

Stewardship ministry: Thanking people

Best practices for churches to thank donors

Why we should say thank you

If asked, many people who give money to our churches would say there's no need to say thank you.

But is that a reason not to? Most thriving nonprofits recognize the importance of two simple words, "Thank you!" *Network for Good* has researched the value of saying thank you to donors and offers these findings on why it's important:

- *Survival*: The number one reason that donors stop supporting a nonprofit is the way they were treated by the nonprofit.
- *Success*: Your gratitude helps bond a donor to your cause.
- *Differentiation*: Most nonprofits are terrible at expressing gratitude. If you're good, you stand out.
- *Manners*: Saying thank you often and well is simply the right thing to do.

These same principles carry over to why church leaders should express gratitude to those who contribute financially to the ministry of their churches.

Treating donors like volunteers

We don't have any problem thanking children or their leaders who contribute in a worship experience. We gladly acknowledge the contribution made by a choir or someone who shares an experience with a ministry or service project. We commission lay leaders to serve and thank them for their willingness to give of their time for these vital roles.

In Romans 12:6-8, Paul lists a variety of gifts that are represented in the body of Christ such as prophecy, ministry, teaching exhortation and giving. Giving is a spiritual gift, among many others, and we are encouraged to participate in exercising this gift for the common good.

Why thank some who give of themselves on a Sunday morning, but neglect others – those who contribute financially? Maybe we need to start by not being so silent about the presence of this gift among us and acknowledging those who excel at it, just like we recognize people who excel in other areas.

A concern about wealth

A major caution I hear about saying thank you to those who give money is that we risk showing partiality to those with wealth (James 2:1-7). If we have this concern, we would need to be consistent and stop thanking anyone for anything they do for the benefit of the whole within the life of the church.

In truth, we have made finances way too important by creating this taboo about talking about money and even thanking people who give generously. This veil of secrecy is not what God intended, and it's certainly not what Paul practiced as he commended the church in Macedonia for giving far more generously than other churches with even greater financial means (2 Corinthians 8:1-7).

How to say thank you

Charles Lane in his book *Ask, Thank, Tell* identifies some ways to acknowledge this gift of giving and express appreciation for those who embody it. He suggests that the church should nurture a culture of thanksgiving. This goes back to the gift of exhortation.



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First, gratitude should include all the ways people contribute to the ministry of the church – including financial generosity. The amount of one’s contribution is not as important as the fact that people participate in this practice as instructed by scripture (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

- *We start by thanking God* for the gifts we receive, which is probably the easiest expression of gratitude to express.
- *We thank those who recognize that gifts from God aren’t to be hoarded* but are to be passed along.
 - It is good and appropriate to thank those who give financially to your ministry as well as those who volunteer time and specific skills needed by the body.
 - Invite a variety of people besides the pastor or treasurer to say thank you, such as, the Sunday School superintendent, youth leaders or youth who are supported by the financial ministry of the church. They should have an opportunity to say how financial gifts help expand God’s work where they serve.

- Thank people in a general way in corporate worship and personally through notes and individual conversations.
- Thank people sooner rather than later.
- In some cases, a meal or trip that allow people to hear or see how their gift benefited other people is an excellent way to express appreciation.

Saying thank you is one of those courtesies we learn as children, and we typically are good at expressing, except to financial givers in the church. There certainly are cautions to be considered as we move into what may be new territory. But keeping silent on this matter of expressing thanks for financial gifts doesn’t reflect good practices either.

Each church and its context are different. We encourage you to host a conversation with your leadership groups and begin testing small steps toward creating a culture of gratitude at all levels of church life, including financial giving.

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