



## Fundraising Pointers for Churches

One of the most poorly understood aspects of global missions is how to raise funding in congregations. Sometimes, this is because they focus is on raising money when it may need to be more about raising vision and passion in the church family. There is a lot of good that could be done if those who take the lead in churches incorporate some basic principles about missions and money. Here are some core principles we've embraced, based on years of observation and experience with missions in churches, and fund-raising at MRN. Following these core principles are some suggestions for short term benefits and long term development.

### Missions Giving Principles

1. People do not give well to **ideas, causes, or organizations**. People give money to **people**. In particular, they give to people they know, like, and trust, **who are doing things they value deeply** and things they believe **need to be done now**, and which provide them a **sense of meaningful impact**. People who give generously want to see that the benefit is worth the cost. If any of these is missing, giving may suffer and slowly die out. But where all these are in place, you will likely be surprised how much money there is when the opportunity is presented well. Where you have regular short falls, you are probably missing one or more pieces. Here is a suggested checklist:
  - a. Do your people know, like, and trust the people in the ministries you support? If there is no sense of relationship or emotional connection between the congregation and the people you support, you will struggle to keep your missions funded.
  - b. Do your people love the people being reached and have a sense of the culture, current situation, and potential there? If the passion and vision reside only in the missionaries and not in the sending congregation, you cannot tap into the most powerful motive there is for giving—love of God and the people he is seeking to save.
  - c. Do your people understand the vision and strategies of the workers you support? Why work there? Why now? Why this particular way? Can your involved members explain what your missionaries are doing, where they are doing it, and why it matters?
  - d. Have you embedded any stories from these ministries in your church's heart by sending representatives to see, fall in love with the people and places, and return to tell the stories? Does anyone who is not getting paid out of the mission's budget tell these stories?
  - e. Do you have a go-to story to tell about each ministry that focuses people's hearts on the impact? This may not be essential for smaller gifts that support infrastructure, but is critical for major works (e.g., missionaries).
  - f. Do the works you support globally fit the values you embody as a people locally (i.e., similar theology, practice, values, vision)? Do your works seem



clearly stated goals or are they just living overseas for unclear reasons doing God knows what?

5. Too many stories and too little investment in each one will prevent you from doing anything well. You cannot raise money to support more stories than you can keep alive in your church. There are multiple ways to do this, and churches can take on multiple stories if they can generate a sense of community and support around each one, but people are not well motivated by how many missionaries you support or how many countries you work in. They give to people and stories, not concepts. Missions is not about how many places you work, but what good you are accomplishing. Too many works may come from a vision that needs better definition and focus, and an inability to say no. If you give a little money to many works, your people may not really care about any of them.
6. "Zero sum" thinking is flawed and fatal. The belief that there is a finite amount of money your church will give, therefore missions giving takes away from local giving, just isn't true. Americans waste tons of money on frivolous things that don't matter because nothing more important grabs their hearts. There is vast, untapped money available in most churches just waiting on a clear, compelling vision to release it. This is why there is so much missions giving outside church budgets. This may not be a money problem, but rather a sign of a spiritual, vision, or communications problem. Poor giving tells you something important, but it isn't about available money, in most cases. Where churches have a clear sense of calling and significance in God's global mission, they give more to both global and local ministries. They tend to go up and down together.

### **Additional Suggestions for Improving Giving**

1. It is good to be focused on a few things you can do well. That is a big help. But you also need to ask if the workers you support are also focused on a few things they can do well? Focus is needed by both the sending church and the workers in the field.
2. Active participation of your people in visiting missions location is important. There are a variety of ways to do this so don't assume this has to be short-term missions, which can be cost prohibitive and often wasteful unless well designed and implemented. It is expensive to send some of your people to visit missions locations, but it is more expensive if you don't. If no one goes and sees what you are supporting, the stories won't easily come back and excite your people. Your chief spokespeople need to go and see and return to tell. If your preacher, youth minister, and elders who speak well (the communicators who control message and carry influence) and your missions committee are not visiting the sites you support regularly so that they can understand and tell the stories all year (not just on "Missions Sundays"), you are going to struggle to get buy-in

from the people. Your leaders need to know, go, and show. Know what you are doing. Go see it first-hand. Come back and show it to the church.

3. People don't need to get anything back for their gift (i.e., tangible things) so much as they need to see a justifiable return on investment in terms of impact and value. The work done must fulfill the core values of your church. The work done must give them a sense of impact. If you can't make a case for why your workers need to remain after their initial vision is accomplished, you will begin to see support drop. People don't lose interest in missions because they are bored or need something new and exciting so much as they need to understand the ongoing needs and why the new aspects of the vision require ongoing funding. People just don't get excited about paying the salary of a local preacher in another country in a stagnant church. They need to see the strategic long-term impact of what you are doing.
4. The person making the "ask" of the church should appeal less to duty and more to potential. The asker needs to communicate the following: This is what excites. This is what we want to see happen. This is what makes me feel that my gift is not only worth the sacrifice but brings me joy. It's fine to talk about what distracts us and tempts us to avoid the gift. Everyone will identify with that. But the asker also needs to tell them why, upon deeper reflection, they really *want* to make the gift.

### **Suggestions for Immediate Impact**

1. Tell one story from your mission's ministry each week during the two months leading up to your missions Sunday or the end of the year. Tell each story, sometime during your worship, in a way that demonstrates the impact your church is having. Each story should be 90 seconds to 3 minutes with one or two of them going longer. They demonstrate success and make the congregation feel the impact they are having. Vary the form and location of the story. One week it can be in the communion meditation. Another week it can be in a video during announcements. Another week it can be a sermon illustration that just happens to come from the mission field. Another week it can be a personal testimony from someone who visited a missions site, etc. Script it. Keep it short and on point. No rambling. Don't scare or guilt people; rather, make them feel useful and impactful. Show them their giving is making a difference and is worth their gift. There are lots of ways to do this, especially around Thanksgiving and Christmas. Let your missionaries know that providing such stories is essential to their ongoing support. (This will be easier to do in following years when you have time to prepare better, but you can do this to some degree wherever you are in your year).
2. Inform people exactly how to give and where it goes. Transparency is important, but it's probably best to avoid budget presentations in worship. Just make the information available. If there is fear or uncertainty about sharing this information,

that may reveal uncertainty about the justifications for the budget, and that is a problem.

3. Be repetitive, but in small pieces with creativity. Remind people in multiple ways and times. Variety and repetition are critical. More people plan to give than do so. They just forget to follow through. Give people more than one way to give. Few people carry cash or checks anymore. Show how to give online with e-banking or pay with credit cards. Set something up that is easy for people to do.

### **Specific Suggestions for the Long-term Impact**

1. Very often, a church missions ministry predated their current congregational vision and there is now a struggle to justify the missions sites. You might consider doing a missions vision review process that would involve starting with a clean sheet of paper, prayer, scripture, and dream of what it would mean to live out your vision globally. Then when you have a clear vision in place, review what you are doing and see what still fits. What doesn't fit should be transitioned out as you move toward ministries that align better with what God is calling you to do now. This should involve the congregation as broadly as possible so that the church understands and has high confidence in the process and the product. Since this is what we help churches do, we obviously think it is important. But whether you ask us to serve you in such a process or not, you won't see a great leap forward without some vision that grabs your congregation's hearts and minds, and that will likely need some reset. Let us know if we can serve you in this way.
2. Require each of your missionaries to provide you a clear end-state toward which they are working, benchmarks for evaluating their progress toward that end-state, an estimate of time frame, an exit strategy and plan for what comes next. This is just good stewardship, but it also builds confidence in the congregation that their support is meaningful.
3. Rather than having to justify the missions ministry against the church's vision, the missionaries should be able to report progress that aligns with the church's vision.