

Nashville, Tennessee

# Associated Baptist Press

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March 12, 1998

(98-17)

## *In this issue:*

- Louisiana College lawsuit settled out of court
- Supreme Court rejects Nativity scene dispute
- Americans' faith wider than deep, Barna claims
- Researcher defines 'born-again' terminology
- Florida lawmakers override veto of partial-birth abortion ban
- Relationships lead to evangelism, non-Christians tell Baptist group
- Don't be afraid to talk about money, conference leader tells pastors
- Planning ahead is a good way to increase giving, research shows
- Spiritual growth produces stewardship, speaker says
- Endowments could be boon for churches, Swint says
- Stewardship emphasis should be year-round, consultants advise

## **Louisiana College lawsuit settled out of court**

PINEVILLE, La. (ABP) -- A 1996 defamation suit filed by four professors at a Baptist college has been settled out of court, the Louisiana Baptist Message reported March 12.

Following months of negotiations, a settlement was reached in late February, 20 months after Louisiana College professors Carlton Winbery, Fred Downing, James Heath and Connie Douglas sued Leon Hyatt of Pineville and the conservative organization Louisiana Baptists Speaking the Truth in Love for publishing and distributing letters the professors claim were false and defamatory.

Among charges in the letters, which were circulated by conservatives prior to the 1995 annual meeting of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, were that the teachers taught anti-Christian values, exposed students to pornography and urged tolerance of homosexuality and abortion. The professors' lawsuit termed those and other charges "absolutely and patently false."

Terms of the settlement include payment of attorney fees from a legal fund raised by Louisiana Baptist leaders and require Hyatt to write a letter of apology to each professor.

The settlement also assures that college trustees will take "no adverse action" against the professors as a result of the lawsuit. The professors pledge to teach in accordance with the Bible and college statements on academic freedom and responsibility.

The Louisiana Baptist newspaper planned to report additional details in its March 19 issue.

Earlier, the defendants sought to have the suit dismissed on church-state grounds. An Alexandria judge declined that request, however, and was upheld by both a state appeals court and Louisiana's Supreme Court.

Soon after the Supreme Court cleared the way for a jury trial, Louisiana Baptist leaders began discussing a settlement. Late last summer, it appeared a settlement would be reached before last November's state convention. After a delay, a second deadline was set for early 1998, but details again could not be worked out. Finally, an agreement was signed by both sides in the closing days of February, the paper reported.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

## **Supreme Court rejects Nativity scene dispute**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court refused March 9 to hear challenge to a Nativity scene displayed by the city of Syracuse, N.Y.

Left standing were two lower court decisions that the display, which may date back as far as 1913, did not violate the Constitution's requirement for separation of church and state.

The display was challenged by Carol Elewski, an atheist, in 1995.

Owned by the city, the display included statues of Jesus, Mary and Joseph; other figures; and a banner reading "Glory in Excelsis Deo" ("Glory to God in the Highest"). It was located at the base of a 55-foot evergreen tree decorated with colored lights.

In upholding the display, the appeals court cited an array of non-religious holiday decorations in downtown Syracuse, as well as a privately owned menorah for which the city pays part of the cost of erecting, dismantling and lighting.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals concluded that a "reasonable observer" would view the Nativity display not as endorsing religion but as a "celebration of the diversity of the holiday season, including traditional religious and secular symbols of the season and that a principal purpose of that celebration was to preserve the economic viability of downtown retailers."

In a dissenting opinion, Judge Jose Cabranes said the publicly sponsored religious display on public property "unavoidably signals to a reasonable observer public endorsement of religion."

-30-

-- By Larry Chesser

## **Americans' faith wider than deep, Barna claims**

By Marv Knox

OXNARD, Calif. (ABP) -- Americans' river of faith is far wider than it is deep, according to a new survey by religion researcher George Barna.

Barna's latest poll documents disparity between Americans' claims about the importance of religion and their faith practice.

"Religion continues to be a major topic of interest and involvement for most American adults," reported Barna, whose Barna Research Group interviewed 1,006 U.S. adults early this year.

"However," he said, "the much-discussed and anticipated spiritual revival is not discernible through common measures of spirituality."

A large majority of Americans answered survey questions in such a way as to indicate faith is important to them, Barna noted.

For example:

-- More than four out of five American adults (83 percent) said religious faith is very important in their lives. That percentage has remained stable throughout the past six annual surveys.

-- Two-thirds of adults (69 percent) described themselves as "religious." That response represents an 8 percent increase since 1991.

-- Eighty-two percent of survey participants said they consider themselves to be Christian. Of those self-described Christians, 50 percent said they are "absolutely committed to the Christian faith." According to Barna's findings, 39 percent of Americans are born-again Christians. And 6 percent answered questions to indicate they are evangelical Christians.

Despite their high self-regard in matters of faith, most Americans don't exercise that faith through a range of practical applications, researchers learned.

"The importance of religious and spiritual matters does not always translate into direct action by Americans," Barna said.

While 80 percent of respondents said they had prayed to God during the previous week, less than half indicated they had participated in five other religious activities in the previous week:

-- Forty-three percent said they had attended a church service.

-- Thirty-eight percent claimed to have read the Bible other than at church.

-- Twenty-five percent had volunteered at church.

-- Eighteen percent had attended a small group at church other than Sunday school.

-- Twenty-three percent had attended Sunday school.

The frequency of these behaviors was relatively unchanged from those recorded in early 1997, Barna reported. Most remained similar to behaviors reported in 1991.

However, church attendance dropped 6 percentage points, and Bible reading declined by 7 percentage points.

On another front, research indicates church membership may rotate noticeably this year, Barna said.

"A significant proportion of adults plan to change their church in the coming year," he said. "Eleven percent of the people who attend a Christian church at least once a month said such transition was likely. If true, that represents more than 15 million people changing their church home in the next 12 months."

Taken together, the research numbers paint a conflicted picture of religious life in America, Barna said.

"God and faith are still hot, but long-term or intense religious commitments are not," he explained. "Despite their fascination with spirituality, most churched people are only moderately devoted to their current church, and they are not deeply invested in spiritual growth."

"It seems that many adults are waiting for the next big spiritual fad to explore. The breadth of our intrigue with faith remains much more extensive than the depth of our commitment to genuine spiritual development."

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## **Researcher defines**

### **'born-again' terminology**

OXNARD, Calif. (ABP) -- Not everyone who claims the label "born again" necessarily is, and some people who don't want the label deserve it, according to religion researcher George Barna's definition.

"The term 'born-again Christian' does not refer to people calling themselves by this label," Barna said of the way his organization, Barna Research Group, uses the term.

Two survey questions are used to classify people as born-again or not born-again, he said.

"To be classified as a born-again Christian, an individual must say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today, and that after they die they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior," he explained.

"People who meet these criteria are classified as born-again, regardless of whether or not they would say they are born-again Christians."

"Evangelical" also is a term applied strictly by Barna's organization.

To be classified as "evangelical" by Barna, people must:

- Say their faith is very important in their life.
- Believe they have a responsibility to share their faith in Christ with non-Christians.
- Believe in the existence of Satan.
- Believe that eternal salvation is gained through God's grace alone, not through human efforts.
- Believe Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on Earth.
- Believe the Bible is accurate in all it teaches.
- Choose an orthodox definition of God.

"This definition has no relationship to church attendance, membership or denominational affiliation," Barna said.

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-- By Marv Knox

## **Florida lawmakers override veto of partial-birth abortion ban**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (ABP) -- Florida lawmakers have passed a ban on partial-birth abortion, overriding a veto by Gov. Lawton Chiles.

The Florida Senate voted 32-7 for the ban March 11, following the state's House in the first override of a governor's veto in 12 years.

Florida is the 20th state legislature to adopt a ban on the controversial late-term abortion procedure, according to the National Right to Life Committee. Iowa's governor signed a bill banning partial-birth abortions March 4.

Most of the state laws have not been implemented due to pending legal challenges. Five state laws banning the abortions are in effect.

Abortion-rights advocates pledged to challenge the Florida law in courts. They claim identical laws in other states have been declared unconstitutional.

The Florida law would make it a third-degree felony for a doctor to perform a partial-birth abortion, unless it is needed to save a woman's life. The bill also would permit the father or grandparents of the fetus to sue the doctor. Women are exempted from prosecution.

Florida's Democratic governor vetoed the measure last year because it did not include an exemption for the health of the mother. Chiles is arguing that the March 11 vote is invalid, saying the Legislature missed its chance to override his veto when it failed to consider the measure in a special session last fall.

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-- By ABP staff

## Relationships lead to evangelism, non-Christians tell Baptist group

By Marv Knox

LEWISVILLE, Texas (ABP) -- Friendship and concern are Christians' greatest tools in leading others to faith in Jesus, Christians and non-Christians alike told a gathering of Baptists.

Six speakers -- three ministers and three non-Christians -- drove home the primary theme of Denton (Texas) Baptist Association's annual evangelism conference: relationships fuel effective evangelism.

The three non-Christians formed a panel to describe their religious upbringing as well as thoughts on Christianity and the church.

Although their ages and backgrounds differ, they cited several common themes.

They were not raised in the faith, and religion had minimal impact on their lives as children and youth.

Religion, much less Jesus Christ, is not perceived as a significant factor in the lives of their friends and peers.

However, they said they could conceive that current new relationships might one day lead them to a relationship with Christ. Two of them are participating in small-group Bible studies and the third has been befriended by a local pastor.

"We've got to break out of our Christian subculture and get to know non-Christians if we're ever going to expect to lead them to faith," Lee Strobel, who interviewed the panel of non-Christians, later told the Baptist crowd.

"We've got to live authentic lives of Christian integrity" in order to make a difference in the lives of non-believers, said Strobel, teaching pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, a congregation that has led thousands of suburban Chicago residents to faith in Christ.

Strobel described his early life as an atheist newspaper reporter with degrees in journalism and law. He was antagonistic toward the church and became angry when his wife became a Christian after she was befriended by Christian neighbors, he recalled.

The neighbors took her to Willow Creek Church, which held "seeker-sensitive" worship services with music, dramas and practical Christian messages that were comfortable and inviting for non-Christians to attend, he said.

For a year and nine months, Strobel attended the church, meanwhile attempting to disprove Christianity according to the principles and practices of law and journalism. Eventually, the weight of evidence changed his mind. "In light of all I saw, it would've taken more faith to remain an atheist than to accept the claims of Christ," he said.

But Strobel and his wife never would have found Christ without a relationship with loving, Christian neighbors and the witness of a church that embraced them -- questions and all, he insisted.

Steve Stroepe, pastor of Lake Pointe Baptist Church in Rockwall, Texas, echoed the need for "relationship evangelism."

Members of his church -- which has grown from a handful of members in 1980 to almost 4,000 in 1998 -- are expected to maintain a list of three non-Christian friends for whom they are praying and seeking to lead to faith.

"Everybody in the church is involved in sharing their faith to their 'household' -- to pray for their unsaved friends and family members and seek to bring them to know Christ," he said. "Our purpose is not to make everybody feel guilty, but to mobilize everybody to reach the world for Christ."

Leading people to accept Jesus as their Savior is addictive, added Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, one of the convention's largest, most evangelistic congregations.

"Once you get started, you just can't get enough," Graham said.

However, not enough Christians feel compelled to evangelize others, he added.

"Reaching people is not about programs; it's about a passion that will not let go of what God calls us to do," he said. "We have two primary problems with witnessing. First is that we think people who do not know Christ don't want to know Christ. And the real problem is that the people who do know Christ don't want to tell others about him."

But since evangelism is "personal and relational," it naturally flows out of caring Christian friendships with non-Christians, Graham said.

Unfortunately, many Christians have insulated themselves from the non-Christian world and fail to interact in the lives of unbelievers, Stroope insisted, adding, "Shame on you if you don't know 10 people who aren't Christians."

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## **Don't be afraid to talk about money, conference leader tells pastors**

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Pastors should shed their reluctance to talk about money from the pulpit, Alabama pastor Gary Fenton told a group of church leaders March 9.

After sharing that reluctance for years, Fenton said he "went through a conversion" about church finances.

Fenton, pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham, said he once thought talking about money "violated my role" as a pastor. He would avoid the topic, he said, by using such euphemisms as "resources" and "stewardship of life." Eventually, he said, he realized he couldn't preach about Christian stewardship without talking openly about money issues.

Rather than downplaying his role as a financial leader in the church, Fenton said he now accepts that function. Getting involved in church finances is important for a pastor because the pastor is a church member and a church leader, and because the pastor "is one of the few people in the church who has the big picture."

Fenton identified five reasons for pastors to talk about stewardship:

-- Stewardship is a biblical theme.

-- A pastor can be an "accidental fund-raiser." By talking about ministry opportunities, a pastor can spark "a little opening of generosity" from a church member, which often develops into a lifelong pattern of giving.

-- "We are trusted trustees." Church members often look to pastors to help them sort out the worthy causes from among the avalanche of pleas for financial support.

-- Pastors are "the conscience of the church."

-- "We are heralds of the vision." A pastor can help a congregation define and proclaim its vision, "and vision attracts contributions," he said. "Instead of us going to them with hands out, they come to us with hearts open," he said.

Fenton spoke three times during the March 9-10 conference on Money Matters, sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics.

Understanding the financial mindset of a congregation helps pastors provide effective leadership, Fenton said. He identified four mindsets common in churches -- the small-business culture, the entrepreneurial culture, the non-profit culture and the corporate culture.

Each approaches financial issues with a different set of values that usually reflects the financial experience of the majority of church members, he said.

-- The small-business church values thrift, Fenton said. People who work in small businesses believe "every cent is important," he said. They know how much things cost and expect their church leaders to know the same.

-- The entrepreneurial church values risk, Fenton continued. People in entrepreneurial businesses "are willing to risk money if they can see some advantage down the line," he explained. If a pastor is unwilling to take risks in budgeting, Fenton said, the entrepreneurial church concludes "our pastor has no vision."

-- The non-profit church values fairness, Fenton said. Often populated with employees from government, non-profit agencies, universities and denominational agencies, non-profit churches want budgets that are equitable to all concerned.

-- The corporate church values targeted investment, he said. Does the budget support efforts that will accomplish the church's mission? This is bottom-line thinking, Fenton said, but identifying a church's bottom line is a difficult thing.

Interestingly, Fenton added, while the model of a corporate CEO has become popular in many churches, many corporations now are looking for CEOs who are more "pastoral," offering care, compassion and nurture to employees.

The task of providing financial leadership to churches today, Fenton said, is complicated by the fact few churches contain only one financial mindset. Most churches have a blend of the four financial models, he said.

Developing church budgets is not only a practical concern but a spiritual one, Fenton said, because drafting a budget forces church members to examine their hearts. Budget time in a church "is a painful but holy time," he said.

Fenton gave advice to pastors considering significant changes in the budget:

-- Expect resistance. "Changing things dear to us should bring pain."

-- Introduce a change long before you vote on it.

-- If it also includes a change of philosophy, go even slower. "When you change philosophy, you are changing the soul," Fenton said.

-- Continually interpret the change for the congregation.

-- Don't sacrifice character for the sake of vision.

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## **Planning ahead is a good way to increase giving, research shows**

By David Winfrey

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- People who think long-term about the needs of their churches are bigger donors than those who don't, according to a study of financial giving.

"How people think about giving and plan giving has a major influence on what they give," said Dean Hoge, co-author of "Money Matters: Personal Giving in American Churches."

Regularity of church attendance remains the No. 1 predictor of an individual's contributions to church, Hoge told a conference on church-finance issues sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics March 9-10.

A study of giving trends found Assemblies of God and Baptist congregations have both the highest rate of giving per household and the highest percentage of members who attend church activities more than once a week, Hoge said.

But the way members plan for giving has a direct impact on the amount they contribute, he added.

For example, Baptists in the study who determined to give a tithe (10 percent) or more of their income to the church gave an average of \$4,042 a year. Baptists who based their giving on a percentage of their income gave an average of \$3,120.

For Baptists who decided to give an annual dollar amount, the annual average fell to \$2,778. Those who set a weekly dollar amount gave an average of \$1,882.

And those who gave "what I can afford each week" averaged \$869 annually.

The findings held true among all five denominations studied: Baptist, Assemblies of God, Catholic, Lutheran and Presbyterian.

Likewise, people who sign a pledge card give a "good bit more" than those who don't, Hoge added.

Southern Baptists ranked seventh in giving among U.S. denominations studied from 1987 to 1989, with contributions averaging slightly more than 3 percent of a member's annual income.

Ranking ahead of Baptists were Mormons, who led the survey with slightly more than 7 percent of annual income given to the church; Assemblies of God; Seventh-Day Adventists; Church of God; Reformed; and Church of the Nazarene.

Hoge added that his study confirmed the adage that most churches get their money from a fraction of their members. "Seventy-five percent of the money comes from 25 percent of the people."

He cited four factors that motivate giving in both churches and secular fund-raising activities.

While not advocating that churches emphasize all these, he said congregations should recognize each factor motivates at least some members. The factors are:

-- Reciprocity with other people. Some members give because they feel they will get something in return, Hoge said. This can motivate members who think the pastor or other church leaders will look at the pledge cards.

Hoge admitted churches differ on whether pastors should know the giving records of members. Those who oppose it say it might influence a pastor's relationship with the members, but some pastors support it as a way to know whose lives are being influenced toward greater stewardship and who should be endorsed for lay leadership positions.

While not taking a side, Hoge said churches should be open about what the practice is "so people aren't surprised later."

-- Reciprocity with God. Some people expect to be blessed by God as a result of their church contributions, Hoge said.

"It's a little like paying an insurance premium for some people," he added. "Martin Luther says you can't buy [salvation], but there's many a person who says, 'Well, just to be on the safe side ... .'"

-- Altruism and thankfulness. One example would be contributing to a hospital's charity fund after a successful surgery. "Efficient stewardship would like to evoke a sense of thankfulness at all times," Hoge said.

-- Giving to the extended self. While most people give out of self-interest, they often consider other people and institutions to be part of their "extended self," he said.

Contributions to a family member, school or church can apply, he said. "We're talking about love and devotion here. Do you feel joy or pain when you transfer money from yourself to the person?"

-30-

## **Spiritual growth produces stewardship, speaker says**

By David Winfrey

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- If a church is committed to bringing members into a deeper commitment with God, proper financial stewardship will naturally follow, advises a former financial director for Willow Creek Community Church.

Bringing members to deeper commitments to Christ "ought to have behavioral manifestations," Dick Towner said March 10 during a church-finance conference sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics.

Willow Creek, a megachurch in suburban Chicago known for its "seeker-sensitive" approach, does not ask its members to sign an annual pledge card. Yet the church had a 13 percent increase in giving last year even though attendance was relatively flat, Towner said, and the 23-year-old church has a debt-free campus.

As with many training messages by Willow Creek personnel, Towner encouraged those attending the BCE conference to consider Willow Creek's principles more than its actual methods.

"Our people are growing significantly in their understanding of and living out of biblical principles," he said.

Towner, who now directs Willow Creek's Good Sense Ministry for financial stewardship, said the church is committed to addressing stewardship among its members in four ways:

-- Cautiously. People's relationship to their money is a "powerful and dangerous thing," Towner said. "We're dealing with habits of a lifetime."

Christians in America are living in a culture that has gone "materialistically berserk" and must recognize their sinful inclination toward greed and envy. "It's an incredibly difficult topic."

-- Forthrightly. Despite the tension related to financial issues, the Willow Creek leaders don't shy from discussing stewardship as an aspect of Christian living, Towner said. "We very rarely ask for money," he said. "We teach about money a lot."

Churches shouldn't be afraid of scaring off unchurched people by teaching what the Bible says about money, he added. "If we care about our people in a spiritual as well as just a real-life way, we've got to educate them on this, because society is sending out destructive messages. They're just being eaten alive."

Through Good Sense Ministry, Willow Creek regularly offers budgeting seminars for people wanting to get their finances under control. "I suggest we have a very seeker-appropriate and relevant message." The intention is for people to leave with a budget in hand, the tools in their heads and the motivation in their hearts to keep their money under control, Towner said.

Willow Creek leaders also recognize that the way the church handles money will speak volumes to non-Christians, Towner said. "It's a key area for Satan to get his foot in the door."

The church has an open-books financial policy and annual audits. Anyone can learn about Senior Pastor Bill Hybels' \$83,000 salary, which he capped a few years ago, Towner said.

But rather than just giving the facts and figures of the budget, Towner said it is important that the church link its line items with how they translate into life-changing ministries.

-- Unconventionally. Towner said Hybels found from the start that many people claimed they didn't attend church because leaders always were asking for money. In seeker services, Willow Creek leaders always note that the offering is for members only, Towner added.

-- Biblically. Towner said churches must constantly fight Americans' unbiblical attitude that things bring happiness. "Our people are being duped by this, and we need to raise their consciousness and say there is another way."

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## **Endowments could be boon for churches, Swint says**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Churches should take a cue from other non-profit organizations in America and begin to build endowments, according to Rubin Swint, president of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Foundation.

Most churches can benefit from the "10 trillion transfer of wealth" taking place in America as the World War II generation passes from the scene and leaves behind a lifetime of assets.

That wealth comes from not only well-to-do Americans but "unlikely millionaires" -- average, middle-class senior adults who worked hard, saved money, earned a pension, bought life insurance, paid off a house, and therefore come to the end of life with more assets than they ever envisioned.

Many of those "millionaires" are packing church pews, but few churches are actively seeking them out, Swint said. Instead, other non-profits -- universities, hospitals, children's homes and other charities -- are reaping the benefits.

"Non-profit institutions know the best donors they have are in churches," Swint told church leaders attending a Baptist Center for Ethics conference March 9. "We had better be asking too."

One approach: encourage members to tithe from their estates.

"The one best thing you can do to promote endowment is to promote wills for everyone," Swint said. Wills are the source of most endowment funds, he noted.

Swint suggested several appropriate uses for the income from church endowments:

-- Pay for capital improvements.

-- Provide for building maintenance. A \$1 million building will cost at least as much to maintain during its life span, he said.

-- Fund mission work.

-- Supplement the operating budget.

Some well-heeled churches have grown complacent or stagnant while depending on endowment for operating funds. But Swint said providing up to 15 percent of the operating budget from endowment income is safe and appropriate.

Churches should decide how to spend endowment income before they receive it if possible, Swint added. If the church is going to manage trust funds, one group of trustees should be appointed to oversee all trusts, he said. And some churches should consider establishing a foundation, he said, which is a simple procedure that can add even more protection for endowment by taking the funds out of the church's regular budget.

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-- By Greg Warner

## **Stewardship emphasis should be year-round, consultants advise**

By David Winfrey

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- When promoting stewardship, too many churches fail to consider their congregations' purpose and culture, according to a fund-raising strategist.

"We make an assumption of purpose, don't talk about culture, and go straight into strategy," said Jim Highland, president of Master Resources.

Like many of the speakers at the Baptist Center for Ethics' March 9-10 conference on church finance, Highland advocates integrating stewardship into a church's total message about what is expected of Christians.

But many churches offer only a brief emphasis on stewardship in the fall that determines the congregation's ministry potential for an entire year, Highland said.

Churches should articulate their purpose so that members know to what they are contributing, Highland said.

Dick Towner, director of Good Sense Ministries at Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago, agreed. "People don't give to a budget. A budget is a reflection of a vision."

Likewise, leaders must recognize the culture of the congregation's members in planning a stewardship message. Older members are more likely to give to their church from a perspective of long-term commitment to the institution. Younger members require more education about why they are giving, Highland said.

Mike Allen, a representative of Cargill Associates fund-raising consultants, cited 10 keys of churches that have effective stewardship programs:

-- They are committed to stewardship as a year-round ministry. Rather than having only one or two weeks in the fall when stewardship is emphasized, "use a little more perspective on the total year and the total amount of what we do with ourselves," Allen said.

Such churches see stewardship as "using the gifts God has given us to do the work God has called us to do," he said. "Stewardship is not a financial issue. It's a spiritual issue."

-- They have a plan. "When we do that, folks respond," Allen said.

-- Pastors and leaders are committed to tithing. "Effective leadership takes modeling," he said. During capital campaigns, many members' pledges equal that of the pastor, Allen noted.

"The pastor sets the mark," he said. "They know what he makes and they know what they make."

-- They pray. "Ask people to make this a matter of prayer," Allen suggested. "Spending records show a clear priority of our lives."

-- They talk about money. "There's more mentioned of money in the Bible than there is love," Allen said. "Why? It must be important."

Churches shouldn't be ashamed to ask for money any more than they are ashamed to ask members for other commitments, he said.

-- They train people. "If they don't know, they can't do it," Allen said.

-- They budget for stewardship education, training and promotion. A reasonable amount is 3 percent of the annual budget, he said. "Keeping it in front of people keeps the recognition high."

-- They intentionally cultivate new members. Such churches teach that being a church member includes being responsible for the "upkeep of the kingdom," Allen said. "If you don't ask them, they're not going to do anything. Let people know that part of what being a Christian is involves financial commitment."

-- Their stewardship programs are grace-guided, not guilt-driven. Guilt is a poor motivation in the long run, he said.

"Do you remember the first time you were more excited about the gifts you were giving at Christmas than the gifts you received?" Allen asked. "If we get people excited about what Christ is doing in people's lives and for them, some of this is going to bubble over."

-- They make stewardship fun. Churches can present their budget in a way that is more interesting than simply a listing of numbers, he said. One church sponsored a missions safari during its Sunday worship service in which members walked through the building to learn about five areas of the budget.

The chief idea for making stewardship fun is to evoke two responses, he said: "Wow. I didn't realize we did all that," and "Wow. I didn't realize it cost so much to do all that."

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