10 Things People Want Before They Will Give to Your Church

Kem Meyer & Bill McMillan
10 THINGS PEOPLE WANT
BEFORE THEY WILL GIVE
TO YOUR CHURCH

KEM MEYER & BILL MCMILLAN
Talking about money in church can be tough for the person on the platform and the person in the crowd. Whether you’re new to faith in Christ or have been a Christ follower for decades, the Bible has something to say about what we do with our money. And if the Bible has something to say about it, then we leaders have a responsibility to talk about it.

Everyone comes to the subject of giving from a different perspective. Some healthy and some not so healthy. Just as people grow in faith over time, they should also grow in their willingness to be generous with every part of their lives. Giving is a process as much as it is a discipline. When you help people take steps toward being generous, they will undoubtedly surprise you—and likely themselves.

But we can't expect people to grow in generosity if we don't talk about it. Most churchgoers may not be as resistant to talking about money as we think. Many of the people who attend your weekend services already give to a variety of organizations and causes, but they might not give to the church because they don't view it as a “cause” worthy of their support. That doesn’t make them bad people, and it certainly doesn’t mean you’ve failed as a leader. What it means is there is a gap we have to fill between what we know the Bible says about money and our willingness to act on what we know.

So how can we help everyone move toward generosity? Simple. We talk about it regularly and often—not just when it’s time for a special giving opportunity but on a regular basis. Generosity should be a thread that runs throughout our lives—not just moments in time.

Here are ten quick things people want from you BEFORE they start giving.
In the hustle and bustle of doing church, it's easy to lose sight of the emotional needs we all have. We want to know we matter. We want to know someone cares about more than our attendance and checkbook. This is especially important in large churches. Just because people are part of a crowd doesn't mean they feel like part of the community. It's easy in large churches for people to attend only worship services. It is usually in those services where a church leader will address the issue of giving. That explains why many de-churched people say, “All they want is my money.”

It doesn't matter how untrue that assumption is. If people don't feel valued, they aren't. If your church is large, go out of the way to treat everyone who walks through the doors as a special guest. Encourage them to become part of a small group or Bible study. Help them connect to more than the morning worship experience. People will connect in the smallest gathering they attend. If they only attend worship, they won't feel connected or valued.

The act of giving is an emotional response—not a pragmatic one. If someone doesn't feel valued or connected, they won't be willing to give. Giving is first about making a human connection.

What are three things your church does or should do to help people know they matter to God and others?
Though most people who attend church believe church leaders want them there, they may not know why. Is having more people this week than last week an ego boost for leaders? No. Are people there to give so the church leaders can do what they want? Of course not. Or can the church really give people the opportunity to make a difference? Definitely! People want to know how they can make a measurable difference—not just through their money, although that is certainly part of the lingering question in the minds of many people who walk through the church doors any given weekend.

Adults will invest their time in organizations that make a difference. More important, every giver wants to know their gift—however large or small—makes a difference. If they think what they can give doesn’t matter, then they will invest their giving dollars elsewhere.

Your church might be doing some incredible things in your community, but if you aren’t telling the stories, people won’t know about them. Many churches focus on international initiatives—and there’s nothing wrong with that—but how are you making a difference in your local community? What ministries and services are you providing and supporting? How are you addressing the issues that plague your community? How can individuals partner with the church to change the world, starting with the neighborhoods surrounding your campus? These are questions that must be addressed publicly.

*How can your church tell the stories of the local ministries with which you are partnering?*
This is one of the most overlooked aspects of cultivating a culture of generosity. People today want financial transparency. They have been negatively affected by numerous scandals that center around the mishandling of funds. With that being said, however, don’t overwhelm them with too much information.

One of the best ways to tell people what you do with money is through a ministry brochure or booklet that describes the ministries of the church and the percentage of the budget required to keep them operational. Few people want a line item budget. But they do want to know how the money is being invested for Kingdom things. Think of it as a promise the church is making to every giver—they want to know how their money will be used.

Most charitable organizations today help potential donors connect their investments to outcomes. If you communicate the desired outcomes, people who agree will get excited about the direction of the church and will be more likely to give to support it.

*What percentage of your budget goes toward ministry, debt, and overhead? How are you sharing the direction and ministry plan of your church? Does your ministry consistently follow through and fulfill on the promises made to those who give?*
The vision of the church should drive the investment of its resources. That's why communicating the vision—your preferred future—is vital to the conversation about money. Think about the solicitations you receive. Very few, if any, of the organizations begin by imploring you to give so they can pay their bills! They paint a picture of the work they do and then give you the opportunity to invest in the organization because they know you share their values.

This approach should be very effective in the church because most of the people there have already bought into the overall purposes of the organization. They agree. They want what the leaders want. That's why they will be excited to support the ministry.

Communicating vision can't be an isolated event; it must be a continual process. People who already are giving will continue to give if they know where the church is heading. Investing your time in communicating vision is never a bad idea.

*What is the vision for your church, and how effectively are you communicating it on an ongoing basis?*
Vision without a strategy is nothing more than wishful thinking. Vision is about ideas. Strategy is the process of translating those ideas into a defined plan of action. This is another critical aspect of cultivating givers. If leaders of the church talk about their dreams for the future but don’t have a step-by-step plan for moving toward the vision, people will grow weary and stop believing the vision.

People want to see progress. They want to know that their investments last year helped move the church toward the vision that was effectively communicated. If they see progress, they are more likely to continue giving at last year’s level or, perhaps, increase their giving. Vision must be connected to sequential, achievable goals that are celebrated when reached. Identify some short-term goals and invite people to help you achieve them. When people believe in the vision, visualize the plan, and trust the leaders, they will do everything they can to help reach the goals. Churches with giving problems might have a vision problem.

*How do you communicate your plan for accomplishing the vision of the church?*
There’s always some controversy at this point. Some people believe that anything less than 10 percent is blatant disobedience to the biblical instruction regarding the tithe. And, honestly, they are right. However, if you look back at the five kinds of people who make up the church, you will understand that everyone isn’t at the same point spiritually. Some people need to learn why to give and how to give. This is where the church can be a big help.

Let’s face it, some people want to give, but they don’t see how they can spare a single penny. These people need help learning how to budget their money and manage their households. Other people view giving as they view tipping a server. If they get good service, they are generous; if the service is bad, they don’t give at all.

Growing givers is one of the most important things you can do for the sustainability of your church. You need to help people learn how to give 1 percent and then walk with them toward 10 percent. Challenge people to increase their giving by 1 percent each year. People who are giving nothing should be encouraged to start giving something. People who are giving something should be encouraged to give 1 percent more.

When you communicate the 10 percent expectation, people who are living paycheck to paycheck don’t see how they can meet the expectation, so they choose to give nothing. However, when you walk with them as they learn to give, you’ll discover more ministry opportunities than you imagined. Educate people about giving and they will give for a long time. Coerce them into giving, and they will eventually tune you out.

*How are you helping people learn to give? What on-ramps are you creating for people to start giving? How can you help people take their first step—or their next step?*
You might not be able to help people find more money, but you can help them prioritize their spending. This is a big part of encouraging people to give. When people learn to sacrifice things they want for things that are more important, they are exhibiting spiritual growth. Many people who don’t give don’t see how they can add one more bill to their pile. They need someone to help them reorder their life priorities. This is where church leaders come in.

We agree that a person’s priorities are revealed by his or her calendar and checkbook. So, once we know a person’s priorities, how do we help reshape them? This is the big question for church leaders. We can reshape people’s priorities by elevating the importance of honoring God, not by chastising them for feeling entitled to a vacation. When you attack people’s priorities, they will become defensive and resistant to change. However, when you point them to a new priority, they will look for ways to work it into their lives. This is where you want the people in your church to be.

*How are you helping people reorder their priorities? How are you communicating that giving is an identity instead of just an activity.*
Some people would give more if they had an active role in the ministries of the church. In other words, ownership produces investment. If you want people to support the student ministry, look for ways for them to serve in that ministry. Give people the opportunity to serve in the ministry to the community, and they will start giving to support that ministry.

In too many churches, the leadership ranks are closed off to new people. They want to get involved but find it impossible to do so. That’s why so many people fizzle out on their attendance. They would stick around if they felt needed, but they aren’t interested in just watching.

As a leader, you might not see the problem. You might think everyone has a place to serve. You might not catch on to the fact that the student ministry volunteer leaders are the same people who have been leading the ministry for five years. You might not recognize that the children’s ministry isn’t welcoming new leaders into the rotation. You might not notice when a very outgoing person grows frustrated because the first impressions ministry is cliquish. Don’t overlook the path to participation. If that path is non-existent, growing givers will be a challenge.

What is your process for moving people toward participation and involvement?
Some church leaders don’t want to give people constant updates, especially when the numbers aren’t meeting expectations. Your congregation, however, wants to know how you are doing financially. They want to see how money is being used.

When builders are contracted to build homes, they are also responsible for providing progress reports along the way. It is proof that what was contracted is what is also being accomplished. It is the basis of trust and confidence—two things that people must have before they will give to your church.

The difference between the budget and actual expenditures reveals to givers how well you and your staff are managing expenses. People want to know if overspending is being excused. The comparison of spending to budget helps people understand the financial foundation of the church. Because people vote with their presence and their money, a consistent shortfall tells you that people aren’t confident in the direction of the church. These are warning signs that leaders must take seriously.

How do you report your financial picture to your congregation? Does it deliver what people want to know?
You must tell the stories of families that were assisted through benevolence or kids who received scholarships to student camp and were subsequently saved. These should become celebratory moments in the life of the church. Carve out time in your worship service to show videos of these stories (preferably just before the offering time).

With today’s technology, there is no reason for people to be unaware of the ways their money is being used to change lives. The technology is far less important than the story itself. Therefore, start capturing the stories and share them on your website and through your services. You’ll probably see that people are anxious to give when they feel connected to the outcome.

*How do you share the life change stories with your congregation?*
Okay. This really comes after they give, so it doesn't fit perfectly within the conversation about talking about money. But you will “speak” loudly if you skip this step.

We want to express one final thought, one big idea that will change the culture of generosity in your church. Do you want to know what it is?

The **ONE BIG SECRET** is this: Always say thanks.

“Thank you!” is the most powerful phrase you can use to encourage giving in your church. We are good at presenting the idea, getting stronger at asking people to give, but communication after the gift is made is almost nonexistent in church work.

We should take a lesson from secular nonprofit organizations. They are usually excellent at thanking people for their gifts. They send personal notes, make phone calls, and recognize donors in printed resources.

Giving is not as much of a financial transaction as it is a relational transaction. When you show appreciation and gratitude for all gifts, people are much more likely to give again. Thanking people is something that almost everyone can do.

*What are you doing to say thanks to your givers?*
Money doesn’t have to be a topic you avoid in conversation. Instead, it can be a subject that allows you to talk about life change, personal transformation, and how every person who participates in your weekend experience can make a significant difference—for eternity.

People are ready to give of their time, talent, and treasure when we engage and inspire them through simple, clear, and compelling stories. When church leaders talk about money in healthy ways that provide a process for growth, we invite people to be part of funding the Kingdom and God’s plan to transform the world.

Because people are at different places on their spiritual growth journey, we must be willing to work with them so they become mature, invested givers. Unless we learn to cultivate new givers, the financial future of the church will be limited. We must begin—right now—developing givers by talking about generosity in healthy ways. If we don’t, we will remain static and the gifts God intended to fund His church will find their way elsewhere.

There is no better investment than God’s church. Let’s just say we both think it’s something worth talking about.
FIVE EASY WAYS FOR YOU
TO CONNECT WITH RSI

1. Follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

2. Subscribe to our blog on rsistewardship.com

3. Sign up for our e-newsletter.

4. Call us at 1.800.527.6824.

5. Contact us to discuss your church’s needs.
KEM MEYER is the communications director at Granger Community Church. She leads creative, technology, and digital media teams to champion communication clarity and flow across departments and campuses. Her marketplace career spanned 15 years with roles in advertising/PR, consulting, and technology services before joining the staff team at Granger in 2002. Her book, *Less Clutter. Less Noise*, provides simple insights for the not-so-simple art of communication to help churches, businesses, and not-for-profits find ways to get the word out and, simply, do better. Catch up with Kem on [Tumblr](http://tumblr) or [Twitter](http://twitter).

BILL MCMILLAN served for more than 20 years as both a pastor and a pastoral counselor before joining RSI. He currently serves as executive vice president. Bill has led thriving stewardship campaigns in churches of many sizes and denominations, raising millions of dollars for local ministry. He is an excellent communicator and project manager, whose consulting hallmarks lie in communications strategy and major gift development. Bill can be reached at [bill.mcmillan@rsistewardship.com](mailto:bill.mcmillan@rsistewardship.com), Twitter ([@billmcmillanrsi](http://twitter)), or [Facebook](http://facebook).
12 TIPS for better ANNUAL FUND campaign results

by Joel Mikell & Bill McMillan
11 FATAL MISTAKES CHURCHES MAKE during CAPITAL CAMPAIGNS

by JOEL MIKELL and BILL McMILLAN
reSET

reSET 2012 Recap

Ideas and Insights from Trusted Leaders That Will Infuse Wisdom into Your Ministry and Give You the Courage to Embrace God’s Vision for Your Church
What is God calling your church to do next?
Call us today!

1.800.527.6824

RSISTEWARDSHIP.COM