

Embracing Diversity in Church Fundraising

By

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Today's nonprofit organizations, including churches, are increasingly embracing diversity as a mission and organizational value. As the mix of members becomes more culturally diverse, fundraising also expands and taps into the economic growth and power of Hispanics, African Americans, Asian Americans and other diverse population groups. At the same time, diversity presents a challenge to fundraisers. Diversity can assume a number of dimensions. No longer can pastors and their teams function under the assumption of "one size fits all." Diverse groups have identifiable, valuable and significant philanthropic characteristics and traits. Therefore fundraising appeals must be tailored to prospective donors' customs and sensibilities.

To not acknowledge and work with diversity is to ignore much potential of income for your Church's fundraising campaigns. Often those charged with fundraising in a Church setting approach a relationship and solicitation from their own perspective, therefore leaving themselves unprepared for cultural differences that can easily be misinterpreted and misconstrued. Generalizations about fundraising from minority groups should be approached with caution. However, generalizations can provide us with some basic information from which we can develop further knowledge that is more specific, accurate and individualized.

Philanthropy in diverse populations often begins with the nuclear family. Although this is usually not considered philanthropy, it does present a groundwork for developing philanthropic habits and practices. Also, in many cultures family reaches beyond the immediate members to extended family which include some relatives as well as those viewed as relatives even though not blood kin.

Religion often plays a significant role. Special occasions, such as birthdays and confirmations, are a platform for giving and volunteering. The religious traditions of all religions promote and teach philanthropic values, although with differing emphases. Those who become Adventist Church members will bring some of these traditions with them, such as the influence of the Catholic church on developing the habit of giving.

Other similarities in giving can be seen across cultures. People of diverse origins are generous philanthropists but sometimes in ways not recognized by the nonprofit world and IRS. Much ethnic philanthropy is informal and not recorded in tax returns and Gallup polls. Some identifiable similarities of giving among diverse populations are:

- Convergence of wealth accumulation, education, career growth and increased earning capacity allows many to become donors in their own right.

- For many cultures, philanthropy is seen in the broadest sense—gifts of time, talent and treasure—and revolve around family, church and education.
- There is direct and informal support to children, elderly, community members.
- Level of immediate need is important.
- Planned giving is seldom priority.
- Most groups are highly influenced by leaders--religious, community, professional, social and family.
- Much giving is focused outside of the United States without regard of tax benefits.
- Reciprocity is an accepted concept. Helping those in ways they themselves were helped often motivates giving in diverse populations.

The implications of the above few generalizations, cautiously presented, are significant for Churches. Given the diverse populations of the United States and the fact that what we now call minorities will make up nearly half of the population by 2050, Churches have a stellar opportunity to increase giving from diverse groups in the coming years. This fact provides us with numerous opportunities to understand and interact with rich differences in languages, values, and cultural practices. It is a movement away from homogenizing everyone to accepting and embracing cultural richness in our American lives.

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