

GOD, MONEY AND ME

Why should I give to your church?

MIKE STRATHDEE

Helping people give money away over the past 15 years has been a tremendously rewarding part of my work at Mennonite Foundation of Canada.

Many of these generous people are from the “builder generation” (born in or before 1945). The builders I’ve spoken with give generously, value church institutions and trust the people who run them.

Being told there is a need opens their wallets or cheque books. As these people age, become infirm and pass away, I miss their generous spirits. Increasingly, many churches, church agencies and related institutions are starting to feel the same sense of loss. That loss will intensify from dull ache to stabbing pain in coming years for those who don’t overhaul their approach and communication with donors.

Many in my generation and most in younger cohorts don’t see things the same way as their church-attending parents and grandparents did. This is true even of the much smaller fraction of boomers and millennials who still attend church more frequently than Christmas

and Easter.

Given this clear dichotomy in how different generations respond, it is sad to see people making appeals based on guilt and obligation near the end of a church’s financial year. That doesn’t work anymore. It reminds me of the father recounting to his young daughter how his family had purchased their first colour TV when he was 10 years old. After some reflection, the daughter replied: “Daddy, was the whole world black and white then?”



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Leave it to Beaver-era appeals don’t work in the digital age. Loyalty to church institutions is a foreign concept to a sizeable group of church attenders. Without new, compelling and repeated calls to commitment, the idea of supporting a congregation’s ministry is easily overlooked or dismissed.

J. Clif Christopher, in his book *Rich Church, Poor Church*, says he finds “far too many church leaders who are working on the answer to the question, “Why should I give?” and not on the right

question for today, which is, “Why should I give to you?”

Younger donors who are asking the latter question don’t want to hear about commitments made at a budget meeting they didn’t attend. They want to give to vision, to relationships. They want to hear about outcomes and changed lives.

As the number of charities competing for donor attention continues to multiply—and Sunday morning once in a while is the extent of many people’s exposure to church—a congregation that wants to succeed in growing givers’ hearts needs to have a compelling answer to Christopher’s question: “Is my church the best place for me to invest to make a difference and change lives?”

Getting positive responses to that question will require leaders willing to move beyond traditional approaches. As Christopher says, “Being taught to give is as integral to the mature Christian life as

learning how to read is to the adult life.”

Do we care enough about church to use proven stewardship best practices, even if they make us uncomfortable?

Mike Strathdee is a stewardship consultant at Mennonite Foundation of Canada serving generous people in Ontario and the eastern provinces. For more information on impulsive generosity, stewardship education, and estate and charitable gift planning, contact your nearest MFC office or visit MennoFoundation.ca.