

## **5 Questions Christian Leaders Need to Answer About Fundraising**



By Sean Mitchell, Faith & Leadership

How do spiritual leaders lead through challenging times? They ask challenging questions.

Questions travel to places of the heart and mind that advice doesn't. Good, thought-provoking questions can lead us to new understandings of ourselves, God and the church. That includes those dreaded questions about budgets and giving.

As director of stewardship development at Myers Park Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, and as a consultant, I equip leaders of church communities to foster generosity through initiatives ranging from planned giving to annual stewardship. I've developed a set of questions to ask stewardship leaders to help them in their work.

**1. What is your mission in stewardship ministry?** Notice, the question is not, “What is the mission of your stewardship ministry?” The question is about *your* mission, the reason for your being involved in stewardship ministry.

It is critical for you to know what unique role you play in this ministry and to be honest about how much of yourself you are giving to this work. When people, companies and congregations are on a mission, we know it. Missions are contagious. Is yours? How would people describe your mission in stewardship ministry? Contagious and inspiring, or apathetic and fearful?

Examine why you do what you do in stewardship ministry. Hopefully, you are giving it your best time and thinking. But if your mission is not based on a sense of calling, you will struggle, and your stewardship ministry will suffer because of it.

Think about ways you can have more impact. What might happen if your focus on stewardship ministry changed? Think and decide. Do you really want to be on this mission? Is it time to change your mission?

**2. Do you know the reasons why people are *not* giving?** It is valuable to become familiar with the answers to this question. People have reasons *for* giving, but they also have important reasons for *not* giving. Here are some common reasons I’ve encountered:

- They have never been asked directly. Sure, they may have been asked to give through a letter or email, but face-to-face requests in small group gatherings -- or even better, in one-on-one conversations -- is the best way to go.
- They believe they don’t have enough to give. Some people are in debt, some spend more than they should, and some people face both issues. These reasons need to be considered when planning a campaign. The challenge of the leadership is to help people re-evaluate their situations and determine ways that giving might still be possible.
- They don’t trust the leadership. Unfortunately, cynicism is prevalent these days. People often question their leaders’ truthfulness and scrutinize organizational decisions. How can you respond? Be authentic. Don’t hide the numbers. Tell potential donors exactly how the money is spent.

**3. What is your elevator speech?** These speeches are more relevant than ever. Knowing the unique purpose of your church or organization and being able to articulate this mission in 45 to 60 seconds is a skill one should actively cultivate.

Imagine a potential giver meeting with you or sitting beside you on the train in to work. The person might ask the following questions: “Why should I give money to the church community when I can give directly to causes that are meaningful to me in caring for the poor?” or, “How would our city be different if your organization was not here?”

If you can craft answers to these questions, you are on your way to creating an elevator speech that will elevate your community's uniqueness and relevance in the minds of potential givers.

As you craft it, remember that every unforgettable elevator speech contains an expression of the organization's uniqueness, the "why" behind its existence and its impact on the world.

**4. Do you believe fundraising is a spiritual exercise?** Whether they admit it or not, most people who are not professional fundraisers are afraid of asking donors to give. They fear being perceived as offensive, being rejected or being labeled as one of those "stewardship" team members.

Each of those things might happen -- and does. Still, the overall exercise is worth the investment of time and effort. Embrace fundraising as a spiritual act. It will help your church community or organization flourish in many ways.

Fundraising deepens relationships. It provides the opportunity to tell the story of how your congregation or organization can do more good works for the kingdom. And fundraising challenges your members to redirect some of their resources to support the group's mission and ministries.

Fundraising matters. Don't be afraid of it. Think of it as a gift and an opportunity to invest time in your community relationships and your spiritual journey.

**5. What are you grateful for?** Gratitude is at the heart of Christian generosity. We give in response to the grace of God. Hopefully, gratitude is one of the primary reasons one decides to serve on a stewardship committee.

In the absence of gratitude, the job can become anxiety-provoking and all about the numbers. Gratitude keeps the work centered on God's ongoing faithfulness and the truth that the world belongs to God, not to us. The work of stewardship ministry is given to us by God, as a way for us to inspire more generosity and care in our world.

Are you grateful for the opportunity to participate? Do you believe this is an important ministry to God? I hope so. I hope you can reach the place where the prevailing undercurrent becomes gratitude rather than simply a desire to *raise more funds*.

Be grateful. This is what it means to be a leader in fundraising ministry. Do everything in response to God's grace. Give your money and your acts of leadership in response to God's grace.