



Clearly Generous

Communication comes with no guarantees. A message sent does not necessarily equate a message received. I quip that a pastor will say to me, "How come I didn't know about that? And by the way, quit sending me so much information."

The Covenant Offices leadership team is reading through a book on organizational health by Patrick Lencioni entitled *The Advantage*. Lencioni is a widely respected business consultant. As a person of faith, he finds the ethics of faith to be constructive for successful business practices. In the book, he describes four disciplines that reinforce organizational health. The first is to build a cohesive leadership team. The remaining three all have to do with clarity: create clarity, over-communicate clarity, and reinforce clarity.

Clearly, clarity matters.

In many of our churches November is when the budgeting process begins. It is a key time for a congregation to consider how it will invest God's resources for God's purposes.

When you get right down to it, money in and of itself has very little value. You can't wear it. You can't eat it. It won't protect you in the rain. What gives money its value is what it can be exchanged for. What can be more valuable than exchanging it for the work of God's kingdom?

We are touching more lives right here at home and all around the world than at any other point in our rich 128-year history. And so we are grateful when congregations ask for ways to be even more supportive of our common work to keep the missional momentum strong.

This is the clarity denominational and conference leaders are communicating to congregations when asked for practical guidelines on how to be supportive and generous in financial partnership for our collective mission.

These four principles simply take good personal stewardship practices and apply them to congregational life. They are nothing more than what a congregation hopes of its own members, and uses them in regard to membership in the Covenant and regional conference.

Percentage Giving. Percentage giving is the biblical principle of proportionality. This first step is to convert your congregation's current

ECC and conference giving to their respective percentages relative to your general fund income. For example, if your total current church budget is \$250,000 and you give \$15,000 to the mission and ministry of the ECC and \$7,500 to your region, your respective percentages are 6 percent to the ECC, and 3 percent to your conference. Use those percentages as the beginning baseline going forward rather than a fixed dollar amount. Percentage giving rather than fixed dollar giving is the single most important factor to a sustainable and growing fiscal future to pursue the opportunities in front of us.

Priority Giving. This is the biblical principle of giving from the first fruits of the harvest to God. Forward the determined percentage amount to both the ECC and conference on a monthly basis, calculated from the previous month's general fund income.

Progressive Giving. This is the biblical principle of increasing faithfulness over time. Our hope is that every congregation be able to increase its percentages to both the ECC and the conference as we seek to be both fiscally responsible and missionally driven.

Pace-setting Giving. This is the biblical principle of generosity and sacrifice. Our hope is that every congregation would target 10 percent of general fund income to the ECC and 5 percent to the conference, as many churches do already. This might take multiple steps if you are not already at that level. So, for example, make as an intermediate goal to first be on the path toward a combined tithe (6.6 percent/3.4 percent), on the way to the goal of 10/5. Being a pace-setter not only greatly amplifies your congregation's missional impact, it serves as an aspirational example for others.

One thing is clear. Covenant people are generous people, and generous people make an increasing difference in the world. Thank you for your partnership in the increasing impact we make together throughout your region, the United States and Canada, and all over the world. ■

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