

[DISCIPLESHIP]

Ministry to High-Capacity Givers

BY ALEXIS WILSON

Churches committed to moving toward a culture of generosity are going beyond traditional understandings of stewardship; they're designing ministries to disciple those whom God has gifted as givers.

This new approach includes an intentional dedication to the spiritual formation of those who are wealthy or those who choose to give away a high percentage of their incomes. Over time—through personal discussions, relationships, and teaching—people are helped to become stewards with a deeper understanding of God's perspective on life.

Here are the principles that cutting edge churches emphasize when min-

istering to those to whom much has been given:

Commitment—Like any other ministry a church undertakes, developing a ministry to high-capacity givers requires commitment. In this case it's also vital for everyone to understand that this ministry is about what the church wants *for* the giver, not just *from* the giver. "In order for this kind of ministry to truly take root, everyone in the culture has to fully embrace the idea that giving is a spiritual gift," says Forrest Reinhardt, who from 1998 to 2006 served as executive pastor of strategic resource development at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California. "It's a sowing and reaping thing, from the standpoint of time, staffing, and finances," he says.

Communication—For Bruce Nelson of Mariners Church in Irvine, California, the concept of creating a ministry to high-capacity givers comes out of his personal experience. "I was in commercial real estate for 10 years, and by age 30 had made \$2 million. It became a life-or-death issue in my life. God broke through with his words, 'If I gave you all this, don't you think I have to say something about it?' I think about the story of the rich young ruler. I wasn't him, but I could have been." Not only does the senior leadership need to convey this sense of responsibility through one-on-one or small group discussions about God, faith, and money, but they

must also be able to clearly communicate the church's vision.

Larry Powell, president of a private equity investment company in Atlanta and a lay leader at North Point Ministries, adds this warning, "One of the great challenges is the church assuming its passions and visions are *my* passion and vision, and not allowing me to pursue and invest in other parts of God's kingdom, and that can be frustrating." Churches can overcome this obstacle by engaging high-capacity givers in the process of developing the vision for what God is calling the church to accomplish next.

Example—When the church staff models giving, their example goes a long way. "Our church isn't populated with high-net-worth givers, but more than 75 percent of our people give a minimum of a tithe," says Pat Murphy, director of development at Antioch Community Church in Waco, Texas. "They got there by watching senior leadership, who modeled it not only in a simple lifestyle but also in real-life surrender." While we all have the ability to be sacrificial in our giving, the wealthy have the ability to give enough to make a major impact. The example of those in leadership can help encourage people to make the shift from accumulating to giving.

Christopher Willard, director of Generous Churches Leadership Communities for Leadership Network, sums it up like this, "It's critical that church leaders become as intentional about teaching generosity and stewardship as they are about any other essential element of discipleship." ☪

Web Sites

www.crown.org—Crown Financial Ministries, founded in 2000, is an interdenominational ministry dedicated to equipping people around the world to learn, apply, and teach biblical financial principles.

www.daveramsey.com—Dave Ramsey is a personal money management expert, an extremely popular national radio personality, and best-selling author of *The Total Money Makeover*, *Financial Peace* and *More Than Enough*.

www.generousgiving.org—Generous Giving is a privately funded ministry that seeks to encourage givers of all income levels to experience the joy of giving and embrace a lifestyle of generosity. Through a partnership with Leadership Network, Generous Giving aims to serve the leaders of innovative churches as they guide their congregations into greater generosity.

www.leadnet.org—Leadership Network's mission is to identify, connect, and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact. Go to their Web site and click on "Generous Churches," then "resources" and "downloads" to access the following: *Secrets of Generous Churches* by Liz Swanson and *Generosity Requires More Than a Sermon* by Andy Williams.



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