

“Looking at Our Response”

Rev. Philip Reitz
Stewardship Specialist Region 1

Your congregation can measure the effectiveness of your annual stewardship response method. You can discover who benefited from your appeal? What were its true costs? Yet, besides funding your mission for another year, what else did you hope to accomplish? How did the Holy Spirit surprise you through your stewardship efforts?

Here are four areas in which to better understand your stewardship financial response ministry.

- **Audience**

- On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the highest), how well did you communicate with these audiences:

Children / Youth / Retired members / Non-contributing members / Leaders / Single members / New members / Visitors / Women / Unemployed members / Men / Other.

- What group(s) of members did your response program most appeal to?

- **Spiritual Quotient**

- What words or phrases describe the spiritual good that came to people through your program?

- What got added to your faith life because of the program?

- Who were the spiritual leaders during the program?

- On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the highest), rate the capacity of the financial response method you used to bring spiritual benefits to your congregation?

- **Emotional Quotient**

- Name the three most prevalent emotions you personally experienced during the program?

- Name the three most prevalent emotions congregation members felt during the program?

- What are the positive feelings you hoped would come from the method you used?

- How did the response method you used provide the context in which emotions could be expressed?

- **Energy In and Energy Out**

- Estimate the number of person-hours contributed to the program?

- On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the highest), rate the amount of energy invested in the program?

- What parts of the program re-energized you, added power to your leadership or motivated you?

- Where do you think your congregation members have been re-energized or motivated through the program?

Just as
iron
sharpen
iron,
friends
sharpen
the
minds of
each
other.

Proverbs 27:17
(CEV)

In addition, consider how the Bible, through story and sharing of faith, provides ways to discover what happens when people are generous givers, and how leaders lead in a time of change and scarcity. For example, after reading Luke 12 or the Sermon on the Mount, ask your leaders how your financial response program took this scripture into account?

It is worth doing your homework on the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the financial response process your congregation uses. The above notes are excerpted from “Looking At Our Response”, which along with 25 other tools is part of the “Stewardship Assessment Tool” kit published by the Division for Congregational Ministries of the ELCA. Check with Philip Reitz if you’d like further information on this kit.



Hold The Phone”

Rev. Philip Reitz
Stewardship Specialist, Region 1

This conversation is with Pastor Julie Josund who serves Calvary Lutheran in Seattle, Washington. A once thriving urban congregation, Calvary’s ministry future was in question when Pastor Josund arrived. Average worship attendance has grown from 60 in 1996 to over 90 today. During the same time regular giving by members has grown from \$63,000 to over \$110,000.

Philip Reitz (PR): What were people talking about at Calvary when you arrived?

Julie Josund (JJ): ‘Was it time to close?’ was the question. The bishop had presented four options. Two involved closing and two involved risking energy and resources toward a future in ministry. From being on the brink and in survival mode they decided to ‘reach out and reach together’ in ministry to the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle.

PR: What led the congregation to ask for advice on ‘stewardship?’

JJ: When the congregation decided to take a stand and grow, a lot of energy went into outreach and worship. We doubled worship attendance and our offerings grew but not enough to give us a step up. Stewardship was an item on our leadership agenda that just didn’t get done.

Each month we'd talk about it and we expressed good intentions which didn't go anywhere. In a way stewardship seemed overwhelming and we didn't know where to start. Finally we just got tired of seeing it on our agenda every month with nothing to show for it.

PR: I remember my first meeting with you and Janet to talk about your stewardship ministry. What was helpful to you in that process?

JJ: Two things stand out. First, that there were options for our congregation. We didn't have to invent a program but could use the work of others. Second, you encouraged us to take a step, do something and learn as we went along. That was the 'push' we needed.

PR: You chose Consecration Sunday, why?

JJ: Consecration Sunday made the challenge manageable for us. The materials spelled out the goal of growing our faith. It talked about financial stewardship as an act of worship, where we are growing and have good feelings. Also, the results that others have had with Consecration Sunday played into our decision.

PR: Your team seemed to enjoy working with the program? What were the best parts?

JJ: Our leaders did have fun. They enjoyed working on the letters, the dinners, and the 'temple talks' but the best part of our efforts was a new sense of freedom in our ministry.

PR: Freedom?

JJ: The results, which were very encouraging, gave our congregation a new awareness that we can do more than survive. We can thrive in mission in our place! Perhaps the biggest 'aha' moment came when the congregation saw the 'grow one step' chart that reported on current giving in the congregation. People were surprised and some embarrassed because they hadn't really thought about giving in the context of daily living and their checkbook. We learned an awful lot about ourselves! And we were also motivated. 37 giving units increased their estimate of giving over the previous year. That increase amounted to a \$19,000 and 17% bump for our ministry. In our context that was very good news!

PR: You also added another part to your program.

JJ: Since we have many older people on fixed incomes we heard some concern that Consecration Sunday focused on current income giving. People on fixed incomes were feeling left out even though some did increase their plan for giving. We listened and as a part of 'Life Skills for Seniors' series we invited Rev. Arlyn

Saathoff, from the ELCA Foundation, to lead a study on wills and planned giving. That gave our seniors a sense that they are a vital part of our ministry now and into the future.

We have changed a lot in the last five years as a congregation, but I think the real joy is to sense the spirit that we have been freed from the survival mentality of the past and have a new sense of freedom to follow our mission into tomorrow.



Money Talk

- The average person in the US now carries debt equivalent to one year of disposable income, paying 14% of that income for interest.
- The top 20% of US wage earners now carry debt equivalent to 120% of their annual disposable income. Most of this is consumer debt.
- Data shows that young people graduate from college with debt approximating at least one year of disposable income.

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