



Lewis Center
for Church Leadership

Leading Ideas

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Is Your Church the Best Place to Give?

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The other day I was visiting with a key donor of a church along with the pastor. The pastor was asking the donor if she would be willing to serve in a very significant capacity in an upcoming campaign for their church. I fully expected the woman to say yes. She was an elected leader in the church and was the number three donor, giving a high five-figure contribution to the operating budget each year. She was, it seemed to me on paper, an ideal candidate for the position.

He began the conversation by bragging on her to me, and then he asked her if she would be willing to consider service in this capacity. I then followed up by explaining to her what the position entailed, and after about ten minutes I stopped, waiting to hear her enthusiastic “of course.” Instead, I got an answer I totally did not expect.

She looked at her pastor and said, “I am concerned about our church. For the last several years we have not grown, and I see fewer and fewer young people. I think you are a fine man, but I am beginning to wonder if supporting the church is good stewardship. Lately, I have been looking into giving more support to World Vision and Oxfam. Pastor, do you really believe that our church is a better place for my money than they are? I must see that my money is going to be used wisely, as God calls me to do. Is our church the best place for me to give? That is what I need answered because, if it isn’t, then I could not serve with integrity in this campaign.”

The pastor was stunned. I could see on his face that he was shocked by the request to justify to the woman why she should choose the church for her offerings. He stumbled around a bit and then turned to me to help him out. There really was nothing a person in my position could say, however. It was not my church, and I was not a leader in it. I was just a consultant. She already knew that I would play little or no role in whether this church eventually moved forward or not. I vainly tried to put a good face on what we were going to try and do, but, in the end, she turned us down. What she ultimately decides to do with her gifts will all be determined by how well the church can compete for them as a place that changes lives over other very good causes.

I have long advocated the need for churches to learn how to compete with other nonprofits. Persons need to hear our life-changing stories and be helped to understand how their dollars are creating positive change in the lives of people—and in ways that are powerful and distinctive. Why the church instead of World Vision, Oxfam, Scouts, or the local hospital? We must be

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prepared on a daily basis boldly to answer that question. If we find we cannot easily do it, then we must get busy changing our church. As the Builder Generation dies off and is replaced by the much more questioning Boomers and Gen Xers, we are going to find ourselves facing those very questions. Are we ready to answer them gladly and compellingly?

I told the pastor afterwards that this lady did him a great favor. She voiced the question with which I had felt many in his congregation were wrestling. His answer to her question will eventually determine whether the campaign succeeds or not.

How would you answer the question: “Is your church the best place for me to give my money?”

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