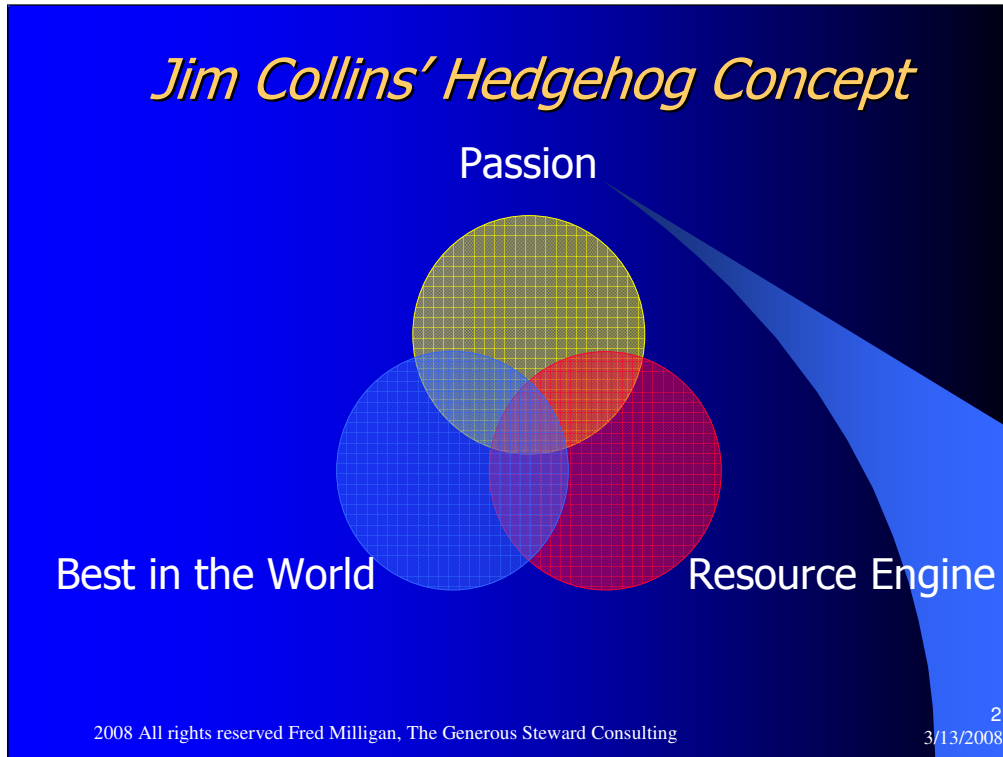


Notes: Story of farmer and minister standing by a field of corn. “my what a beautiful field God has made,” says the pastor “Yep”, but you should have seen it when God had it all to himself.” The title of this workshop is Cultivating Generosity. So we are acknowledging that there is a role for us to play in the process of assisting in the development of our members into the kinds of generous people God wants them to become.

It is essential to the idea of stewardship, that we hold everything we have in trust from God who is the true owner. We are to care for it in ways that honor the owner. In this sense, the words “cultivate” and “steward” are synonyms. What are some words that come to mind when you hear the word cultivate? Farming, growing, nurturing, organic, organismic. An essential aspect of cultivation is that it relies upon a variety of variables operating within a wholistic system rather than only one or two variables. A particularly good example of what I am talking about would be the cultivation of flowering plants which not only depend, for their fruitfulness upon the proper acidity and fertility of the soil, proper amounts of rain and sun, but also upon the pollen from other plants. Cultivation of generosity is similarly a systemic process and cannot be adequately considered on an individualistic basis.



Secondly, our aim is to cultivate generosity not only of money but in every aspect of the church member's life. Jim Collins' little monograph: Good to Great in the Social Sector: Why Business Thinking is Not the Answer points out that, in contrast to a business where everything is measured according to the profit figures, in a church or other social sector organization, what he calls the "resource engine" is the key. This Resource engine includes the traditional time, talent and treasure trio as well as the organization's public reputation in the community or culture at large. So our effort to transform lives and not merely gain financial gifts also better serves this task of strengthening the resource engine of the church. We make it clear that God doesn't just want your money but your whole self.

The critical question is not "How much money do we make or raise?" but "How can we develop a sustainable resource engine to deliver superior performance relative to our mission?"



This brings us to a consideration of the most common use of the word cultivate in the world of professional development. In this vocabulary, the word “cultivate” refers to the efforts of the Funds Development officer to develop a relationship with existing and potential donors or between the donor and the organization for which he/she is working.(usually on an individual basis) While these existing and/or potential donors typically share the values and appreciate the work of the organization, the goal of the funds developer is instrumentally focused on gaining the funding. While it is always in the best interests of an organization to treat donors in an ethical and respectful manner, the primary consideration is always the real or potential gift to the organization that is of primary interest. The object is to cultivate the gift.

In the church, our primary task in our relationships with members is to encourage their growth in “self-giving”, of time and talent as well as money. And while we are aware that the more one gives of time and talent to an institution’s mission the more likely they are to give monetarily, we must never become more focused on the gifts than the giver. To use Immanuel Kant’s dictum, People are to be treated always as ends in themselves and never merely as means to an end. For us, cultivating generosity is important, not primarily because it produces funds for our ministry program but because it produces transformed lives. For us, the cultivation process is never a merely instrumental enterprise. It is about cultivating the giver.

Ultimately our aim is to cultivate generosity in people – to transform lives - not to cultivate a gift to the institution.

Introduction

Agape' = Self-giving (generous)
Self-giving = Social



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4
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The essential aspect of what it means to be a Christian is summed up in one little Greek word, Agape'.

It is a word for “Love” from the common or Koine form of Greek spoken by the writers of the New Testament. But unlike English, which has only one word, the passionate Greeks had three: The other two were eros (which refers to the desire of those who have been separated to be re-united) and philea, (which refers to the love between friends). Why then did the new testament writers use agape, exclusively when they might have used eros, or philea? **Because the particular kind of love indicated by the word Agape' is a love that is self giving.**

In other words, the most essential aspect of Jesus' love for us and to the extent that we emulate him, our love for others is that we show our care through giving of ourselves and our resources, i.e., by being generous toward one another. This begins with the most elemental aspects of the giving and receiving of care in families and extends throughout our lives. And through endowments, past our lives as well.

- Social = congregational
- Spiritually Healthy Congregations cultivate generous people



The key to nurturing this generous self-giving is to recognize its socially constructed nature. You see, our faith is not directed solely toward God. It is a “one another” faith. It is relational.

Because our faith is a relational faith, we learn this generosity not in the isolated confines of our private moments of devotion, but in the midst of healthy and generous congregations. So the best way to cultivate generosity among Christians is to cultivate the health of the congregations which form us.

To the extent that a Christian is spiritually developed, or healthy, he/she will be generous toward others. This does not happen in isolation from the larger Community of faith. The pyramid of a single donor’s generosity, which moves from one time gift to annual gift, major gift, big gift and planned gift, therefore, always rests within a larger framework or “system” of the congregation as a whole.

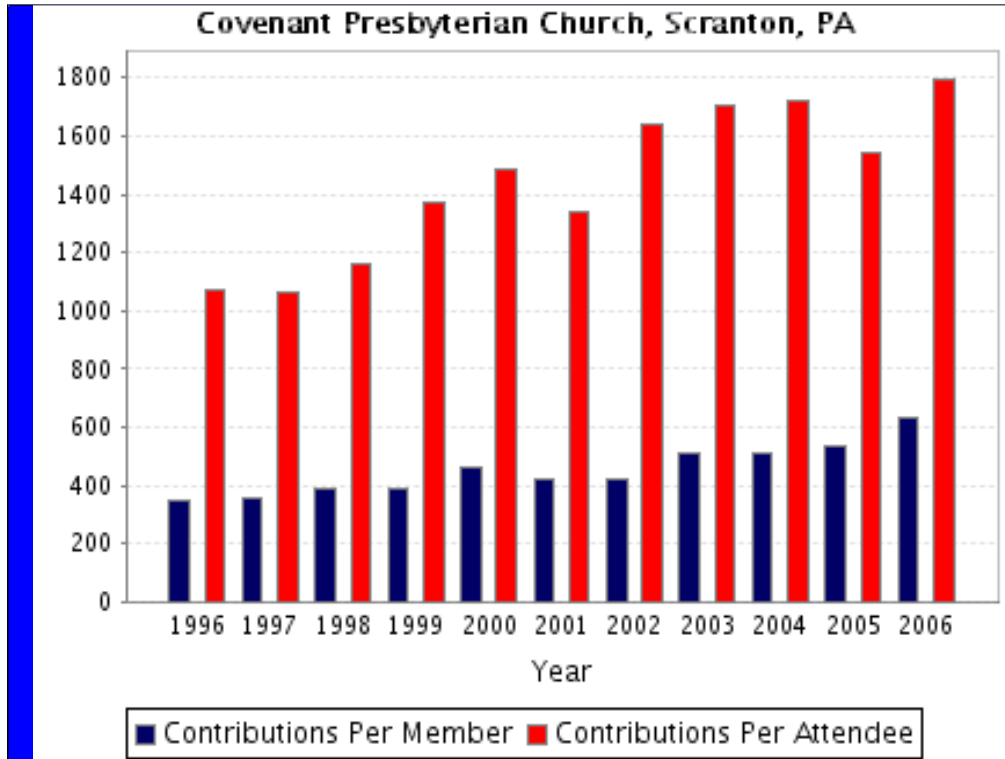
What is Systems Thinking?

- Systems Thinking involves a shift:
 - From focusing on the parts
 - To focusing on the relationship and interaction among the parts



Systems Exercise

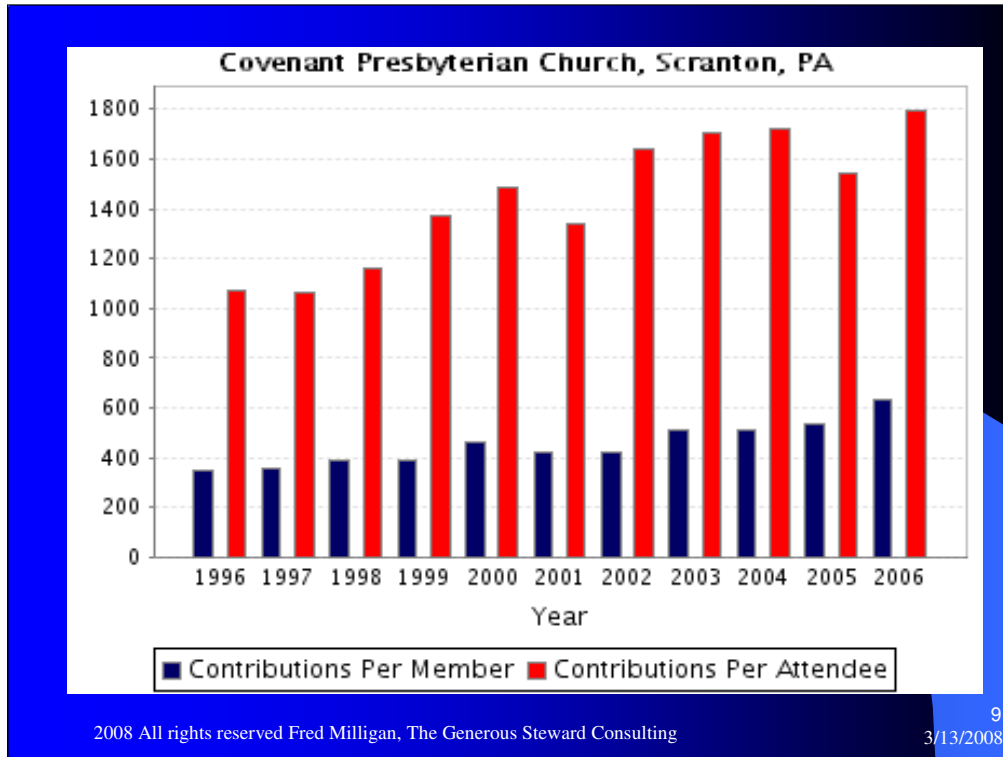
- Form into groups of 5 or more
- Create circle holding hands
- The person in the circle nearest to the door should now attempt to move toward the door without breaking their connection to the rest of the group



It is a matter of common experience among ministers that the giving of members decreases when a congregation is experiencing internal hindrances to the flow of good-will among the members. In such circumstances we cannot effectively cultivate the generosity of the individuals apart from attention to the well-being of the whole congregation.

Covenant Church is a typical example of a congregation that went through a significant disruption that affected the health and well-being of the congregation. In 2001, a serious conflict developed between the Head of staff and Associate Pastor. A consultant was called in during the early months of 2002 and the result was that toward the end of the year, both the Head of Staff and Associate Pastor were asked to step down from their positions.

In September of 2003, as I served the congregation as their Interim Pastor I began to work at bringing healing to the congregation, using an every member canvass stewardship process in which we listened more than we talked, offering three workshops over the next 18 months on Healthy Congregations, Conflict Resolution and Pastor/congregation relationships, two of which were led by outside resource people and leading the congregation in a thorough discernment process to focus them away from their recent past grievances and toward their mission.



Beginning in 2003 and continuing to the present, there has been an increase in both per member and per worship attendee giving. A new pastor was called in the Fall of 2005, producing a spurt in worship attendance that diluted the per worship attendee giving for that year. However, the congregation continues to show improvement in member stewardship, with increases in per member giving as well as moving back up in per worship attendee giving to \$1,800 in 2006. While this is well below the national 2006 average of \$2,016, it is still movement in the right direction.

These gains in regular contributions have been made in spite of the fact that a capital campaign for \$500,000 was begun in 2005 with members beginning to pay their pledges in July, before the new pastor arrived.

All this is to show that there is real validity to thinking not only about the discipleship of individual members but about the overall health of the congregation as a system as well.

Systems Thinking Cultivates Congregational Health

- Murray Bowen
- Rabbi Edwin Friedman
- Pete Stienke
- “Healthy Congregations Develop Generous People”

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10
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In the 1960's, Dr. Murray Bowen, a Psychiatrist who treated Schizophrenics, discovered that working with the patient's family and tracing patterns of interaction even into former generations, produced greater results than seeing the patient alone. He created what came to be known as Family Systems or Organic Systems Theory of mental illness and founded the Georgetown Family Center at Georgetown University in Washington D.C.

One of his students, a Rabbi in the D.C. area, began to think about how this theory might be applied to the congregations he was serving. In the seminal work, *Generation to Generation*, Edwin Friedman makes this important bridge from the field of psychotherapy to congregational studies.

Then in the 90's, Pete Steinke, a Lutheran pastor, began to describe this important work as it applies to Christian Churches. He wrote a couple of books on the subject as well as developed several workshops, including the one upon which this workshop is based called, “Healthy Congregations Develop Generous People.”

A Comparison of Two Ways of Thinking: Separate Parts and the System

Separate Parts Thinking

Atomistic

Problems belong to the individual

Problems are *intra* (within a part)

Whole can be understood by reduction into parts

Parts explain the whole



Understanding comes from breaking down into smaller and smaller pieces



Parts can be understood in itself

Think in lines

A—B—C—D

Cause and effect thinking

System Thinking

Wholistic

Problems belong to the system

Problems are *inter* (between parts)

Whole can be understood by interaction of the parts

Whole explains parts



Understanding comes from looking up (larger and larger wholes)



Parts mutually influence one another

Think in loops



Co-causal

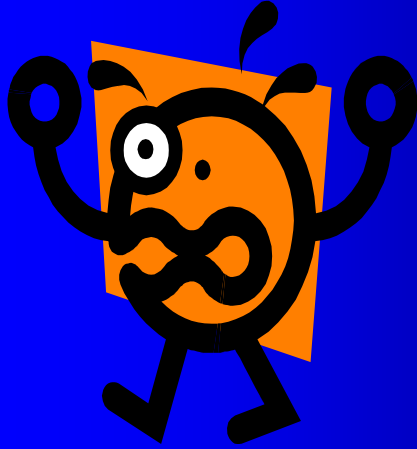
20

11
3/13/2008

This a chart created by Pete Steinke to illustrate the difference between a systems and an individualist approach to persons

"Lifesigns" Henri Nouwen

- The "House of Fear"
- The "House of Love"



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12
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In Organic Systems thinking, the focus is on how a congregation as a system deals with its anxiety: The anxiety that individual families bring with them from their personal and family histories, the anxiety which all feel as a result of our mass media hysteria which is often fostered by politicians as a means of control or marketers as a means of making sales of products and the anxiety that is inherent to the communal life of a congregation as an institution with its many decisions and difficulties.

In the book, "Lifesigns" the late Henri Nouwen explores his conviction that most of us spend most of our lives living in what he refers to as "the house of fear." He writes:

"Though we think of ourselves as followers of Jesus, we are often seduced by the fearful questions the world presents to us. Without fully realizing it, we become anxious, nervous, worrying people caught in the questions of survival; our own survival, the survival of our families, friends, and colleagues, the survival of our church, our country, and our world."



“Once these fearful survival questions become the guiding questions of our lives, we tend to dismiss words spoken from “the house of love” as unrealistic, romantic, sentimental, pious, or just useless. When love is offered as an alternative to fear we say: Yes, yes, that sounds beautiful, but “ The “But” reveals how much we live in the grip of the world, a world which calls Christians naïve and raises “realistic” questions; **‘Yes, but what if you grow old and there is nobody to help you? Yes, but what if you lose your job and you have no money to take care of yourself and your family? Yes, but what if refugees come to this country by the millions and disrupt the ways we have been living for so long? Yes, but,’**”
(Pg. 20)

Nouwen says that his book is based on the conviction that love is stronger than fear, though it may often seem that the opposite is true. ‘Perfect love casts out all fear’ says St. John in his first letter.”

Psychographics: Financial Success & Security

For high-net-worth individuals, financial security is related to both psychological comfort and material wealth

- A recent survey of affluent investors indicates their **greatest fear is a decline in their living standards during retirement.**
- While significantly more of the total population than the high-net-worth population work because it is necessary for financial security and stability, a **remarkable number of high-net-worth people maintain that they work predominantly to ensure that their family is secure**
- **The higher the net worth, the greater the amount of wealth** respondents say **they need to feel financially secure.** Only 36% of pentamillionaires feel completely financially secure. The median amount needed for financial security is \$20 million, or 67% more than current wealth, with the average amount needed \$45 million, or 75% more than current wealth
- **Wealthy women also seem to need more money to feel secure** than wealthy men. 29% of wealthy women say they would need more than \$50 million to feel completely secure, compared to 4% of wealthy men.
- Wealth recency also has a significant impact on financial concerns. The **more recently people have acquired wealth, the more concerned they are about providing for retirement**, their family's security, and the educational needs of their children, and the less concerned they are about managing investments, tax and/or estate planning, and providing for health and wellness.

14
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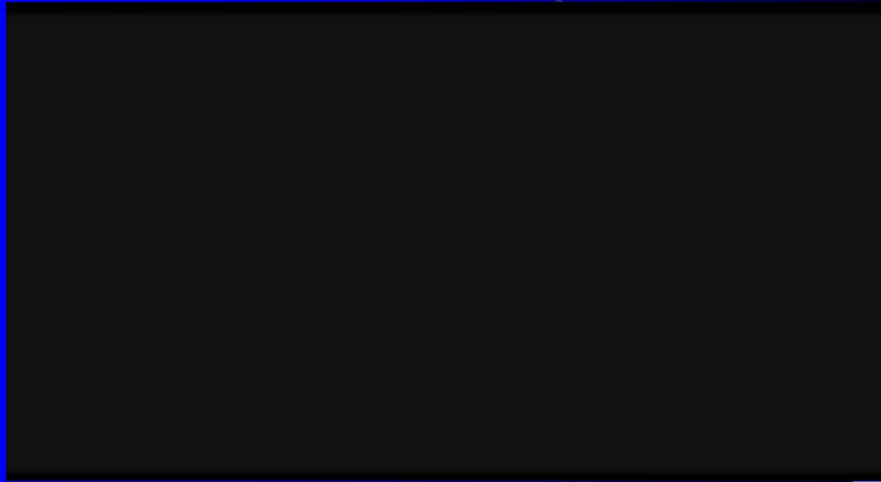
In the study described in the slide, individuals with a net worth of \$5 Million felt they would need \$45 million to feel financially secure. The conclusion of the study is that the more money one has the more one feels the need to have in order to feel secure.

According to Robert Lippman in an article in the Chronicle of Philanthropy, "The biggest losses in giving to religion come from high income families who are worried. Households with incomes exceeding \$75,000 drop their giving six times more when worried (42%) than those with incomes less than \$25,000 and nearly twice as much as those households with incomes between \$25,000 and \$75,000." (Chronicle of Philanthropy, Lippman, 9/7/04)

So long as we feel that our well-being is dependent upon our bank account, any reversal in fortunes will lead us to despair. How then can we find our way out of this place?

And this is also the premise of this workshop.

An Unfinished Life



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15
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In order to illustrate my point about the relationship between congregational health and generosity, I want to show you a brief movie trailer from a film that was shown in 2005. This movie is about a family that has failed to find healing long after they were traumatized by two tragedies: the loss of a son in an automobile accident and the mauling of a friend by a bear.

As the movie opens we find the character played by Robert Redford locked into a stingy refusal to extend hospitality to a woman we learn is the wife of his deceased son and his granddaughter who he didn't even know existed.

An Unfinished Life

Healthy Families
Develop Generous People

- Redford character - closed off, "stingy"
- Begins to teach his granddaughter to work on the truck and drive it.
- Forgives Self and Daughter-in-law

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16
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This movie shows us the process of how a family comes to find healing. Not by simply healing the individuals within the family in isolation from each other, but rather in relationship with each other.

- Healthy families are connected
- Healthy families are generous
- Healthy families take the long view
- The Movie closes with the Morgan Freeman character speaking of taking flight in a dream and going
“to a place high above the earth where
the blue meets the black and
everything that is, has a reason for
being.”

- “birds eye” = systems perspective?
- Health to generosity?
- Generosity to health?



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Healthy Congregations:

- *Respond, rather than react to anxiety*
- *Invite stewardship of self*
- *Focus on strengths*
- *Manage conflict as a source of possibilities*
- *Encourage leaders to challenge people*
- *Focus on mission*
- *Invite Leaders to Promote Strength Through "non-anxious presence"*

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19
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In a longer workshop I would devote whole sections to each of these elements of a healthy congregation.

Two ways of seeing the world

- The House of Fear relies on Separate Parts thinking
- The House of Love relies on Systems thinking

“Fundraising” versus “Funding Ministry”

The first is based in Separate
Parts thinking while the second
is based in Systems thinking.

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In his book “Creating a Climate for Giving” Don Joiner speaks about attitudes towards church finances according to individualist and systems thinking. He believes this distinction is instructive in terms of the difference between what he calls a “fundraising” and a “funding ministry” perspective.

Fundraising churches:

- “identif[y] the problem (not enough money because members are not giving) and design[] a program to solve the problem (an annual fund campaign).”
- “The guiding theology ... is that people do not want to give. Therefore, we design gimmicks and ploys to get people to give up their money. The image is one of a tight fist, with the church trying to pry the fingers open to get to the money.” from Donald Joiner, *Creating a Climate for Giving*

Fundraising Churches Believe:

- Ownership in the individual
- Focus on Institutional needs
- Focus on Money as the key issue
- Focus on Budget as self evident goal
- Focus on Membership vows/Obligations
- Focus on Shortfall (scarcity mentality)

Funding Ministry Churches Believe

- God's ownership Vs. our ownership
- members need to give Vs. need of institution to receive
- Ministry Vision Vs. ministry costs
- Results (transformation stories) Vs. budget information
- Spiritual growth Vs. obligation
- Possibilities Vs. shortfall

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24
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Healthy Congregations are able to put into place the kinds of practices that will cultivate the congregation's capacity to become "Funding Ministry" churches.

Best Practices

- Integrity/Transparency of Financial Systems
- Consensus on Congregational Priorities
- Empathy/Communication
- Ministry Involvement
- Culture of Gratitude
- Faith/Worship/Prayer
- Challenge

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25
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In her book, *Rambam's Ladder*, Jullie Salamon tells about a study conducted in the late 90's by Dr. Paul Schervish, a sociologist at Boston College and a senior research associate at his Social Welfare Research Institute, John J. Havens. Out of their research they came to the conclusion that "Caring behavior is motivated by identification with the needs of others." Based on this insight, they advise that "The scolding model of fund-raising which seeks to elicit giving and volunteering by bullying, by instilling guilt, and by admonishment, should be replaced by one that engages the individual and seeks to build on the individual's prior experiences of giving and receiving care and the identification with the fate of another, which are endemic to human love."

But the journey from the House of Fear to the House of love is not a quick one. In his book, *More Than Money*, Patrick McNamara highlights a number of congregations that took this journey by placing the the image of Stewardship at the center of their life. On average, he says, it takes from three to five years for a congregation to begin to arrive at this healthier place. So how might your congregation begin the journey?

Change or Die

- Strong Spiritual/Emotional Component
- Re-framing
- Continuing Support

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Research on change dynamics emphasizes that while information and education are important, they are not enough to change behavior. Nor is a sense of crisis sufficient to do the job, even when a person is dying and needs to make major changes to survive. In the article, "[Change or Die](#)", in Fast Company, Magazine.

A three-fold approach seems to work best:

- A strong spiritual / emotional component, not just information and admonition but transformation.
- An emphasis on “re-framing” — describing the situation in different terms, and helping people move from the old frame to the new one.
- Continuing support. In medical studies, patients lectured once or twice by their doctors about the need for change did miserably. Those who had an opportunity for ongoing interaction, for support and accountability in an environment of trust did remarkably well in accomplishing meaningful, permanent change.

Cultivating Generosity Initiative

- Cluster of Congregations
- Two-Thirds of Session members participating
- Personal spiritual journey
- Three year commitment
- One day workshop each year
- Giving Culture Analysis
- Quarterly meetings

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27
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In order to provide these elements of spiritual/emotional support, re-framing, and continuing support I have developed a program called the Cultivating Generosity Initiative. Out of more than a year long conversation with presbytery staff in the presbyteries of Philadelphia and Carlisle, and four informational meetings with groups of pastors and lay leaders we are ready to launch the first two groups this May and June of 2008.

Your congregation may not be ready to make this level of commitment but one thing is for certain, cultivating a congregation's generosity requires a systems perspective.

Closing

May your efforts to cultivate your own and your congregations' generosity be nourished by the divine perspective from



"a place high above the earth
where the blue meets the black
and everything that is, has a
reason for being."

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29
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