

## Who Is Giving What?

**J. Clif Christopher – Horizons Stewardship Company**



Last week I got a phone call from the pastor of a church Horizons had led a campaign for a couple of years ago. He and I talk quite often about a number of things not the least of which is his church and the progress that is being made in various ministry areas. This church has shown some exciting growth in a number of areas and usually our visits are celebratory. This day, however, he was a bit distressed. For the first quarter of the year giving to church operations was down from the previous year. He asked if he could send me a letter to review that he was considering sending to the congregation about the shortfall.

When I am asked about issues like this my first questions are research ones. Exactly how much are you down from the same time period last year and the year before? How much are you off your budget projections? Are there any obvious reasons for the shortfall like heavy snow Sundays or did you even have the same number of Sundays last quarter? What is going on with worship attendance? Are there any conflicts in the church that may be causing some reaction? All these and more need to be answered prior to any letter being sent.

The biggest question to answer, however, is what is going on with your top 10-20 donors? They are probably responsible for a big percentage of the budget. I remember one pastor who called me and then emailed me a lengthy letter he was sending to all of his members to encourage them to increase their giving because the church was unexpectedly behind by \$50,000 early in the year. He was alarmed because if he prorated that out it meant a \$200,000 shortfall on the year. He wanted to jump right on it.

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I encouraged him to review the donor list, which he had never done and was reluctant to do. When he did he saw that one donor who always gave a January check of around \$35,000 had paid nothing. One phone call reassured him that the check was soon to be sent and the donor was sorry he was a couple of months late on his usual contribution date. Suddenly, things did not seem so dire. The pastor realized it was not his entire membership that was decreasing their giving. Most of it lay in one individual who was a bit late on his normal schedule. A strongly worded letter encouraging persons to help their “distressed” church would have been a bad idea and possibly even backfired on the preacher.

When I asked my pastor friend if he knew what his top donors were doing he confessed that he did not and would check this out thoroughly before drafting any letter.

Could the treasurer do this and just report such to the pastor? Yes, but it is not nearly as effective. It is assumed that the pastor knows his or her congregation better than anyone else. Are contributions down from someone because of a death or divorce or job loss or other crisis that a treasurer would not know about? Treasurers are treasurers because they do numbers well. Pastors are pastors because they know numbers reveal things that are personal and soulful. The church needs the pastor's heart to help interpret numbers appropriately.

Once you have your information you can then determine how best to respond to it. You may need to make one or two home visits rather than send out 500 letters.

J. Clif Christopher is a certified church growth consultant and founder of Horizons Stewardship Company. He is a nationally recognized speaker and author on stewardship and co-author of the book *Holy Smoke! Whatever Happened to Tithing?* published by Discipleship Resources.