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**BUILDING UP  
YOUR BIG PROJECTS**

*Giving Above & Beyond*

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# Sacrificial Giving: The Heart of True Stewardship

BY GUILLERMO E. BIAGGI

Christians are called to live differently in a world consumed by the pursuit of wealth, status, and security. As stewards of God's blessings, we are entrusted with material wealth, time, talents, opportunities, and more—all of which ultimately belong to God. While tithes and offerings are essential, the Bible calls us to a higher standard: sacrificial giving. This form of giving reflects our understanding that everything we have is a gift from God, and we are His stewards.

Stewardship goes beyond meeting essential obligations like tithing 10% and giving a percentage as regular offerings. Faithful stewardship is about recognizing that all we have belongs to God and we need to use it to honor Him. In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus shows that faithful stewardship is rewarded, while those who hoard their resources are condemned. Faithful stewardship calls for a spirit of generosity that mirrors God's own nature—who gave his son for our salvation. It's not about doing the minimum; it's about using everything we have for God's purposes.

## THE CALL TO SACRIFICIAL GIVING

While tithing and regular offerings are biblical principles, sacrificial giving challenges us to go beyond. In a world facing economic, social, or moral crises, the church is called to rise above mere obligation and give with a sacrificial spirit. Sacrificial giving is our response to God's grace and love. As David declared in 1 Chronicles 29:14, "Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand." Recognizing that all we have is a gift from God makes sacrificial giving more manageable and meaningful.

Sacrificial giving requires trust in God's provision, even when stepping outside our comfort zones. It's not just about

money; it also involves offering our time, energy, and talents to advance God's work on earth. In a materialistic world, sacrificial giving is a testimony that our true treasures are not of this world but in heaven.

## OBEDIENCE AND LOVE

At its core, sacrificial giving is a response to God's love, not an obligation. As Paul writes, "If I give all I possess to the poor . . . , but do not have love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). True generosity flows from a heart of love. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Our giving reflects what we value and demonstrates our commitment to God's purposes on earth.

Sacrificial giving also invites us to partner with God in His mission—not just to meet others' needs but to advance the gospel, support the church, and spread hope. When we give sacrificially, we expand God's kingdom and transform lives.

Finally, sacrificial giving is more than a financial transaction—it is an act of worship. It is both a privilege and responsibility to recognize that everything we have comes from God and we should return it to Him in faith. As we embrace sacrificial giving and encourage others to do the same, we trust that our contributions will be used for His glory and the expansion of His kingdom. Let us remember Jesus' words: "Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21).



Guillermo E. Biaggi is a general vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

# Leadership Role in Funding Large-Scale Projects

BY ANIEL BARBE

## REVISITING THREE BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS

After the release of an issue of the *Dynamic Steward* magazine on systematic giving,<sup>1</sup> a local church pastor pointed out to me the need to equip local church leaders on how to finance their large projects and initiatives. His comment suggests that systematic giving might not be sufficient for funding local projects that require substantial resources. Does the Bible have something to say about funding large-scale projects within the church? To explore the subject, I engaged in a limited study that focused on three biblical accounts:

- The building of the tabernacle in the wilderness
- The grand construction of Solomon's temple
- The extensive restoration of the temple under King Joash

My initial impression was that the same God who instructed His children in systematic giving also provides unique guidelines for funding large-scale or special projects.

This article uncovers key themes related to how leadership can approach the funding of contemporary large-scale projects and reveals an interesting intersection between project funding and systematic giving.

## FROM, FOR, AND THROUGH GOD

The central theme that has emerged is that the funding of special projects among God's people must be a God-centric initiative, not merely a fundraising exercise. While each project under consideration was distinct and happened at different times, the respective leadership embraced the conviction that the project was from God, for God, and made possible through God.

## FROM GOD

The vision for building the tabernacle in the desert was communicated and commanded to Moses during his extended

encounter with God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18; 25:1-9). Likewise, David sought God's guidance on how to proceed with the building of the temple in Jerusalem, even amending his initial plan in response to God's response (1 Chronicles 22:8, 9). Similarly, King Joash's actions were guided by instructions from the high priest of his time (2 Kings 12:2). In each case, the leadership was firmly convinced—and communicated this conviction to the people—that the project was God's will and part of His design. As a result, participation in the project was seen as an opportunity to be part of God's work, which is a critical conviction.

Executing large-scale projects can bring extensive pressure and stress to a local church congregation. However, the assurance of God's leading provides the serenity to navigate this often-turbulent season. Additionally, according to Cincala and others (2016), when church members are conscious that they are not simply paying the bills but are involved in something much bigger than themselves, like God's mission, their motivation to give is heightened.<sup>2</sup>

“ **Giving and worship have an intrinsic connection.** ”

## FOR GOD

The instruction given to Moses about collecting materials for the tabernacle first emphasized God as the recipient before focusing on the infrastructure to be built. The command was for the “Israelites to bring me an offering” (Exodus 25:2), after which God specified that these offerings were to be used to “make a sanctuary for me” (Exodus 25:8). The focus was clearly on God.

Similarly, David's intention in mobilizing resources for constructing the majestic temple was to honor the LORD before all nations (1 Chronicles 22:1, 5). The project was an expression of worship and adoration. This idea is reinforced in David's description of his gifts as an act of devotion (1 Chronicles 29:3) and by his



appeal to the other leaders and people of Israel: “Now, who is willing to consecrate themselves to the LORD today?” (1 Chronicles 29:5). so, David was not simply raising funds, he was raising the spiritual devotion of God’s people.

Without minimizing the technicality of raising funds, it is critical not to lose sight that raising money for religious purposes is primarily a spiritual endeavor. Alain Corallie, an Adventist scholar whose work focuses on worship, explains that there are three key incentives to giving: God’s grace, God as Giver and Forgiver, and God as Source of blessings. Giving and worship have an intrinsic connection. “Truly, worship is giving, and giving is worship.”<sup>3</sup> Giving and worship have an intrinsic connection.

“ **When church leaders uphold the conviction that a project is God’s design and aimed at His glory, they can proceed with the unshakable assurance of God’s provision.** ”

#### THROUGH GOD

When the Israelites received the appeal to give to God for the tabernacle, they were coming out of several centuries of slavery and roaming in the wilderness without any regular income. Yet, according to the Bible, they could give because God had miraculously provided them with articles of silver and gold and clothing a few weeks before (Exodus 12:35, 36). They could provide because God had preceded them in giving. King David, who made substantial donations from his assets, acknowledged that “we have given you only what comes from your hand” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

An important lesson emerges from these accounts: The resources needed for the execution of large-scale projects are already provided by God to His children. Our role is to encourage the channeling of these resources in the right direction. When church leaders uphold the conviction that a project is God’s design and aimed at His glory, they can proceed with the unshakable assurance of God’s provision. When church leaders uphold the conviction that a project is God’s design and aimed at His glory, they can proceed with the unshakable assurance of God’s provision.

“ **Two striking features of Moses’ and David’s appeals were their simplicity and non-coercive nature.** ”

#### INVITATION: SIMPLE AND NONCOERCIVE

Leadership played an explicit role in inviting people to give for the constructions of the tabernacle and the temple (Exodus 25:2; 1 Chronicles 29:5). This contrasts with two prevailing assumptions in the Christian milieu. First is the belief that people can recognize existing needs for themselves and respond accordingly, meaning there is no need for formal appeals. Second is the idea that once people are spiritually converted, they will give automatically, without reminders or solicitations. While these assumptions may be sometimes valid, they are generally fallacies. Both Moses and David chose not to take that risk. Herzog and Price (2016) found in their study that the lowest levels of participation occur among those who are not exposed to any appeal to give.<sup>4</sup>

Two striking features of Moses’ and David’s appeals were their simplicity and non-coercive nature. They did not use any detours or fancy strategies. While it is essential to carefully plan giving campaigns, the aim is to communicate clearly and not to add unnecessary complexity. Church leadership should be cautious about investing disproportionate energy and resources in raising funds. The fundraising campaign is never an end in itself.

Ellen G. White strongly condemns the organization of some types of activities that could possibly boost giving: “Moses made no grand feast. He did not invite the people to scenes of gaiety, dancing, and general amusement. Neither did he institute lotteries or anything of this profane order to obtain means to erect the tabernacle of God in the wilderness.”<sup>5</sup> The end does not justify the means. Nevertheless, Moses and David achieved resounding success in their efforts.

The second characteristic of Moses’ and King David’s appeals is how they expected people to give. There was not an ounce of compulsion in their approach. In contemporary fundraising practices, it is common to evaluate the cost of a project and then invite each potential donor to contribute a specific amount to cover the expected budget. This method is mathematically sound and provides a clear path to the completion of the project. However, it may not be respectful of people’s unique circumstances, and neither Moses nor David pursued this route. After casting the vision and defining the needs, they allowed each person or family the freedom to give what they were impressed to give. Two key expressions characterized the process: “heart prompts” and “freewill offerings” (Exodus 25:2; 35:29). The leaders trusted that God’s Spirit was active in convincing people to support His projects.

## BIG PROJECT . . . NO SPECIAL APPEAL

Interestingly, King Joash adopted a different approach from Moses and King David when he undertook the reparation of the temple. There was no special appeal for gifts and donations. Instead, he decided to use the accumulated regular offerings that were dedicated to the maintenance of the temple to support the major restoration project (2 Kings 12:4; 2 Chronicles 24:6). This text specifies three types of offerings: “The money collected in the census, the money received from personal vows and the money brought voluntarily to the temple” (2 Kings 12:4). The temple administration had a permanent fund set aside to maintain the place of worship, which was consistently replenished by the census offering—a defined minimum annual contribution of half a shekel for every male aged twenty and above (Exodus 30:14–16). The other two offerings were voluntary and given as supplements for the same purpose.

“ **A special project can, in some cases, be funded through the accumulation of regular offerings without the need for special appeals.** ”

There was a strong culture of regular giving among God’s people during King Joash’s reign. Despite observing an undue delay in the repairs, King Joash did not resort to making special appeals. Instead, he insisted on closely monitoring the use of the three specified offerings. After all, savings result from intentional actions. As a result, sufficient resources were channeled toward completing the repairs. This situation illustrates how a special project can, in some cases, be funded through the accumulation of regular offerings without the need for special appeals.

A study of the economic practices of US congregations has shown that contributions through regular giving usually resulted in a higher volume of contributions than special, one-time donations.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it may be wise for local churches to emphasize and prioritize systematic giving. A portion—preferably a percentage—of regular offerings would then be consistently allocated to the church capital fund or reserve fund within the church budget. The understanding is that these funds will only be used to support special projects when needed. However, if—for practical reasons, emergencies, or unique opportunities—the church requires additional resources beyond what has been saved, it can still make special appeals for funds, but the practice remains exceptional.

A word of caution is in order. Utilizing regular offerings toward repairs or other projects

has some restrictions. The priests could not redirect all types of offerings for the repairs of the temple during the time of Joash. The Bible explicitly mentions a category of offerings that could not be used: “The money from the guilt offerings and sin offerings was not brought into the temple of the LORD; it belonged to the priests” (2 Kings 12:16). The nature of these offerings and their use as a major source of subsistence for the priests forbid their usage for the repairs.

“ **In fundraising for large-scale projects, church leaders must, early in the process, clarify the restrictive nature of some funds to avoid misunderstanding and tension among the members.** ”

While it is not prudent to draw a principle from a single descriptive passage, the restriction in using some categories of offerings for financing projects such as repairs is a well-documented instruction. Another such offering is the tithe, which had an exclusive usage of supporting the Levites (Numbers 18:21–28). Ellen G. White also strongly dismisses the possibility of altering the established use of tithe. She wrote these words to a church that was questioning her about using tithe money to service debt because they were facing a risk of foreclosure: “Every soul who is honored in being a steward of God is to carefully guard the tithe money. This is sacred means. The LORD will not sanction your borrowing this money for any other work. It will create evils you cannot now discern.”<sup>7</sup> In fundraising for large-scale projects, church leaders must, early in the process, clarify the restrictive nature of some funds to avoid misunderstanding and tension among the members.

## CREATING WAVES OF GENEROSITY

It is the cherished dream of all leaders to garner ample support for the remarkable vision that God has placed in their hearts. The account of the preparation for the construction of the temple highlights a winning strategy: When leaders demonstrate sacrificial giving, they inspire others to give. King David used the expression “a large amount” (1 Chronicles 22:3) to describe his gifts. It was neither an exaggeration nor hyperbole. Some have estimated the contemporary value of his gift to be around \$20 billion. Was he giving from the surplus of his kingly wealth? It was not so. He testified of the sacrificial nature of his donations by saying, “I have taken great pains to provide” (1 Chronicles 22:14).

As a result of his lavish and sacrificial gift, King David gained the moral authority to challenge the other leaders and the





“ **Leaders can create a ripple effect of generosity when they exemplify giving as they appeal to others.** ”

people, saying, “You may add to them” (1 Chronicles 22:14). Continuing with the leaders and expanding to the people, there was a contagious wave of generosity and support across the nation (1 Chronicles 22:6–9). This story demonstrates the power of role modeling in spiritual leadership. Leaders can create a ripple effect of generosity when they exemplify giving as they appeal to others. While this can be the most challenging aspect of raising funds, it is also one of the most effective for funding large-scale projects. Ellen G. White, while writing about the gift of influence, reminds us of the power available to leaders and anyone else to exercise our influence for good: “It is only through the grace of God that we can make a right use of this endowment. There is nothing in us of ourselves by which we can influence others for good.”<sup>8</sup>

The funding of large-scale projects within the local church must be approached with a God-centric mindset; they are from, for, and through God. Effective appeals are both explicit and noncoercive, avoiding marketing gimmicks that do not align with biblical and ethical values. We must trust in God’s ability to soften hearts. Systematic giving is a key tool for financing large-scale projects, offering a reliable and desired source of income. Careful planning and monitoring church expenses are essential. Finally, local church leaders hold a unique advantage over external or professional fundraisers. Through their personal giving, they can demonstrate the value and pertinence of a project, which plays a critical role in motivating others.



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# Financing Big Projects: Principles for Above-&-Beyond Giving

BY MICHAEL J. BROWN, MBA, CFRE

When local church leaders embark on raising financial support for building campaigns or other special projects, there can be a delicate balance between mobilizing large-scale resources and avoiding a decline in weekly tithes and offerings. Whether it's constructing a new sanctuary, establishing a center of influence, or upgrading school facilities, such projects simultaneously inspire excitement and consternation. In situations like that, the key challenge for leadership is to inspire "above-and-beyond giving." That means fostering increased generosity while maintaining ongoing, annual support. Such reliable financial contributions are mission-critical in covering operating expenses like building and equipment maintenance, salary expenses, or other program and ministry expenses. In this article, we'll delve into how church leadership can utilize best-in-class philanthropic principles that not only finance big projects effectively but also promote unity, inspire incremental giving, and cultivate a copious culture of generosity.

“ **The first step in raising above-and-beyond giving is ensuring that members have both clarity about and passion for the core elements of your local church's strategic plan.** ”

## KEYS TO EFFECTIVELY FINANCING BIG PROJECTS

The first question that church leadership should ask themselves requires organizational introspection to answer. Leadership must thoughtfully consider the following: “How ready is our church to ask

members to give above and beyond their current level of support?” Congregations tend to be very forgiving if the strategic focus of the local church has been slightly hazy. Congregants are likely to continue to return their tithes and give a level of free-will offerings that adequately support recurring, annual budget needs. However, the situation is totally different when asking for the above-and-beyond giving needed to financially support large-scale special projects or capital campaigns. This is a primary reason that capital campaigns, the behemoth of campaign giving, often stall. The people perish for lack of vision, and in this instance, it is your job to cast that vision contagiously. The first step in raising above-and-beyond giving is ensuring that members have both clarity about and passion for the core elements of your local church's strategic plan.

“ **The mission—“What are we doing, and what is our mandate?”—must be crystal clear.** ”

When we ask the church body to enter a season of prayer to consider how they might give exponentially more than they have ever given before, and when we ask members to make a moderate- to long-term commitment to sustaining a significantly increased level of giving for a campaign or project, that will most certainly prompt people to begin caring very deeply about and to earnestly yearn for—if not insist on—strategic clarity. They will ask themselves, “Why should I give even more sacrificially than I currently am giving to my church? What is so critically important that I should stretch my faith and increase my level of generosity to a higher financial commitment than I have ever thought of before? Do I really understand what's going on with this project,





and am I as passionate about this project as leadership is?" The first step in step in raising above-and-beyond giving is ensuring that members have both clarity about and passion for the core elements of your local church's strategic plan. Most often, local congregations would benefit immensely from pushing pause so they can craft or refine the church's strategic focus. That will facilitate every church leader's and every departmental leader's ability to sing from the same hymn sheet during a special project or capital campaign. That way the congregation hears a consistent set of messages around which they can rally and proudly be a part of.

“ **The fundraising case for support answers three critical questions: Why give? why give now?, and what happens if I don't give?** ”

The mission—“What are we doing, and what is our mandate?”—must be crystal clear. It will be central in building a case for incremental giving. Doing so helps financial contributors see the role they play in fulfilling the bigger picture, the central purpose their organization fulfills, and the core value they corporately deliver. Clarity in values helps the membership know why we are doing what we're doing. Research shows that being in alignment from a values standpoint is known to be one of the strongest intrinsic motivators for doing anything, including giving generously. A compelling vision underscores and asks, “Where is God leading us?” It provides supporters with a key milestone along their discipleship journey and indicates how their financial faithfulness is actively helping the church body to get from its current state to its divinely destined future state. With those core components of your ministry's strategy in place, you are ready to crystalize the most important component in successful fundraising—the case for support.

The fundraising case for support answers three critical questions: Why give? why give now?, and what happens if I don't give? Although deceptively simple-seeming, crisp answers to these questions empower campaign leadership to convincingly tell the organization's story about the project under consideration. Making a compelling case for support also gives members a clear idea of what a God-inspired, cooperative future together looks like. It raises the relevance of giving because people do not give to organizations; they give to causes. And people give most generously to transformational causes. The bigger the ask, the larger the transformational impact supporters expect to see, experience, feel, and hear about. Never forget that the purpose of fundraising campaigns is to operationalize the social impact of your strategic plan. It

isn't about securing equipment or buildings; it is ultimately about transforming lives. That is what generous givers desire to hear about, the key point you need to consistently communicate: transformed lives. For example, financing a new STEM lab means creating a stimulating environment for students to discover the mysteries of Creation. Replacing a leaking roof means creating a safe, inviting environment wherein community members can come to learn God's design for their spiritual, physical, and financial lives. Successful fundraising, especially for big projects, is not about how to manipulate people into making charitable donations. It is about growing authentic relationships wherein potential supporters are motivated to give generously to transform lives.

“ **Generous giving is rooted in trusting relationships, and trust is a pivotal key to unlocking congregational generosity.** ”

For Christian ministries, it is essential to take things a step further. Christian fundraising must simultaneously yield financial and spiritual fruit. This reminds me of a call I received from a conference treasurer who was aware that a member had recently inherited a large sum of money. Basically, the question posed to me was how best to structure the ask. The questions I posed in response were: What is the spiritual benefit for the prospective donor? How will they grow spiritually through the process? How does making this gift tie into that member's philanthropic interests? There was a pregnant pause wherein we both realized that the donor exchange was heading toward a transactional focus instead of a relational focus. Fortunately, the treasurer pushed pause long enough to consider the spiritual aspects of both asking and giving. When giving is primarily seen as a transaction, with relationships on the back burner, generosity is thwarted and trust is diminished.

## TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY

Generous giving is rooted in trusting relationships, and trust is a pivotal key to unlocking congregational generosity. Although the capacity to give is an essential precursor to a propensity to give, that inclination to give is significantly moderated by trust. Above-and-beyond giving is dependent upon a high degree of trust. Building trust influences a donor's willingness to give by assuring donors that their contributions are well-managed. Another contingent for trust is assuring donors that their donations are used efficiently and effectively for their intended purpose(s). This transparency in reporting can

be done in many ways, some more compelling than others. For instance, adhering to the best practice of acknowledging gifts within 48 hours of having received them provides an opportunity to give the donor a timely receipt for their gift. It also offers a fertile period during which you can illustrate the impact of the gift and go a step further to acknowledge the donor and their role in helping move the mission forward. Something that few churches do, but many other nonprofits routinely do, is the creation of a ministry impact report.

**“ A broad, long-term solution for increasing above-and-beyond giving is to consistently cultivate a culture of generosity. ”**

Due to cost and convenience, ministry impact reports are usually produced in digital format. They are a great way to highlight accomplished goals, spotlight ministry impact, overview community service projects, and collectively honor ministry supporters. Through impact reports, you can affirm donors’ decisions to financially support the ministry and plant the seeds to consider increasing their level of engagement and support. You can find several examples by typing “ministry impact report” into your favorite search engine. There you will find local Christian church examples like the Reformed Church in America. You will also find creative examples of integrating ministry impact reports into campaigns like the Wycliffe Bible Translators. Through integrated marketing communications like these, you will build donor trust that convincingly shows the ministry value of every dollar raised and stimulate the trust needed to increase above-and-beyond giving, a central role in and reflection of a vibrant culture of generosity.

**“ You will find that people’s faith in God grows exponentially with their generous giving. ”**

**CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF GENEROSITY**

A broad, long-term solution for increasing above-and-beyond giving is to consistently cultivate a culture of generosity. Doing so requires intentionality in developing a long-term focus on creating a fertile environment wherein generosity naturally and abundantly flourishes. This requires taking intentional, strategic steps to establish an environment that ignites Spirit-led, whole-life stewardship. It is stewardship that mobilizes multigenerational

philanthropy to collectively serve communities and reflect the transforming love of Christ in and through membership. It is characterized by unbridled joy in giving (2 Corinthians 9:6, 7) and reaps the fruit of the spiritual gift of giving (Romans 12:8). It teaches the 7 T’s of Stewardship: Time, Temple, Talent, Treasure, Trust, Theology, and Testimony. It also shows the membership how to expand ministry through principles and practices of successful fundraising. And it encourages establishing a legacy of incremental giving by making a planned gift. It is an environment wherein giving inspires spiritual growth.

You will find that people’s faith in God grows exponentially with their generous giving. Married couples will have purposeful conversations about their lives, purpose, and resources. Members begin to experience God, enabling them to commit more financial resources than previously imagined. People gain greater financial freedom because they have increased financial resources available for giving. People grow their commitment to Christ and share a vision of attaining true life (1 Timothy 6:17-19). A culture of generosity culminates in the church body growing its faith in God and intensifying its commitment to the local congregation. That is the long view of funding big projects with above-and-beyond giving.



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# My Level of Dedication

By KONSTANTIN KAMPEN, DMIN

**W**hen my son was born, his height was 57 centimeters (22 inches). If he had remained at that height for his entire life, it would have caused him a lot of inconvenience and problems. But at the time, no one was concerned. Everyone knew these were just his initial measurements, and the genuine concern would come if he stopped growing. Thankfully, with good nutrition and physical activity, he grew taller. It's hard to admit, but he is now taller than me!

The spiritual journey is much like physical growth. When someone first learns about God, their level of consecration is often very low. At this stage, selfishness is their dominant driving force. They live by a simple motto: "I am the center of the universe, and my needs are the most important." Staying at this level, however, leads to dire consequences—such individuals cannot inherit eternal life.

As a person grows in their understanding of God, they begin to move to the next level of consecration, which we can call "mutual benefit." At this stage, people realize that living for God is not just right but also beneficial. They discover that following God brings blessings, and they often find comfort in Bible verses such as Malachi 3:10. This is a good deal: If you're faithful in tithing, God promises to bless you abundantly. Even without advanced math skills, it's clear how this kind of consecration brings personal benefits.

However, the journey doesn't end there. As people continue to grow in their relationship with God, they reach the next level of consecration: "intelligent dedication." It is a deeper relationship than one based purely on mutual benefit. At this stage, individuals understand God's love and character more fully and are willing to dedicate their time, talents, and resources to Him. Besides keeping the Sabbath, they might even set aside another evening each week to serve God. Not only do they return their tithe, but they also begin giving regular offerings. Moreover, these individuals become actively involved in church life and service, using their gifts and talents to further God's work. It is a solid level of consecration, and churches with a majority of members at this stage tend to grow and thrive.

Yet, even "intelligent dedication" is not the highest level of consecration. There is a deeper level—what I would call "total consecration."

Those who reach this level dedicate their entire lives to the Lord. Some young people may choose to devote themselves to pastoral or missionary service. At this stage, serving God and maintaining a close relationship with Him becomes the central focus of their life. Believers at this level are more concerned with God's mission than their personal pursuits.

But is "total consecration" the highest level? Not necessarily. Throughout the Bible, we see instances where God calls people to an even more significant commitment—what might be termed "sacrificial consecration." This consecration involves giving up everything for God, even when it requires personal sacrifice. Sometimes, it comes with the risk of losing one's life.

One example of "sacrificial consecration" is the story of the widow of Zarephath. During a famine, when Elijah asked her for food, she didn't just give him a portion—she gave him everything she had left, trusting God to provide for her needs. Her story illustrates how "sacrificial consecration" leads to a miraculous outcome. Abraham, too, exemplified "sacrificial consecration" when he was willing to offer up his son Isaac, and because of his obedience, God called him His friend.

However, the ultimate example of "sacrificial consecration" is Jesus Christ. He gave His life for us on the cross, taking on our sins and securing our salvation. This is the most remarkable example of sacrifice and consecration the world has ever seen.

We each have the opportunity to reflect on our own spiritual journey. We can ask ourselves, "What is my current level of consecration?" and "What level of consecration does God want me to attain?"



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# Build it and They Shall Come!

By LILYA WAGNER, EdD, CFRE

**B**uilding campaigns, or capital campaigns as they are usually referred to, can be exciting and energizing times for churches and their organizations because people with a vision or a determination to do something good or improve an existing condition can carry out that sense of purpose. Conversely, these campaigns can also be disillusioning if the goals aren't reached or there is much dissension or division among the participants. Then, the entire effort can be demoralizing. So, what is the best way for a church or its affiliates to undertake such a major effort and ensure, with God's help, that it will be successful?

## FOUNDATIONS FOR CAPITAL CAMPAIGNS

**C**apital campaigns are defined as a periodic, carefully organized, highly structured fundraising program that uses volunteers supported by staff—or church members guided by a manager of the campaign—and possibly consultants to raise funds for specific needs to be met in a specific timeframe, with a specific dollar goal that allows donors to pledge gifts to be paid over years. This will be the preferred term we will use because it indicates not just wishful thinking, but a purposeful and carefully planned, even professional, effort.

Interestingly enough, based on research and successful campaigns, today's best practices can find parallels in the Bible. There is an excellent example of a well-planned and executed capital campaign in 1 Chronicles 29:1-17 that contains steps of the campaign we use today:

- The “kingdom” (i.e., institution or organization) invests in the campaign and budgets for it.
- The “kingdom” practices good stewardship.
- The king (i.e., the leadership—board chair, president, executive director, pastor) gives personally.

- Those central to the organization (i.e., faculty, senior staff, church staff) give.
- The campaign is made public, and donors (i.e., alumni, constituents, church members, and other public) are enthused.
- They give when asked.

The article “Leadership Role in Funding Large-Scale Projects” in the same issue of this magazine explores three biblical accounts that relate to capital campaigns.

## KEY PRINCIPLES FOR CAPITAL CAMPAIGNS

**S**everal biblical examples and principles correlate with best fundraising practices today, and these can readily be adapted by a church family and leaders willing to give the campaign careful thought and planning. Some of these principles are common sense, bolstered by evidence of success through research and practice. These principles are solid steps to take, verified through study and practice. We will list some aspects of a successful campaign below, recognizing that much more can be stated in helpful materials or via help from knowledgeable individuals.

### I. IT'S IMPORTANT TO ASK, “WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?”

Such a question brings up further steps in the campaign's planning. Why do you need to do this? Your potential donors to this effort, no matter whether they are church members or others, will want clear answers. Are there alternatives to what you wish to accomplish that may require less effort or be more economically feasible? In the vernacular, can you clearly and concisely answer the question, “So what?”



## II. ARE YOU READY FOR THIS KIND OF CAMPAIGN?

In the professional field of fundraising, there is a tool called the feasibility study, which is carried out by an objective individual or group and indicates readiness for this major effort. These are often costly, so some alternative methods have been devised in recent years. Questions such as those in Box 1 and Box 2 have been included. Regrettably, too many campaigns of these types are based on worthy wishes and hopes, but it pays to be realistic from the beginning since this step will guide launching and managing the campaign.

### FEASIBILITY QUESTIONS

- How is the organization perceived? What are the perceptions versus realities?
- What is the stewardship of the church, or giving to the organization, both money and volunteering?
- Does the organization tell its story accurately and effectively?
- Can potential donors of many kinds be identified?
- How can you determine that donors, internal and external, would be willing to give? What amounts would they be willing to give?
- Who should be involved in the campaign? Why? How will they be invited to participate and help?
- How has the goal been set?

## III. PUTTING TOGETHER A PLAN IS VITAL.

One person should head a representative committee that includes people willing to give and work. This brings up another essential point: Capital campaigns should not cause tithes and offerings to diminish. Those funds provided by the membership should remain in place by the givers, so this campaign can be called a “stretch” campaign. If people understand what is happening, see a clear purpose, and can view a plan that spells out the activities and steps in a rational way, they will stretch and participate in different ways to accomplish a common goal. Of course, the feasibility step will determine if, by and large, the church family and all related to this effort are behind it and willing to do their part.

## IV. A PLAN SHOULD SPELL OUT VARIOUS FACTORS.

One of these factors is who will give to this effort. Who cares about this project? Who could be participants in both working on the campaign and giving? Who is “out there” whom the campaign will benefit? For example, it is well-known that faith-based organizations in a community are a plus since they build up the community in various ways and help solve existing problems. So frequently, businesses and corporations participate in particular ways because it benefits their standing in the community, especially if they have employees who are also church members. There are many ways to plan, and samples, as well as advice, can be provided by knowledgeable and practical individuals upon request. Perhaps a stewardship-related committee of volunteers who have successfully done this work can be set up, which would help buy-in from the constituency.

### ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS

- Who should head the campaign?
- How long should the campaign run?
- What is the relationship between the church and the community, and can this relationship yield results in terms of donors?
- Will this be a campaign for a project, building, renovation, equipment acquisition, etc.?
- How can sustainability of our project or result of the campaign be achieved? How will we maintain or keep it going?
- What happens if we don't succeed?
- What happens if we don't do this?

## V. OF COURSE, IT IS VITAL TO INCLUDE PRAYER EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.

As the old adage goes, “God helps those who help themselves!” This saying has its roots in the 1600's and was later quoted by the notable American Benjamin Franklin. It contains much truth! Yes, we can expect guidance and wisdom if we prayerfully approach each step of this campaign, and evidence can be found in many well-planned and carefully executed campaigns carried out by churches and their close affiliates, such as schools.

## VI. COMPLETE PREPARATION IS KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN.

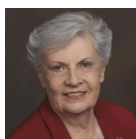
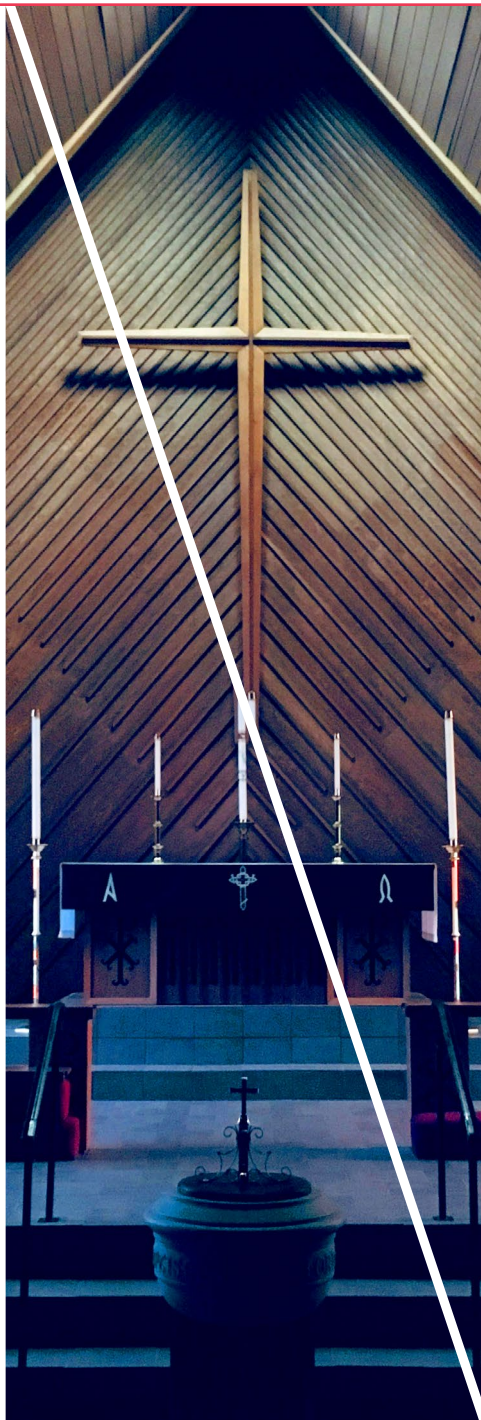
It is often said that capital campaigns are 90% preparation and 10% execution or implementation, which is undoubtedly true. Potential givers/donors/supporters should not be approached prematurely, without careful and personalized preparation, whether these are groups or individuals, and should be requested to give when they and the organization are ready to undertake such a major step. Those who can give the most should be asked first because this provides momentum and a good base toward the goal, and then the process should be moved on so that everyone has a chance to give. Sometimes, people in the lower income bracket give a larger percent of their means than others in higher brackets, e.g., the widow's mite. Too often, this generosity is ignored or denigrated. A major tool for campaign planning can be the gift range chart, exemplified in *Successful Fundraising*,\* a handbook designed by the North American Division for churches undertaking any fundraising beyond tithes and offerings.

## VII. IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE.

Much more could be listed, such as what tools to use, ranging from a personal approach to letters and grant proposals, but a vital point is that the biblical injunction, "It's more blessed to give than to receive," is so true! The Bible is replete with suggestions and statements about how generosity is mutually beneficial, and even secular research from prestigious organizations has proven that generous people live longer, are happier, and are healthier! What a wonderful verification of what the Bible counsels us to do with God's help.

Capital campaigns, especially for churches, can be uplifting and successful for all, from the pastor and church board down to the children's divisions, if they are carefully planned and just as carefully carried out. Too many churches experience disappointment, division in the ranks, blame, and finger-pointing, and most importantly, a worthy goal is not achieved if campaigns are based on "go out there and get the money!"

The Stewardship Ministries or Planned Giving Trust Services Department can provide more material and information or refer to other materials and experienced individuals. The ultimate wish is that the question "So what?" can be successfully determined, and those supporting it will also benefit.



Lilya Wagner, EdD, CFRE, served as the Director of Philanthropic Service for Institutions at the North American Division from 2008 to 2020. She has also been an Associate Director at The Fund Raising School and the Director of the Women's Philanthropy Institute at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Indiana University. Her most recent book, *Diversity and Philanthropy: Expanding the Circles of Giving*, explores the cultural influences on generosity and won a major international book award.

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# Discovering and Achieving God-Sized Vision

BY CYNTHIA C. HUSKINS

Does the prospect of fundraising fill you with excitement? When I think of “fundraising,” I recall my childhood. Any club or project within the church, the community, or the school required us to sell fruit, candy, or wrapping paper to raise funds. We walked in the annual Walk-a-Thon to raise money for the March of Dimes and in the annual Crop Walk to raise money for world hunger, with sponsors paying us for each mile we walked. These sponsors were always our parents, their friends, and our grandparents. While I enjoyed eating the candy, I never found joy in asking people for their ten-dollar donations. I was a shy child, and I dreaded those conversations. The entire process seemed painful for everyone. Is this the impression you and your members have of fundraising? If so, it is no wonder that most pastors and church leaders approach a capital campaign with a sense of fear and dread. Take heart that that is not only an ineffective approach to capital campaigns, it is the antithesis of biblical stewardship and everything God asks of us.

## THE STATE OF THE BUILDING

When you go to church, what do you notice? Was there sufficient parking? If there isn't, you probably notice that. What about the exterior of the building or the landscaping? Is the entrance clearly marked? Is the carpet 1990's mauve? If it is more modern, is it well maintained? Are the seats in the sanctuary comfortable? Are the bathrooms accessible, clean, and sufficient to accommodate the attendees? Do the microphones pop and crackle? Can you hear the speaker? Are the screens and projectors state of the art or in a state of malfunction? Glancing around the church, is there evidence of deferred maintenance? While most members hardly give a thought to the condition of *their* church, as a consultant and stewardship expert, these are areas that I intentionally evaluate every Sabbath. Why? Because every visitor is making these unconscious evaluations. While these details may not have any impact on *your* worship experience, for visitors, these details

have a significant influence on whether they return to your church, or any church for that matter. Does your church reflect the excellence of God? The condition of your church facility impacts the kingdom of God. Our stewardship of the facility resource impacts eternity.

“ **Success in a capital campaign is not just measured in dollars raised; it is measured primarily in lives changed.** ”

## CAPITAL CAMPAIGN MISTAKES

Often when a church asks for my assistance with a capital stewardship campaign, they are trying to build a new facility or renovate their existing facility, often while addressing deferred maintenance. The expectation may be that the consultant will “fundraise” for them. This misnomer is an example of several mistaken expectations made by well-meaning church leaders. The role of the consultant isn't to raise the money for the church. The role of a consultant is to help you embrace a new organizational reality and help the members understand what it means to be a steward of God's resources. Success in a capital campaign is not just measured in dollars raised; it is measured primarily in lives changed. In every campaign I'm involved in, lives are transformed. Adult children come back to church, new people start attending, and people who have always attended get excited about where God is taking their church.

A second mistake is the idea of equal giving. If we have a two-million-dollar project and a membership of 400 people, then we should just ask each member for \$5,000. Equal giving never works. Some people can easily give \$5,000, and they will give that amount only; however, others could never imagine being able to give that much, so they give nothing at all. God is not a God of equal giving.

A third common mistake is the thought that perhaps a wealthy person will fund the entire project for us. A wealthy person may provide some funding, but most will only give when there is evidence of significant progress toward the goal and they sometimes desire public acknowledgment of their generosity. As God's children, we exist to glorify Him above all.

A fourth common mistake is the thought that "we can do this ourselves." If your church is trying to raise more than your yearly church budget, you probably need professional help. We live in an era of specialization. No family physician would attempt to do their own family member's brain surgery, they would take them to a neurologist. Similarly, we should not expect our pastors to do everything on a professional level. There is humility and intelligence in seeking assistance.

**“ The final mistake is making the capital campaign about money. It's not about money. It is about people. It is about each member's relationship to God. ”**

A fifth mistake is the fear that members will redirect their tithe and offerings to the special project. When we teach whole-life biblical stewardship from the perspective of God's providence, giving typically increases across all categories. How does this happen? When we understand that God owns everything and we accept our role of steward rather than owner, our lives are transformed. Understanding our identity within God's kingdom realigns our priorities and results in a radical form of godly generosity that transforms our church and impacts our community.

The final mistake is making the capital campaign about money. It's not about money. It is about people. It is about each member's relationship to God. Therefore, biblical stewardship must emanate from God's vision.

### God's Vision

**W**hen we feel like there is not enough time, God provides!

When we feel like there is not enough money to accomplish His vision, God provides!

Aligning the desires of our hearts with the desires of God allows Him to give through us in ways we never could have imagined. Miraculously, God continues to provide!

In *Counsels on Stewardship*, Ellen G. White tells us, "The gold and the silver are the LORD'S; and He could rain them from heaven if He chose. But instead of this He has made man His

**“ If we are seeking to achieve God-sized vision, we must look to God to provide His miracles and blessings through His people. Through each one of us! ”**

steward, entrusting him with means, not to be hoarded, but to be used in benefiting others. He thus makes man the medium through which to distribute His blessings on earth.\* We are to become like our Creator God, benevolent and unselfish.

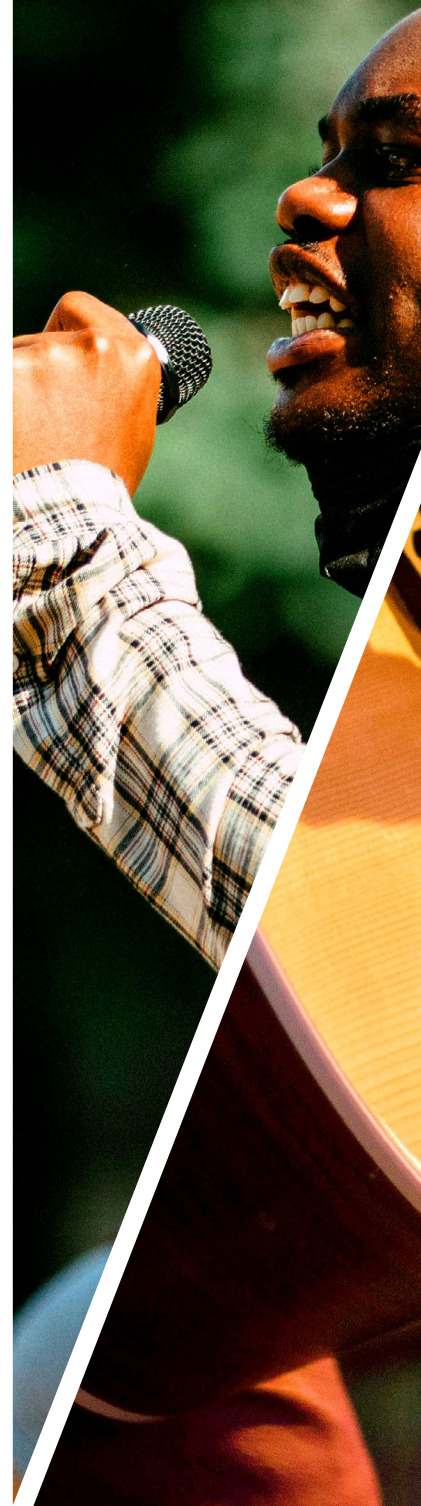
When our churches need God-sized funding to achieve God-sized vision for their church and community, secular fundraising has us look to our earthly abilities, whereas biblical stewardship principles can transform every single church member and the entire church family. If we are seeking to achieve God-sized vision, we must look to God to provide His miracles and blessings through His people. Through each one of us!

Are all of God's promises true? Of course. Does God ever overpromise? Of course not.

When God reveals His vision to His people, He has already equipped us to achieve His vision. This does not mean it will be easy—not at all! We must rely fully upon God with an open heart and a willing spirit. Are we willing to sacrifice our time for God's vision? Are we willing to invest our skills and abilities in achieving God's vision? Are we willing to sacrifice our treasure for God's kingdom? Are we willing to accept that everything we are and everything we have belongs to the highest Source of life, and are we willing to be the conduit through which God's vision is achieved?

God has uniquely equipped you specifically for this moment in place and time. When God calls your church to His new vision, it may seem impossible! But God can bring possibility out of impossibility. When God's vision becomes real, you should expect a radical transformation in your church. Do not expect everything to remain the same. A reinvigorated dose of the Holy Spirit should be expected—"church" should not feel the same. A new, reinvigorated church is needed for a new generation. A new church is needed to transform the world we live in. When our Adventist pioneers embraced God's vision, it was not comfortable. They had to hold on tightly to God because they were challenged beyond human capacity. God never calls us to be comfortable, but He always empowers us to achieve His vision. He is calling you out of your comfort zone to accomplish His purpose! The question remains, are you willing?

Your individual and unique purpose is to pour yourself into the world as a child of God





“ **As stewards, we are not responsible for outcomes. God owns all of the outcomes.** ”

and show this world a loving God. It is through you that God wants to work His miracles in the lives of others. If you do not know your own unique mix of spiritual gifts, seek that knowledge from the LORD. If you do not know your own unique passion, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal that to you. Engage your gift mix in your local church and use all the time, talent, and treasure at this moment in time to impact the population of the kingdom of heaven for eternity. Everything you are, everything you have, it all belongs to God and is purposed for His glory! C. S. Lewis said: “Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God.” All of our time, any of our skills or talents, any bit of treasure or generosity—you cannot give God anything that is not His already. Everything about us, all that we have, is His.

As stewards, we are not responsible for outcomes. God owns all of the outcomes. With this realization comes the freedom to claim the promises of God, step out in faith with God, and allow God to own the outcomes! When we accept that the vision we hoped for was never in our power to fulfill, God lovingly and supernaturally fulfills that vision, in ways and through means that we never would have thought. Our faith will be strengthened, and God will be glorified.

The need for a stewardship program within your church is an opportunity for God to transform every member of your church family. It is an opportunity for God to change the trajectory of lives. It is an opportunity for God to perform miracles that ensure a legacy of generosity within an entire community of people. The need for a stewardship program within your church is God-ordained and within His perfect timing to radically impact the kingdom of heaven! Step out in faith, embrace the calling, and allow God’s miraculous outcomes to become your new reality!



Cynthia Huskins serves as the Director of Development, Stewardship, Planned Giving & Trust Services for the Atlantic Union Conference, North American Division. She is married to Pastor Ted Huskins, and they are the parents of five children. Together, they have worked with hundreds of our Seventh-day Adventist church families, focusing on vision & leadership development as well as stewardship and capital campaign guidance.

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\*Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1940), 15, italics supplied.

# Philanthrogenesis: Nurturing of Thankful Hearts Toward Mission-Driven Giving

BY TONY REYES

**P**hilanthrogenesis—a term that may be new to some, yet its quintessence is deeply familiar. At its core, philanthrogenesis is the origin or spark of generosity—when a heart is moved to give and make a difference. It is the beginning of philanthropy, where thankfulness is turned into action. We repeatedly witness this spark in our work, where both church members and donors alike are inspired to support projects that advance the church’s mission. Just as a seed needs good soil to sprout and grow, so the spirit of generosity—nurtured by gratitude and purpose—can flourish into meaningful support that helps advance God’s kingdom and move His mission forward.

“ **Our stewardship efforts today can foster this founding sense of generosity, directing resources toward the mission.** ”

In the story of Solomon’s temple, we find a powerful example of how philanthrogenesis may work itself out. Although King David would not be the one to build the temple, he planted the seeds of generosity by sharing his vision, giving from his resources, and inviting the people to join him. David asked, “Who then is willing to consecrate themselves to the LORD today?” (1 Chronicles 29:5). The people responded with joy, and a spirit of generosity was ignited, enabling Solomon to complete the temple.

In that same spirit, our stewardship efforts today can foster this founding sense of generosity, directing resources toward the mission. Here is how we can intentionally foster philanthrogenesis in our projects while valuing and recognizing the contribution each member brings to the work:

## UNDERSTANDING THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC FUNDRAISING

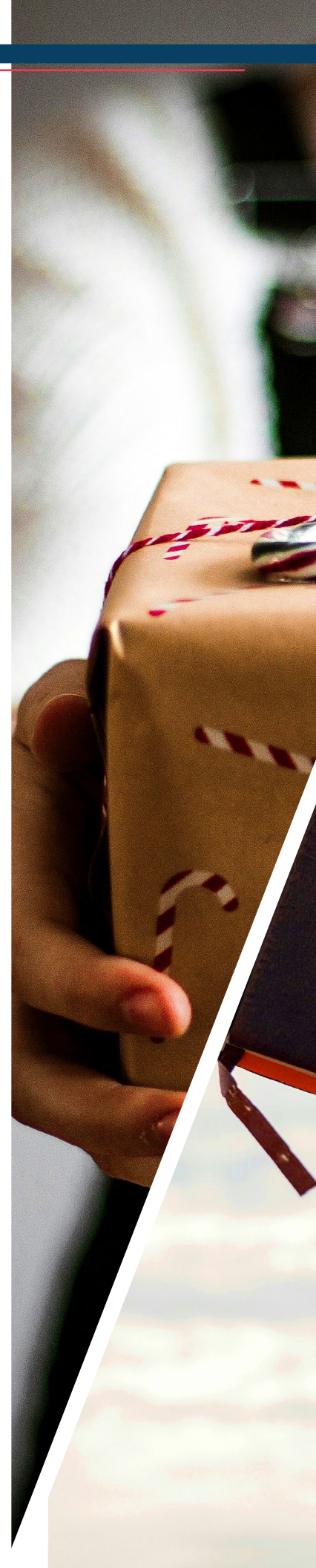
**G**reat projects building worship spaces, constructing community centers, or expanding educational facilities require more than just money; they demand a collective, mission-driven effort. David was a powerful example when he carefully planned for the temple of Solomon, setting aside resources and inviting the people to join him. He ignited philanthrogenesis in the people by making it clear that everyone’s gift mattered.

For us, strategic planning and effective communication are the keys to lighting that initial spark of generosity. One excellent example of this occurred several years ago when I was involved in a project to remodel a K–10 Adventist school. Despite limited resources, we conducted a transparent and mission-driven campaign, inviting members to do whatever they could financially or through volunteering. We reached our goal through systemic giving, targeted strategies, fundraising events, and participation of our invested membership. We successfully remodeled the school, which is now serving as a mission outreach hub. Leaders kept the spark alive by celebrating every contribution, regardless of size.

## CREATING A VISION, COMMUNICATING IT EFFECTIVELY, AND BUILDING GRATITUDE

David’s vision for the temple was a powerful one. He communicated its profound meaning to the people, inspiring a burning desire to provide. As Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (KJV). A well-articulated vision and appreciation for every gift strengthens philanthrogenesis by motivating people to act.

It is not only about casting the vision effectively; it’s also about genuinely saying thank you. Research from the University of Pennsylvania shows that expressions of gratitude can boost future giving by over 20%, with appreciated donors much more likely



again. Similarly, not to be outdone, Penelope Burk's work in donor-centered fundraising reveals that a simple thank-you call to a new donor can increase future donations by as much as 39%. When vision is anchored in what God wants to accomplish and combined with gratitude, it motivates and elevates giving and helps members connect their contributions to His ultimate mission. Regular expressions of gratitude—whether through personal notes, public acknowledgments, or follow-up reports—fan the flame of generosity and lead to sustained giving.

### IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE FUNDRAISING STRATEGIES WITH PHILANTHROGENESIS AND GRATITUDE

Several strategies can be used to enlist everyone to participate in giving:

#### SYSTEMATIC GIVING

Systematic giving—through tithes and regular offerings—is essential to the structure and sustainability of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. It supports the global mission and ongoing operations. However, local projects often require additional, designated contributions. Projects such as building community centers, enhancing local ministries, or supporting outreach programs thrive when members give *above and beyond* their regular tithes and offerings.

“**When vision is anchored in what God wants to accomplish and combined with gratitude, it motivates and elevates giving and helps members connect their contributions to His ultimate mission.**”

To ensure the success of local initiatives, we encourage members to engage in special giving campaigns and designated contributions that supplement their systematic giving. This approach enables local congregations to dream big, plan strategically, and achieve impactful projects benefiting their communities. By fostering a spirit of generosity that goes beyond the foundational practices of tithing and regular offerings, we empower our churches to grow, innovate, and better serve their mission on a local scale.

#### EVENTS TO RAISE FUNDS

Events that celebrate community and encourage contributions are powerful ways to initiate and nurture a culture of giving. David's gathering of the people was an inspiring moment of collective generosity. Mission

dinner, benefit concerts, or online campaigns in today's context bring the community together. These events allow contributors to be recognized through tokens of appreciation or public acknowledgment. Such activities activate a spark of generosity that often evolves into long-term support.

#### GRANT WRITING

Working with organizations like ADRA and faith-based grant programs expands our resources and deepens our gratitude for these partnerships. Sharing the results of successful grants with church members keeps everyone connected with the mission and supports the importance of these collaborative efforts.

#### MAJOR DONOR CULTIVATION

Identifying and nurturing relationships with major donors begins with expressing genuine appreciation. Research suggests that personalized thank-you letters and personal recognition deepen relationships and encourage greater support over time. Regular expressions of gratitude can reinforce that initial spark, fostering a strong sense of involvement and commitment to the mission.

#### ONLINE GIVING AND CROWDFUNDING

Technology allows us to extend our reach through the philanthrogenesis of the world. Every online gift should be acknowledged, from the smallest to the most significant. Sending messages of gratitude using social media and sharing digital reports showing donations' impact can help keep online donors engaged and connected to the mission.

#### LEVERAGING PRESENT GIFTS, PLANNED GIFTS, AND BLENDED GIFTS WITH GRATITUDE

David's preparation for the temple was not a short-term project but a legacy with eternal significance. His call to the people was clear: "Who then is willing to consecrate themselves to the LORD today?" (1 Chronicles 29:5). Leading by example, David gave generously from his treasury and encouraged others to contribute in various ways. This call inspired both immediate and long-term contributions, creating a rich blend of offerings that supported the construction of what would later be known as Solomon's temple.

In today's context, there are parallels in how the church can leverage present gifts, planned gifts, and blended gifts to achieve its mission. Just as David's invitation united various forms of support—from immediate offerings to long-term commitments—churches today can draw on a mix of contributions to build and sustain their mission:

**THE ROLE OF PRESENT GIFTS**

Present gifts enable the church to launch current projects and make immediate progress. These contributions empower the church to act promptly and address immediate needs like the initial resources David called for.

“ ***By integrating immediate gifts with future commitments, churches can create a comprehensive financial strategy that meets current needs while securing long-term sustainability.*** ”

**THE ROLE OF PLANNED GIFTS**

Planned gifts, such as bequests and trusts, mirror the deeper commitments made by David and the leaders who contributed beyond their current means. These gifts ensure a continued flow of resources into God’s work, providing stability and sustainability for future generations.

**THE POWER OF BLENDED GIFTS**

Blended gifts combine present and planned giving, reflecting how the collective and varied contributions during David’s time enabled the completion of the temple. By integrating immediate gifts with future commitments, churches can create a comprehensive financial strategy that meets current needs while securing long-term sustainability. This holistic approach helps mission projects get started and thrive for years to come.

Research supports this balanced approach. The Giving USA 2023 report highlights that significant support comes from a combination of immediate and planned giving, with donors who see the direct impact of their contributions being more inclined to make future commitments. Additionally, the National Philanthropic Trust reports that 43% of donors are inspired to make planned gifts after witnessing the immediate outcomes of their current contributions.

These planned gifts are vital for the long-term sustainability of the mission, while present gifts create the foundation upon which future support can build. By valuing both types of contributions, churches can foster a robust culture of giving that supports immediate action and secures lasting impact.

The story of David in preparing for Solomon’s temple reminds us that funding big projects is more than just a financial goal; it’s the journey of inspiring philanthrogenesis—a

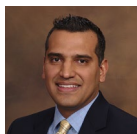
shared mission that starts with a thankful heart and each member being willing to give. Global total member involvement allows us to involve ourselves and every church member in the mission.

God supplies the needs for His work in our prayerful plans and grateful hearts. We must not forget that philanthrogenesis is based on theophilogenesis—the love of God toward humanity that stirs a loving response within us. Such giving is based on the divine example given to us through God’s love for us. So says 1 John 4:19, “We love because He first loved us.” It is the greatest love that inspires generosity and links our mission work with a calling higher than man.

Now, following this spirit of humility, let us remind ourselves of what David said, among his other musings, as he beheld the liberality with which the people were giving: “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

“ ***Philanthrogenesis is based on theophilogenesis—the love of God toward humanity that stirs a loving response within us.*** ”

May we always recognize that the resources, abilities, skills, talents, strength, and generosity of our church members and friends are a blessing from God entrusted to us for His mission. Together, we build thankful hearts, inspire generosity, and build His kingdom to prepare a world for His soon return!



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# Tithe: Why Not For the Poor?

By MANUAL CHOGA

**A**s a stewardship educator, I am often challenged by the following question: Why can't the church use the tithe to help the poor rather than solely supporting those involved in pastoral ministry? Those who raise this concern support their claim by rightly observing that God is considerably concerned with the plight of the poor and downtrodden in Scripture (Deuteronomy 15:11; Psalm 68:5; Proverbs 14:31; James 1:27). They conclude that if the church is to reflect God's character, it should be willing to use tithe to care for the needy.

Additionally, supporters of this view often reference Deuteronomy 14:22–29 and 26:12, which indicate that tithe was used in biblical times to assist the less fortunate. It raises questions about the church's position on the use of tithe. The issue is not new within the Adventist Church; Ellen G. White reports about individuals who viewed the tithe as a fund for the poor.<sup>1</sup>

This article seeks to explain how contemporary Christians should approach the tithe question by examining a biblical account of when giving to the poor was pitted against giving directly to God.<sup>2</sup>

“ ***Our obligation to give to the poor does not diminish our need to give directly to God, nor does our giving to God lessen the importance of helping the poor.*** ”

## MARY'S ALABASTER JAR

**T**he story of Mary anointing Jesus with the perfume from her alabaster jar is a biblical instance when giving to the poor is opposed to giving directly to God. Judas questioned, “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the proceeds given to poor people?” (John 12:5, NASB). The other disciples agreed with Judas' seemingly reasonable argument (Matthew 26:8). Mary must have felt dismayed by this rebuke, which appeared convincing at the time.

However, Jesus defended her actions. First, He quoted Deuteronomy 15:11, which says that the poor would always be among them.

By quoting this passage, Jesus affirmed His own instructions about caring for the poor. But He went further, explaining that He would not always be with them, referring to His imminent death. In this context, what Mary had done was good: “For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial” (Matthew 26:12, NASB). This episode highlights the principle that each act of giving has its proper time and place.

Following the promptings of the Holy Spirit, Mary had her priorities straight—she gave this gift to honor Jesus while He was still alive, unlike those who would come later to bury Him. She chose what needed to be done at that moment (Luke 10:42). Jesus went on to say, “Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her” (Matthew 26:13, NASB). Mary is remembered for her gratitude, generosity, and determination to prioritize giving to Jesus.

From how Jesus handled this situation, it's clear that our devotion to God through tithes, offerings, and assistance to the poor should not be seen as competing. Both are essential to the Christian life. Our obligation to give to the poor does not diminish our need to give directly to God, nor does our giving to God lessen the importance of helping the poor.

## GETTING OUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

**T**he story of Mary's alabaster jar testifies that it is acceptable for some giving practices to have precedence over others. At that moment, it was fitting for Mary to use her perfume to anoint Jesus in appreciation of what He meant to her rather than spend the money on the poor, as others suggested.

For our time, I'll suggest that it is essential to prioritize giving toward the spread of the gospel over other causes, including giving to the poor. This may sound odd, but let me explain. The real solution to the world's problems is not charity but the gospel—what Jesus accomplished through His life, death, resurrection, and ongoing work in heaven. That is the permanent solution to sin and the world's ills. Salvation comes from accepting the gospel. While efforts and advocacy for the weak are necessary, they are only temporary fixes, like patches on an aging garment—they don't provide a lasting answer. The ultimate solution is a new heaven and earth created by

God (Revelation 21:1-5). This new creation will be ushered in by the preaching of the gospel (Matthew 24:14).

This understanding aligns with Ellen G. White's position: "The tithe is set apart for a special use. It is not to be regarded as a poor fund. It is to be especially devoted to the support of those who are bearing God's message to the world, and it should not be diverted from this purpose. The great object of our work is to carry the light to those who are in darkness."<sup>3</sup>

“ **Supporting the spread of the gospel should represent the first portion of our giving, taking precedence over all other objects of our generosity.** ”

As Christians, our primary commission is not to give to the poor but to "make disciples of all nations." Caring for the needy should accompany preaching the gospel, but it is not the ultimate goal. Our primary emphasis must be on preaching the gospel, as that is the real and lasting solution to the world's problems. I believe that attempts to redirect the use of tithe from supporting the gospel ministry to helping the poor are a diversion tactic of Satan, who opposes the spread of the gospel. In contrast, supporting the spread of the gospel should represent the first portion of our giving, taking precedence over all other objects of our generosity.

### USE OF TITHE IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

A surface reading of Deuteronomy 14:22-29 and 26:12, 13 might suggest that the tithe can be shared with the Levites, foreigners, widows, and orphans. However, this understanding seems to contradict Numbers 18:21, which assigns "all the tithes" to the Levites as compensation for their service.

To reconcile this apparent contradiction, we must understand that, historically, the Jews had two different tithes.<sup>4</sup> The first was a Levitical tithe (Numbers 18:21-32), "which belonged exclusively to God, and which was given by Him to the Levites and priests."<sup>5</sup> The second was a festival/charity tithe. It was a festival because, in the first two years of the cycle, it was eaten by the family at the central sanctuary during the pilgrimage festivals (Deuteronomy 12:6,11,17; 14:22-27). In the third year of the cycle, this same tithe was kept in the towns for charity (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29; 26:12-15). Under the theocracy, God instituted a form of social security for the Israelites, with this second tithe partly used to aid the poor. This was groundbreaking, as no other nation had such a special provision for the poor at the

time. We can see this as a precursor to the modern social security systems.

Hence, why don't we promote this festival/charity tithe in the church today? The answer is that the second tithe had both civil and ceremonial elements. Ceremonial because it was used for the festivals, and civil because it was used for charity. As Christians, we no longer practice the Israelites' ceremonies, as they were shadows pointing to Jesus (Colossians 2:16, 17). Christ's completed work on the cross would be denied if we enforced these practices today.

The civil aspects of the second tithe may no longer be applicable today since we are no longer a single nation under a theocracy like the Israelites. In Israel's arrangement, the religious and secular life of the country was not separate. No separate civil taxes were imposed upon the people. If we were to implement a strict second tithe, we would need to account for the social security taxes people already pay to the government. While one could argue that government social programs are often mismanaged, that still doesn't change the fact that income earners have already been taxed for that purpose. The church would also need to account for the different percentages each government charges in different countries. The process would be extraneous.

What is practical today is for the church to continue emphasizing the principle behind the second tithe—the importance of giving generously and regularly after we have tithed 10% of our income and the necessity of providing for the poor. The latter is not emphasized enough. God's people cannot be generous toward the church and stingy in other aspects of life. Generosity should permeate everything we do, including caring for people in need.

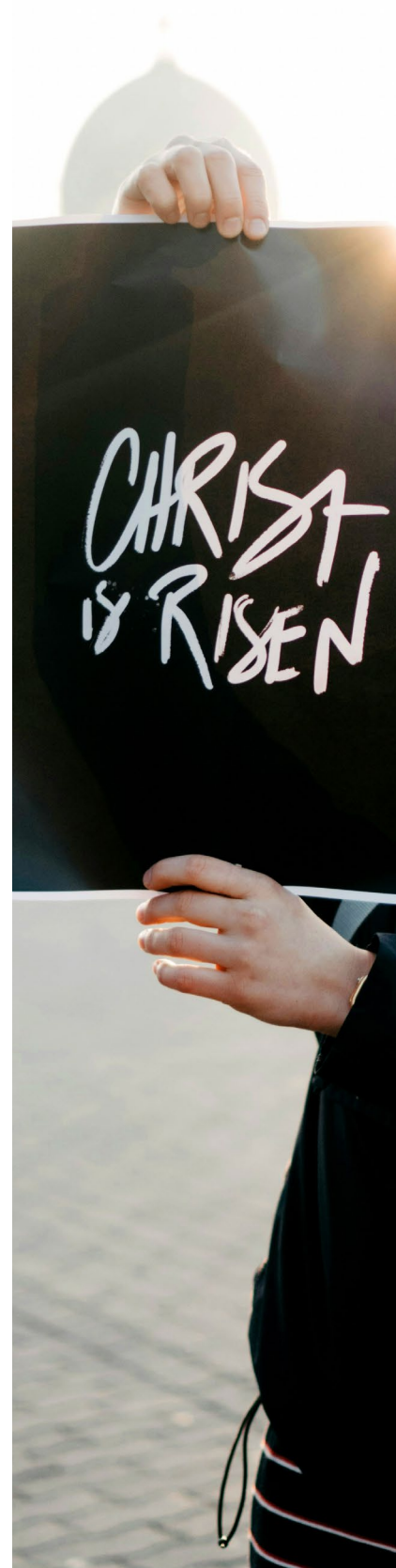
Should the church divert tithe from supporting those involved in pastoral ministry to helping the poor? I can conclude that giving to the poor and supporting those involved in spreading the gospel are both essential. However, supporting the spread of the gospel takes precedence over other acts of generosity. It should represent the first portion of our giving. I am using the principle of precedence in giving employed by Mary. This position is grounded in a biblical understanding of salvation and eschatology.



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#### References

1. Ellen G. White, "Honesty Toward Men and Toward God," *The Review and Herald Supplement*, December 1, 1896.
2. Giving to the poor is also giving to God (Proverbs 19:17; cf. Matthew 25:34-40), but in this article, I am distinguishing gifts to the poor from those given directly to God through tithes and offerings.
3. White, "Honesty Toward Men and Toward God."
4. Angel Rodriguez, *Stewardship Roots* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1994), T-10; Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1890), 530.
5. Rodriguez, *Stewardship Roots*, T10.

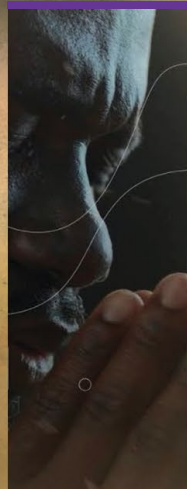




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