

Stewardship: Even through Uncertain Times

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4: 6-7)

When we face tough times, it can become very difficult to honestly look to the Lord in a spirit of thanksgiving. Are we being honest with God when we really don't feel like giving thanks to Him and yet “kinda go through the motions?” As good stewards of God's creation, we are challenged at every step of the way to, indeed, search for God's gifts ever present in our lives. Sincerely looking for reasons to be grateful can help us to get through these times. Scripture reminds us that, *“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of the deer, he enables me to go on the heights.”* (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

How beautiful these words are for us today. Indeed, gratitude nourishes our spiritual lives. It is a sign that we



are growing in other positive attitudes like trust, contentment, and humility. Gratitude can be an indicator of how strong our relationship is with God. In medical terms, it is the antidote for worry, anxiety, and greed in our lives. When we are thankful for that which we have been so graciously given, then we don't worry about that for which we are anxious.

We cannot appreciate and depreciate our gifts in the same breath. And isn't it interesting, when we focus on appreciating our giftedness, how much more pours into our lives?

My friends, we are the stewards of creation—an abundant creation, given us by an abundant God, in whose image we are made. Let us embrace our abundance with thanksgiving and sow the seeds of generosity. How better to affirm our identity as God's children even in apparently difficult times.

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Fund-raising, Even Today?—Especially Today!

During economic uncertainty and recessions, we may often feel as though all of our plans need to change—that our strategies to provide for those less fortunate in our organizations and congregations must also change. Some organizations may even feel pressured to change their mission, “at least until things get better.” Churches often stop planning and disengage from their building initiatives, often sacrificing months, if not years of planning, excitement, and momentum towards their goal to expand the church and build ministry. “That's not how to position your organization for success,” says Mr. José De Jesús, president of Millennium Consulting, a Kirby-Smith Associates firm dedicated to successful church fund-raising since 1938.

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What should we be doing to weather the storm?

- Don't start cutting back on staff and services—no one gives to a sinking ship.
- Stress the mission, the mission and, oh yes, the mission.
- Concentrate on developing a “top of mind” awareness about your organization.

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The state of our economy can be the greatest teacher and reminder to us of our values and priorities not just as consumers, but more importantly as the children of God. If our economy is not well, is it because there is a shortage of money? Is there a shortage of food? Are there no jobs left for us fill? Is there a shortage of homes in which to live?

There is, however, a great shortage. A shortage of certainty in how God will care for us as he always does. We hunger to see in ourselves the courage to be even more generous than we've ever been. It is during these times of uncertainty that our willingness to be like Jesus (recall that Stewardship is a measure of our discipleship with the Lord) is called forth. What a wonderful opportunity the Lord has given us.

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Marketing statistics teach us that successful businesses must develop and maintain in the minds of their customers a “top of mind awareness” about their products in order for customers to continuously purchase and invest in their products.

The same is true about our donors and supporters. Successful Development and Advancement is about advancing not only the mission but also advancing the priority of the organization in the minds of its donors and constituencies. Unfortunately, today's non-profit organizations and religious institutions face very different prospects and constituents. Like consumers, marketing research teaches us that our prospects are:

- **Skeptical**—Why? Because dishonesty seems to have inundated big business and even some non-profit and religious institutions.
- **Cautious with their Commitments**—They want us to “show them” a proven track record of success. For religious institutions, we advise churches to focus on the human aspect of their project as much as possible. Not that bricks and mortar aren't important. Remember, people give because of people—to people and for people.
- **Not Interested in Sales Pressure**—Think how long a piece of junk mail lasts in your hand before it is tossed in the garbage. (The average is 7 seconds, by the way.) How long do you give the telemarketer who calls you at 6 p.m.? Once you have the attention of your prospect, make sure you thank, educate, involve, and solicit. Yes, in that order.
- **Families are busy**—Short-term commitments are the answer to help families become involved in your organization or church. Help them to feel good about what they do by recognizing them and letting them know that their work is indispensable. Always tie their time and talent to improving the lives of others. That is the greatest investment we can make.
- **Confused**—We are a society of choices. When we go to supermarkets, we want 20 choices for milk and 15 choices for eggs. All of these choices, as nice they may seem, can also confuse us. Advertisers are allotted 60 seconds to brainwash us into buying a certain product. Often the greatest minds are recruited to put together a 60-second spot to get us to think of their product first. For example, when you have stomach discomfort, how do you spell relief? Were ROLAIDS successful with their top of mind awareness campaign?

That's why today, it is so important for faith communities to keep their message simple, but strong and compelling. Your mission must be one that is on the “top of minds” of those you work with, those you serve, and those whom you solicit.

- Where is your faith community in this process?
- How is your message coming across?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, do your prospects have a “top of mind awareness” about your mission?

We can help you facilitate a process to visit all of these areas and partner with you in furthering your message. Finally, when it comes to raising money, we can help your organization maximize its fund-raising potential with professionalism, compassion, effectiveness, and integrity. Call us for a free consultation: 1-800-762-3996.