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EXPERTS' SPOTLIGHT

Recognizing Abundance: Holistic Financial Stewardship

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By Maurice Seaton

“And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.”

2 Corinthians 9:8

As Episcopalians, some of the hardest conversations with friends, family and fellow parishioners revolve around money and the stewardship of the resources that God has given to us. It is only when we realize that who we are and what we have are gifts from God that we can grow into the discipline of being good stewards. Healthy stewardship begins with God at the center, and is sustained through prayer and hard work.

All stewardship should be rooted in the vision that God has given us as individuals and as a church or organization. Discernment of that vision is means understanding what God is calling us to do with our resources of time, talent and treasure. Communicating and embracing that vision as the entire parish family, in creative and inclusive ways, is the next step in responsible stewardship.

TYPES OF GIVING

Annual Stewardship

There are four practical aspects to stewardship that leaders in Episcopal communities of faith need to reinforce in an annual stewardship campaign:

- *Education.* Teaching a theology of stewardship that includes witnessing to God's generosity and the ways we can respond. Developing and nurturing an understanding of how our resources are intended to further God's mission through the church. Resources may include people (paid and volunteers), time, monies, and property.
- *Asking and Receiving.* Conversations about annual expenditures, capital projects, investments and other resources need to be inclusive and well planned and must take place before we ask for resources. Explain exactly what is needed when asking and why it is important, using a mission driven budget where appropriate. Long term goals can always be taken account of in a strategic planning process.
- *Managing and growing.* Church and civil law requirements for sound financial management and accountability are fundamental to good stewardship. Growth and investment considerations may be applied differently depending on the type of asset, gift or fund, and the purpose for which it was intended.
- *Sharing.* Apply resources according to the agreed common vision, and in compliance with legal requirements. Are we living out the gospel and sharing the bounty that God has given us beyond our sometimes insular, community of faith?

Capital Campaigns

The primary purpose of a capital campaign can vary according to the specific needs of each church, and most churches conduct a capital fund drive for one or more of the following reasons: (1) to raise money for brick and mortar projects (repair, maintain, rebuild, renovate or new construction), (2) to raise money for program activities (mission and ministry), (3) to build endowment monies (invest legacy gifts and restricted or unrestricted funds of various kinds), (4) to retire debt.

Capital fundraising is a necessary activity approximately every five to ten years in most churches. Three distinct phases to a capital fund effort are recommended:

- *Discernment* and planning define a vision of what the campaign is about, identify the project needs and costs, and usher in a period of communication that informs and involves all constituencies what about the vision, the projects and their costs.
- *A Feasibility Study* then tests the support in the congregation for the vision and projects that were identified. The study invites feedback and dialogue that enables leadership to made good decisions and ensure a successful capital campaign that leads to the funding goal being met or exceeded.

- *The Ask* in a capital campaign should be a time of celebration and community building when everyone is approached with information about the campaign and asked to join the effort through a pledge to the campaign.

Some tips for conducting a successful capital campaign:

1. Hire professional, outside counsel. Capital campaigns require high levels of organization and confidentiality, and are time consuming. Experienced advice gets results.
2. Involve everyone in the congregation and view the campaign as an opportunity to build community and deepen the commitment of members.
3. Make sure you educate members on the differences between annual stewardship, planned giving and capital fund raising, and use the capital campaign as an opportunity to reinvigorate or start a legacy society.
4. Do a feasibility study that secures buy-in from all members and ensures success.

Planned Giving

Establishing and maintaining a planned giving program for your congregation holds enormous potential for every Episcopal organization. A planned giving program can be an effective way of growing endowment in a long term, sustainable way. Since more than 70 percent of planned gifts come from bequests, establishing a legacy society that recognizes donors for remembering your organization in their estate planning is a vital part of any planned giving program.

There are many resources available that describe life income gifts with detailed information about tax benefits and income projections.

Tips for planned giving:

1. Develop a year-round planned giving program for your congregation or organization that includes structure and policies for accepting planned gifts.
2. Establish a legacy society to recognize those who have agreed to make a planned gift in their estate planning.

3. Conduct a wills awareness seminar or series of similar workshops and invite technical specialists to present expertise and information. Remind those who attend to include a bequest to your parish or organization in their will.

Endowment Management

The goal of any monies that might be termed endowment (restricted or unrestricted) or permanent funds should be to have the money you do have invested wisely in order to support the ministries of the church, diocese or organization. Any organization with an endowment knows the challenges of growing, administering and investing endowment funds. Developing policies and structure for endowments, whether the endowment is modest or extensive, is essential to ensure good stewardship.

Holistic Stewardship

A parish or community of faith organization should incorporate a holistic approach to financial stewardship. The foundation of a mature development program is to be well-grounded in your own mission and to embrace it through prayer, worship and teaching a strong theology of stewardship of the gifts God has given.

With this sure footing in faith, the parish should then work toward enhancing annual stewardship, consider from time to time the need for capital improvements and offer up gently the need for all to consider the mission needs of the church in one's estate and planned giving.

Maurice Seaton is the Associate Director of Giving Services at the Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF). The mission of the ECF is to strengthen the leadership and financial capabilities of Episcopal congregations, dioceses, and related organizations to pursue their mission and ministry. ECF offers a full array of fundraising resources and services for capital campaigns (including discernment, feasibility study, and gifting), planned giving, annual stewardship, and endowment management. Comments, questions, and requests for further information may be directed to his attention at Episcopal Church Foundation, 815 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017; 1-800-697-2858; or by email at maurice@episcopalfoundation.org.

Additional Resources Online

The Episcopal Church Foundation (www.episcopalfoundation.org): Provides comprehensive information about planned giving, capital campaigns, endowment management, and annual stewardship as well as links to newsletters, marketing materials and other resources.

Episcopal Gifts.org (www.episcopalgifts.org): Offers online resources and tolls for calculating potential life income gift options.

The Episcopal Network for Stewardship (www.tens.org): The Episcopal Network for Stewardship (TENS) offers practical resources that encourage generosity in annual stewardship in the Episcopal Church.

Remember the Future: Financial Leadership and Asset Management for Congregations, by Gerald W. Keucher (2006, Church Publishing www.churchpublishing.org)