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**Cultivating Generosity - A Program For Your Church**

*By The Reverend Fred. D. Milligan, Jr.*

Whether the image is one of farming or gardening, the word cultivate has great resonance as we think about the topic of generosity. While a variety of images come to mind, perhaps the one that stands out as the transition between the world of growing plants and growing givers is that of interdependence. Soil conditions, air, sunlight, water and seeds form a complex and interdependent context within which a plant grows. Likewise, the growth of a giver requires an interdependent social matrix within which the person's generosity can be nurtured.

To paraphrase the recently popularized African proverb: It takes a village to cultivate generosity.

For Christians, this social dimension of the cultivation of generosity takes on a deeper, theological meaning as it reflects an embodiment of the self-giving (in Greek, 'agape') love of Christ. As Christ has given himself to and for us we are called to give ourselves to and for one another. This means that for us, generosity is never merely a transactional and individual event but always a transformational and relational one. For us, generosity is nurtured within the context not only of our faith relationship with Jesus Christ but also our relationships with one another in the garden that is the family and congregation.

So when we think about cultivating generosity in the Christian context, we cannot bypass the role of the congregation as the primary "mediating institution" or garden within which its members' generosity is cultivated. It is never sufficient to attempt to train individuals to be more generous apart from addressing the congregational context and its leaders' resistance to change.

Alan Duetschman, in his 2005 article "Change or Die" (Fast Company Magazine, Issue 94, May 2004, Pg. 53), presents findings on change dynamics. He emphasizes that while information and

education are important, they are not enough to produce change. Nor is a sense of crisis (even when a person is dying and needs to make major changes to survive) sufficient to do the job. What seems to work best is leading people through a three-fold approach which includes:

- 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 to move from the old frame to the new one;
- continuing support.

Our approach to the cultivation of the generosity of our members must be systemic and not merely episodic. One-time workshops where only one or two members of a congregation attend and canned annual campaign programs are insufficient given the scope of the task at hand. But how might such an approach be developed?

A program for implementing these insights around the cultivation of generosity might best be pursued with clusters of congregations (half dozen or so) in a Presbytery. It would require a high degree of commitment from the leadership for at least one Saturday workshop a year during that three year period. Such a program might include:

- the personal commitment of congregational leaders to engage the issues of faith and money through use of the Money Autobiography, journaling, scriptural study and worship;
- attention to how each congregation can begin to move from a culture of obligation and scarcity to one of gratitude and abundance;
- a coaching model utilizing a local network of stewardship consulting teams and regular gatherings for mutual support;
- a detailed analysis of each congregation's giving culture with a report and recommendations regarding the development of "best practices" in the area of stewardship;
- support from a qualified resource person via telephone, e-mail and website.

If we want to truly cultivate the generosity of generations to come, I am convinced that this is the kind of program that is needed. If you are interested in pursuing a conversation about how this process might be implemented with a cluster of congregations in your presbytery, please call me at 570-575-5611 or e-mail me at hopfl1@comcast.net.

*Fred is an ordained minister in the PCUSA who has served a wide variety of types of individual congregations as a pastor and our denomination as Associate for Stewardship Education. In addition to the MA in Theological Ethics from the University of Chicago and the MDiv from Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Fred holds a Certificate in Fundraising Management from the Fundraising School at the Center on Philanthropy at the University of Indiana.*



## Time to Consider the Halloween Candy Tithe

When Mamie Broadhurst, pastor at First United Church in Oak Park, Illinois, was brainstorming ideas to teach the concepts of tithing and stewardship to the children, she remembered something Second Presbyterian in Nashville had done when she was a Young Adult Volunteer there a few years earlier. Kids were asked to bring to church, the Sunday after Halloween, a tithe of their Halloween candy. It was a way to get families talking about stewardship, and a way that children could learn about tithing

This article was first published in the November 2006 PEER Post. To read the full article please [click here](#).

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## In-Depth January Conference on Endowments

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If your church is thinking about starting an endowment, already has an endowment, or wants to know more about church endowments, plan to attend this workshop! *Growing Ministries through Growing Funds*, a one-day program on endowment management, will be held Saturday, January 26, 2008, from 8:30 am to 5 pm at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania (near Philadelphia). Come learn how your church can enhance and develop its ministry through an endowment program. This is a conference both for the church considering creating an endowment program and for the church wanting to revitalize or enhance its endowment program.

Features include:

- Separate tracks for churches at different levels in growing their endowment program (registration survey provided to guide in track selection)
- Worship on theology of stewardship
- Individual, professional consult before leaving conference to determine plan of action for your church
- Plenary on stewardship
- Networking and roundtable discussions during lunch

Presenters will be:

- Robbe Healey - Farr Healey Consulting
- Phil Ellmore - Muhlenberg College and Farr Healey Consulting
- Paula Kem - Presbyterian Foundation
- David Haight - Presbyterian Foundation
- Rev. JC Austin - Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church

Contact Joan Bergsteinsson at 610-687-8912 or [joanbergie@comcast.net](mailto:joanbergie@comcast.net) if you have questions. You may register on the PEER website after October 22, 2007.

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## Who We Are

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The Presbyterian Endowment Education & Resource (PEER) Network exists to serve leaders in Presbyterian congregations and organizations in the creation, development, and creative use of invested funds for the cause of Christ's ministry. Through seminars, print and electronic media, and direct consultation, PEER is a volunteer network of ministers and laypersons which works to strengthen and deepen the church's theological understanding of stewardship, and provide education, practical advice, and encouragement in the building and managing of endowments in the local church. Visit our website to learn more about PEER.