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Financial Commitment Programs That Work

This month we look at financial commitment programs. It is very helpful to select the one you plan to use four to six months before you plan to use it. This lessens the anxiety level for the stewardship committee and lets you plan formation activities that support this work in the months leading up to it. It gives you time to be creative, well-organized, and even have fun doing it. The following outline provides some basic essentials to help you choose.

Goals to be Achieved by a Commitment Program

- Provide a conversion opportunity. This will most likely involve a confrontation with or comparison of the messages of the culture versus the invitations from the Kingdom of God. This is the most important goal.
- Provide a "round trip" for the commitment device. In other words, deliver a commitment device (pledge card) to members of the congregation and get it back to church leadership.
- Provide an estimate of income that enables church leadership to plan activities for the coming year.

Methods that Work Well

- Every Member Canvass - Canvassers call upon prospective givers/pledgers, talk about the mission and work of the congregation, its role in the lives of those being visited, the canvasser's own witness, and invite a financial commitment. Twenty years ago this was the most effective method. Today it is less so, but still a powerful strategy. Training for canvassers required.
- Stewardship Banquet, Festive Meal, Deuteronomy Feast - Whatever you call it, it is a meal for the congregation complete with special activities for the children, an engaging speaker, time for witness to the value of the mission and ministry of the congregation in the lives of members and the community, and an invitation to give as God is calling us to give. Training for table hosts required.
- Cottage Meetings - These small group meetings in members' homes provide opportunities for conversations about the work God is calling the congregation to do. They are an excellent idea for congregations engaged in vision/mission review and future planning. They can be disastrous for congregations experiencing conflict. Training for hosts and discussion leaders required.
- Personal Notes - Think of it as an every member canvass on personal stationery. These are personal notes, written by members of the congregation to other members, not to be confused with the letter composed by the rector or senior warden mail merged through the computer (or, even worse, copied on the copier) and sent to everyone. Letter writers tell why they give and ask others to respond to their own call from God. Training for letter writers is critical.

Best Kept Secret to Commitment Program Success - Worker Training Includes

- Opportunity to Engage the Gospel - a specific type of Bible study
- Opportunity for workers to examine their own reasons for giving to God
- Opportunity to reflect on what it is that God would have them do
- A challenge to do what it is God would have them do
- Opportunity to make their commitment first

Other Secrets to Success

- Design commitment programs that further the vision, mission, and plan for your congregation.
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- Use a different commitment program every year.
- Teach something new every year.
- Write a new stewardship prayer EVERY YEAR.
- The best materials are those that your congregation invents for itself. This includes the commitment device (pledge card).
- When recruiting a committee, recruit skills, not just people you think will say "yes."

Resources

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