

PAUL, THE FUNDRAISER

Reflections on how fundraising was conducted in the early church

by Philip J. Hunt

As we look around our modern offices, it is hard to see jobs which are common with the early church. The Bible talks about elders, evangelists, stewards; it doesn't mention typists, word processors, computer programmers. Of course, you might feel that Matthew or Judas were the biblical forerunners of present-day taxation officers and book-keepers.

But there are some tasks for which there is a very clear biblical mandate. These include preaching the good news, healing the sick, and fundraising. Wait a minute! Did he say fundraising!?!

Yes, he did. We find from Paul's letters that fundraising was included among the many tasks he considered appropriate for his great missionary calling. As Paul was concluding his great letter to the Christians in Rome, he outlined his travel plans and says:

"Just now, however, I am going to Jerusalem in the service of God's people there. For the churches in Macedonia and Achaia have freely decided to give an offering to help the poor among God's people in Jerusalem. That decision was their own; but, as a matter of fact, they have an obligation to help them. Since the Jews shared their spiritual blessings with the Gentiles, the Gentiles ought to use their material blessings to help the Jews. When I have finished this task and have handed over to them all the money that has been raised for them, I shall leave for Spain and visit you on my way there."

(Romans 15:25-28)

(Bible quotations from the Good News Bible)

We don't know what the problem was in Jerusalem. But whatever it was, it needed money to fix it. In that regard, at least, it sounds like the kind of problems with which we are pretty familiar today.

As Paul, this great preacher and leader, travelled on his missions he proclaimed a number of messages. It is quite clear that one of those messages was to urge Christians to put their faith into practice. And one way they could do this was to give to the poor and needy. So, Paul talked about the poor in Jerusalem, and asked for money.

That process should sound familiar to anyone in the fundraising business. Challenging Christians to do as they say, to put their money where their mouth is. Communicating the needs of the poor. Asking for money. That's fundraising.

Now we don't have an example of Paul's appeal. We don't know how he appealed for funds in the first place. There is no direct mail appeal letter included in the New Testament, for instance. But two things do come close. They are in the letters Paul wrote to the church at

Corinth. The first is a set of instructions to donors. The second is a reminder letter to an unfinancial sponsor.

INSTRUCTIONS TO DONORS

"Now, concerning what you wrote about the money to be raised to help God's people in Judaea. You must do what I told the churches in Galatia to do. Every Sunday each of you must put aside some money, in proportion to what he has earned, and save it up, so that there will be no need to collect money when I come. After I come, I shall give letters of introduction to the men you have approved, and send them to take your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems worth while for me to go, then they can go along with me." (1 Corinthians 16:1-4)

Often as we organize our fundraising campaigns we issue sets of instructions which look remarkably like this. Paul gives specific instructions on how the money is to be raised. The Corinthians are to put aside some money every Sunday.

He also gives a guideline concerning how much to give - each in proportion to his or her earnings. Paul expects that big earners will be large donors.

Also Paul tells them how to remit their funds. He will authorize collectors in consultation with the donors who will transport the funds to Jerusalem.

A REMINDER LETTER TO UNFINANCIAL SPONSORS

It seems that the Corinthians must have made a promise and reneged. They had pledged to give to the poor in Jerusalem, but they had failed to fulfil that pledge. So Paul writes them a reminder letter. It takes up two whole chapters of his second letter to the Corinthians and is similar in many ways to letters I have seen written by modernday fundraisers to "delinquent" or unfinancial donors.

Paul writes:

"Our brothers, we want you to know what God's grace has accomplished in the churches in Macedonia. They have been severely tested by the troubles they went through, but their joy was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor. I can assure you that they gave us much as they could, and even more than they could. Of their own free will they begged us and pleaded for the privilege of having a part in helping God's people in Judaea. It was more than we could have hoped for! First, they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God's will they gave themselves to us as well."

(2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

The first thing to notice is that, as Paul introduces his reminder letter, there is not a word about the Corinthians themselves. We might expect the letter to read like a demand notice.

"Unless you pay up in 14 days we shall take legal action."

No. This is not Paul's way. Instead of reminding the Corinthians about their pledge, he talks about someone else altogether. He praises the Macedonians for being such good donors. His tactic is very clear. His praise of the Macedonians sets a standard by which the Corinthians may judge their own performance.

Is it right to praise good donors? Surely when Jesus said, "Let your giving be in secret" he meant that we should not make a big show of our giving.

Does this mean that we should not give special attention and praise to large donors? From Paul's actions we can say that the answer is that it is OK to praise our good donors.

There is a big difference between World Vision praising its good donors and the donors praising themselves. There is a big difference between Paul saying how wonderful the Macedonians are, and the Macedonians saying it themselves.

The Macedonians did not issue press releases publicizing their generosity. They gave secretly and without seeking glory. But Paul praised their giving in such a way that their generosity has become part of history. Even today, nearly two thousand years later, we still read Paul's praise to a good donor.

And it is justified praise, because these donors are really something special. Paul writes "of their own free will they begged us and insisted.." (8:4). Do we have such donors at World Vision?

You know, we read or hear every day about hunger and poverty.

It is easy for us to forget how deeply moving the plight of the poor is. We see so many pictures of emaciated children that we can comfortably sit at our desks, eating our lunches, while poring over the latest pictures of dying children in food relief camps in Africa.

But most people have not been numbed by the perpetual horror in the same way that many of us have. If you go with a World Vision representative to any meeting and sit with the audience while a World Vision audio-visual is being shown, you will hear the gasps of horror as the images of starving children appear on the screen. Personally, I always find such empathy deeply moving. I am usually glad that the lights are out for fear that my own emotions are too transparent.

This was the situation Paul discovered in Macedonia. Doubtless, Paul had told the story of the poor in Jerusalem more than once. Yet, the Macedonians were hearing it freshly. It struck an empathetic chord.

Paul did not need to nag them. He did not need to plead, nor to beg. On the contrary, the Macedonians begged Paul to take their gifts.

Why were the Macedonians so responsive, while the Corinthians were not? I think Paul gives us a clue in the second verse - "their joy was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor."

Firstly, the Macedonians knew the joy of Christian living. Secondly, they were poor. Here is an essential difference between the Macedonians and the Corinthians. The Macedonians were poor: the Corinthians were rich.

Time and again, as we have presented a picture of the poor to the newly rich people of Hong Kong and Singapore we have heard the comment "We know what that is like_" People who have known poverty, don't need it to be explained to them. They know what it is like. They want to help.

I cannot think of any research done within the world--wide partnership of World Vision which reveals that World Vision supporters are rich middle class. Most can speak of experiencing real hardship like to fall on hard times. plead or beg. They will respond with enthusiasm.

MAKING DONORS FEEL GUILTY

So Paul tells the Corinthians about these excellent donors then asks the Corinthians to fulfil their promise.

"So, we urged Titus, who began this work, to continue it and help you complete this special service of love." (8:6)

How do you suppose the Corinthians felt? They had failed to keep their promise. It was a promise to a special and greatly revered friend.

I suppose they felt guilty.

Is it right to make donors feel guilty? Perhaps we should be cautious about criticizing the giving of others. We do not know everybody's circumstances. As I return to Australia, or visit the USA or Britain, everyone looks fabulously wealthy to someone who is living in Hong Kong. Here, in Australia, it everyone has cars and even parking spaces! Everyone seems to own spacious private home, unlike the crowded flats of Hong Kong.

But we know that real financial problems do exist with many people who live in triple-fronted brick veneer houses, and who have twin garages with late model motor cars.

Let us take notice that Paul does not criticize the Corinthians personally. He does not say "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves".

Instead, he puts the facts as objectively as he can. If their consciences make them feel guilty, then this is God's Spirit working within them. God can use such feelings to urge them to respond.

It is possible that they have perfectly good and just reasons for not keeping their promise. In that case, their consciences will not be troubled. They will be able to explain to Paul. They will be happy for the fine work of the Macedonians.

We cannot say to donors that they MUST give. Nor should we tell them that they should be ashamed to be rich while others are poor. Rather, we should show the very real and factual contrasts which characterize our world. The contrast between rich and poor. The contrast between well-fed and hungry. Then, like Paul, we may trust God and the way He made human nature to do the rest.

WHY WE SHOULD GIVE

Paul has given the Corinthians an example of a good donor by describing the Macedonians. Now he goes on to outline the reasons why the Corinthians should also be good donors.

YOU ARE RICH

"You are so rich in all you have: in faith, speech, and knowledge, in your eagerness to help and in your love for us. And so we want you to be generous also in this service of love." (8:7)

These Corinthians have everything. Much faith. Many good preachers. Scholars galore. Enthusiasm. Love for Paul himself. After all this flattery you get the feeling they would be ready to say yes to anything!

Paul does not shrink manipulative flattery. group of Christians had reference to the poorer world context. This is from genuine compliments. This is not shallow This is an inventory of real gifts that this demonstrated. Coming directly after the Macedonians it puts the Corinthians into a something we should never be afraid to do. Let us not shrink from reminding people of all the good things they have and how that contrasts with the rest of mankind. Furthermore, if people have good virtues or have made great accomplishments let us not be so coy as to avoid acknowledging these good things.

IT PROVES YOU CARE

"I am not laying down any rules. But by showing how eager others are to help, I am trying to find out how real your own love is." (8:8)

We say we care, but a big gift shows we care. How do we find out if a person's love is real and genuine? Watch what they do. Their actions will verify or deny their words.

The Living Bible adds a gloss to this verse which may not be a good translation, but I like the idea it holds. "I am not saying you must do it, but others are eager for it."

A big gift from the Corinthians would be good public relations. So many people rationalize their own failure to give by pointing to the rich people who also do not give. They justify their own unresponsiveness by pointing at rich companies which do not help the poor and rich churches which ignore the needy. People who are blessed with riches should give a lead and set an example with their giving.

JESUS DID IT

"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; rich as he was, he made himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of his poverty." (8:9)

Paul reminds the Corinthians that there is no greater example of giving from the richness of one's possessions than the example of our Lord himself. Christ gave everything He had, for the poorest and most needy among us. Given His example, should we do less?

KEEP YOUR PROMISES

"My opinion is that it is better for you to finish now what you began last year. You were the first, not only to act, but also to be willing to act. On with it, then, and finish the job! Be as eager to finish as you were to plan it, and do it with what you now have." (8:10-11)

It is always easy to be enthusiastic at the beginning of a new venture. Enthusiasm is high. But as that first flush of excitement fades into the routine of getting the job done, people lose their commitment. It seems that this is what happened to the Corinthians. Paul reminds them that when the going gets tough, the tough get going.

HOW MUCH SHOULD PEOPLE GIVE?

"If you are eager to give, God will accept your gift on the basis of what you have to give, not on what you haven't. I am not trying to relieve others by putting a burden on you; but since you have plenty this time, it is only fair that you should help those who are in need. Then, when you are in need and they have plenty, they will help you. In this way, both are treated equally. As the scripture says, 'The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.'" (8:12-15)

The numbers on a cheque do not measure the generosity of the donor's heart. One day when Jesus was at the temple he saw many rich men giving large amounts. But he also noticed one old widow who gave just a few cents. Jesus said, "This poor woman has given more than all the rest combined. For they have given a little of what they didn't need, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has."

Do we judge the value of donors by the numbers we record on their giving history? Of course, numbers are important. Large gifts are important. They indicate a larger capacity to give and an ability to make a big impact on the needs of the poor. We should be glad and especially grateful to have large donors. Furthermore, I believe it is right to give large donors a different kind of treatment to smaller donors. But this is only because they are in a different category, not because they are superior.

PAUL'S 'YES' CARD AND REPLY PAID ENVELOPE

Every direct mail practitioner knows that each letter must include a response mechanism. I call these 'YES Cards' because in the days when I was writing direct mail copy I would always insist that the artist's design include the prominent display of the word "YES". I wanted to be sure that people knew what we wanted them to do!

Paul has a "YES" card and a reply paid envelope all rolled up into one person - Titus.

"How we thank God for making Titus as eager as we are to help you! Not only did he welcome our request; he was so eager to help that of his own free will he decided to go to you. With him we are sending the brother who is highly respected in all the churches for his work in preaching the gospel. And besides that, he has been chosen and appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this service of love for the sake of the Lord's glory, and in order to show that we want to help.

"We are taking care not to stir up any complaints about the way we handle this generous gift. Our purpose is to do what is right, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of man.

"So we are sending our brother with them, we have tested him many times and found him always eager to help. And now that he has so much confidence in you, he is all the more eager to help." (8:16-22)

BEING HONEST - LOOKING HONEST

Paul went to a lot of trouble to avoid suspicion. In all, he was sending three people, all tested and trusted servants, to accompany the money to Jerusalem.

He realised that when one is entrusted with someone else's money it is not sufficient just to BE honest. One must LOOK honest as well.

There is very little doubt that the Corinthians would trust Paul. Paul was their spiritual father. They loved and revered him. If Paul said he would deliver the money to Jerusalem, it is unlikely that they would have wanted further reassurances.

This is just good business sense. Paul was not unfamiliar with the ways of businessmen. Even in his day it was probably common to have separation of duties in many businesses where money was involved. In our offices, we make sure that the person who dispenses the petty cash is not the same person who authorizes petty cash payments. Then the person who authorizes petty cash payments is not the same person who replenishes the petty cash. These duties are separated in most offices. We make these separations, not because we distrust the people involved, but so that any person, even the most suspicious and cynical, can look at our practices and see clearly that we are honest.

As the stewards of other people's gifts we must never be slow to offer information about how those gifts are being put to work. It ought to be our policy to give out even more information than people ask for - so that we shall not only BE honest, but so that we shall also give observable evidence of our honesty.

THE DONOR'S OBLIGATION

Paul is not yet finished with the Corinthians on this topic.

"There is really no need for me to write to you about the help being sent to God's people in Judaea. I know that you are willing to help, and I have boasted of you to the people in Macedonia. 'The brothers in Achaia,' I said, 'have been ready to help since last year.' Your eagerness has stirred up most of them. Now I am sending these brothers, so that our boasting about you in this matter may not turn out to be empty words. But, just as I said, you will be ready to help. However, if the people from Macedonia should come with me and find out that you are not ready, how ashamed we would be - not to speak of your shame - for feeling so sure of you! So I thought it was necessary to urge these brothers to go to you ahead of me and get ready in advance the gift you promised to make. Then it will be ready when I arrive, and it will show that you give because you want to, not because you have to." (9:1-5)

It is quite remarkable how strongly Paul continues to speak to the Corinthians. He really does not hold back. He speaks very plainly and with firm authority.

He tells them they must keep their promises. They must live up to their earlier enthusiasm. They must not cause Paul to lose face, not to mention their own loss of face (although Paul DOES mention it!).

Why can Paul write like this and get away with it? It is because he is held in such high regard by his readers. They will accept his plain speaking because they love and respect him so much. This is what "speaking the truth in love" means.

Few of us could write to our donors like this. They would be offended. But it is sad that we do not have the quality of relationship with our donors which permits us to write in this forthright manner. Donors should feel part of our work, just as we ourselves do. And they ought to feel personally responsible for supporting it. After all, they ARE responsible - without donors the work stops.

This is a special feature of the child sponsorship programme. We ask a donor to take a special and personal interest in one child, and also to accept responsibility for the relationship. Sponsors do feel responsible, and they do have a sense of their obligations. It is OK to remind sponsors of their obligations if they fail to give regularly, because you will discover that most responsibilities lightly.

PAUL HAS A FUNDRAISING PLAN

It is encouraging to note that there is nothing ad hoc about Paul's fundraising.

He has a systematic method for fundraising. Like so many fundraising plans it involves bite-sized contributions over a period of time. Paul's method for the Corinthians is "a proportion every Sunday". This is just like \$20 a month for sponsors, or \$1 an hour for 40 Hour Famine participants.

He has a communications plan. He gives examples of other donors to establish giving standards. You should notice that he used the example of the Corinthians to encourage the Macedonians. Now the boot is on the other foot and he is using the Macedonians as a standard for the Corinthians. He uses advance mail to communicate the plan before he arrives. He sends advance men into the field to develop the plan.

He has a response mechanism - Titus, the reply paid envelope!

He has a mind for public relations. Paul wants the gift to be given to "show that you give because you want to, not because you have to."

Actually, I enjoy the irony here. It is not hard to read between the lines. Paul is quite clearly thinking that the Corinthians do "have to", because of their obligation and promises. They have a moral obligation which amounts to an imperative.

Paul says "I don't want others to think that you did this because I put pressure on you." Yet he puts the pressure on anyway. And he puts it on hard!

It is important for us to realise that people who want to give, still need to be challenged and reminded to give.

Is there any doubt that the Corinthians wanted to give? I don't think so. It seems that the Corinthians were genuinely keen to make a large contribution to the needy in Judaea. Paul believes that they continue to have this desire. Yet they still need to be urged to give.

Quite often we receive letters which say things like "If you spent less money on these direct mail appeals you would have more to give to the poor." It is simply not true. If we spent less on direct mail, we would actually have less for the poor.

This is because people need to be reminded to give. We live busy lives in a busier world. We may have the most profound and genuine desire to share our good fortune with the starving in Africa, but we shall not be moved to write a cheque until we are reminded.

People WILL give because they want to - but usually only when they get letters like this one that Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

HOW MUCH SHOULD WE ASK FROM DONORS?

"Remember that the person who sows few seeds will have a small crop; the one who sows many seeds will have a large crop. Each one should give, then, as he has decided, not with regret or out of a sense of duty; for God loves the one who gives gladly." (9:6-7)

"If you are eager to give, God will accept your gift on the basis of what you have to give, not on what you haven't." (8:12)

Here Paul has uncovered a very simple but important principle for fundraisers. The principle is this: Don't tell people how much they should give; do tell them how much is needed.

If we allow people to make up their own minds, they are more likely to give gladly.

By all means, let's tell people how much it costs:

\$20 to buy medicine for one child in our Kampuchean Children's Hospital;
\$25 to buy provisions for one starving Ethiopian family for this month;
\$10,000,000 to do adequate hunger relief work in Mozambique.

We have a responsibility to the poor to effectively communicate what the needs are and how much money is required to meet those needs. But that does not give us the right to tell people how much they should give.

Of course, there are some restrictions to this principle. If people want to sponsor a child it is going to cost them \$21 a month. If you want to be a sponsor that is what it costs. But if someone wants to give us \$10 or \$1 we cannot say that it is unworthy or too small. Too small for sponsorship perhaps, but not too small to be useful.

If we believe anything as Christian communicators we must believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to work in human hearts, even in human hearts which are not totally committed to Him. Therefore we should be committed to telling people what is needed. There is much which can be said about the real contrasts between the rich and the poor. Much to tell about the needs of the hungry. If we do our job of communicating well, we can be certain of a harvest of generous giving.

THE RESULTS OF GIVING ARE GOOD

"And God is able to give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause. As the scripture says, 'He gives generously to the needy; his kindness lasts for ever.' And God, who supplies seed to sow and bread to eat, will always supply you with all the seed you need and will make it grow and produce a rich harvest from your generosity. He will always make you rich enough to be generous at all times, so that many will thank God for your gifts which they receive from us. For this service you perform not only meets the needs of God's people, but also produces an outpouring of grateful thanks to God. And because of the proof which this service of yours

brings, many will give glory to God for your loyalty to the gospel of Christ, which you profess, and for your generosity in sharing with them and everyone else. And so with deep affection they will pray for you because of the extraordinary grace God has shown you. Let us thank God for his priceless gift!" (9:8-15)

In Hong Kong, and many other places, it is considered good luck money to beggars. The idea is that the gods will be kind your generosity to the beggar. It does seem that Paul this idea here in verses 9-11, and it is not hard to scriptural support for the idea that God does not let unrewarded.

But I don't think Paul is really stressing this idea here. He is not talking about a cause and effect relationship. For to do so would be to stress selfish reasons for being generous. Such selfishness does not sit well alongside the selflessness of the Cross.

Although it is true that generosity reaps its own rewarding harvest I think Paul is merely making an economic forecast about the future profitability of Corinthian enterprise. To say that the Corinthians will always have money to give, is a little like saying that the Westpac Bank will continue to make money. It is a very reasonable forecast. So, given the Corinthians fine record in profit-making businesses, it is very likely that they will always have money to give.

Paul then goes on to stress two more important and worthy reasons why people should give.

Firstly, we should give for the simple reason that those in need are helped. This is a clear statement of justice. The needy need help, therefore we should give. It is such a clear principle, yet frequently overlooked.

Secondly, it causes other people to give thanks and praise to God as they see our Christian faith proved through our giving. Our words are converted into actions. And our actions cause others to be thankful and praising.

In many World Vision projects it is this very process which leads people to Christ. In Sri Lanka, World Vision is breaking people free from money lenders. We help lending co-operatives to form and the people start to sense a feeling of community as they take control of their own credit arrangement. Judy Hutchison, in charge of our evaluation team, reports that people start to learn and display behaviours which are Christian-like. Later an evangelist visits such a community and speaks to them the good news of Christ. Many people see the connection between the saving words of the gospel and the actions of generosity.

The generosity and selfless giving of donors through World Vision is one of the most powerful witnesses to the reality of our faith.

Christians give in selfless and unrewarded ways. In many communities, hip-deep in corruption, this kind of giving is revolutionary. People soon ask "Why do you do this without seeking a reward?" We are able to echo the words of Paul in verse 14, "because of the extraordinary grace God has shown us."

If we think, even for a moment, about the immensity of God's generosity - generosity so great that we use the word "grace" to more adequately describe it - we can see that it is also the duty of all Christians to give.

In the light of this reflection, perhaps we can understand why Paul is so firm-in his advice to the Corinthians. If, like Paul, we "thank God for His priceless gift", our own duty to give is immediately put into perspective.