are stuck? Is this a barrier for me, the staff, our leaders, or the congregation?”

Identify your number one barrier among any you identify and then take advantage of a free 22 minute phone conversation with Ruben Swint about how to address that barrier and move beyond it.

Important Things to Know



Ruben Swint is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership. He leads the Funding Ministry Team whose web site is www.FundingMinistry.org. In this role he focuses on capital campaigns, planned giving, and annual giving for congregations, denominations, and parachurch organizations. Email Ruben for a free subscription to **The Generosity Letter** monthly e-zine at RSwint@TheColumbiaPartnership.org.

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