

Endorsements

‘Rod Irvine has been a source of wisdom to me for over twenty years. His ability to theologically reflect on church leadership, including the whole subject of money, has been a Godsend. As a result, Christians in the churches where I have served have been able to extricate themselves from debt and become increasingly generous. This, in turn, has meant those churches, including the one I currently serve in, have been able to significantly increase their annual income, eliminate debt, engage in capital campaigns and increase their capacity for mission support. My story can be told by other senior ministers in the Anglican world. This book distils the best of Rod’s thinking. If you will take these insights on board you will increase your pastoral ministry to believers, raise substantial funds for ministry, and thereby increase your capacity to reach those who are still far from Christ. I cannot speak highly enough of Rod or this book.’

John Gray, senior minister, St Paul’s Anglican Church, Castle Hill, NSW

‘Rod Irvine has written one of the most needed and helpful books for every local church leader. In his time at Figtree Anglican Church, Rod increased weekly giving exponentially as well as resourcing their building program, which created a fantastic new auditorium and extensions to the church. In this book Rod gives biblical foundations, theological reflections, practical suggestions and the wisdom accumulated in many years of exceptional local church leadership. This is a book every church leader should read and digest.’

Karl Faase, senior pastor, Gymea Baptist Church, NSW; CEO, Olive Tree Media

‘While initially I expressed support for Rod to implement the program outlined in this book in our church, my support, selfishly, was only half-hearted. In one sense, arguing against the principles he explains here is like arguing against motherhood. But for me this was more than an issue of principles—it affected my finances! So began another chapter in my spiritual growth, trusting God as I contributed far more than common sense dictated and certainly a lot more than I was used to giving. I haven’t yet arrived, but I am further on that journey. Many others in our church had a similar experience over the years. Almost needless to say, the secondary benefit was seeing ministries flourish and resources developed. We have Rod to thank for leading us in this very important issue. It was his clear teaching, integrity, passion and personal example that helped us make our money “dance for God”’

Rob Grimmett, former rector’s warden, Figtree Anglican Church, NSW

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Preface

A Personal Story

This is a personal story. For that reason I have written it in the first person because it concerns my journey in raising money for ministry at Figtree Anglican Church in suburban Wollongong, south of Sydney, Australia. More importantly, however, it is my journey in understanding the importance of generosity in my own life. It is a journey that is far from complete.

I took up the position of senior minister (rector) of the Anglican parish of Figtree in December 1987 and had the privilege of ministering in that wonderful church for just over twenty years. There were so many things I did not know about parish ministry. Raising financial resources to advance ministry was one such area. Like many ministers, despite going to a first-rate theological college and cutting my ministry teeth as an assistant minister (curate), I had very little understanding of how to ensure enough money came in each week to advance the cause of God's kingdom. During my first full year at Figtree, 1988, the parish needed \$3,263 each week to



meet its commitments. I remember the figure vividly. I was elated when it was achieved and depressed when it was not, especially if there were a number of consecutive weeks with offerings below budget.

On one Sunday, I remember one of my leading elders (rector's warden) telling me after the evening service that the day's offering was \$3,998. We both put an extra dollar into the plate to bring it to an even \$4,000 and went home smiling. However, finances were not always that encouraging, and for years there was a constant gnawing feeling that we would simply run out of money and have to cut back ministry and lay off staff. To make matters worse, I found that every year the parish ran an annual Gift Day to pay for the completion of the church building. This building had been opened four years before, but it still had a significant debt and many sections needing to be completed. I had known of this commitment before I started at the church, but I was dismayed to find that the annual Gift Day for 1988 was in May of my first year and that I was to lead it. Somehow I muddled through, mainly because the congregation was accustomed to having a Gift Day. It was a matter of producing a brochure that emphasised some projects that went toward the completion of the building and asking people to support them.

As time passed, the parish grew and it became obvious that we needed to employ an extra member of staff. This was a new position for which we had absolutely no money. So we advertised and mid-year appointed the next staff member, who was due to start at the end of the calendar year. My appeal to the congregation was to point out the obvious ministry need and to say something like, 'This year's budget is \$3,700 per week. On January 1 next year, the budget will increase to \$4,800 per week. We have a big debt and no strategic reserves. Please help or we will go broke.' This was not very visionary or theological, but the Figtree congregation was wonderful and we limped through.

On one occasion when I was worrying about the finances, my parish treasurer advised, 'Rod, you preach the gospel and the money will take care of itself.' There is a very deep truth here. But I was still concerned that I really didn't know how to bring financial needs before the congregation or to teach about generosity. Further, the local area was developing and the church numbers were increasing. New staff members were being added and new ministries started, all of which required resourcing. I decided to form a stewardship team to whom I would delegate the responsibility of raising money, allowing me to put my time into preaching and overseeing



the ministry. Unfortunately, this did not work. The team, who were very fine and able people, had no expertise in raising money or encouraging generosity. It was not their fault. As I didn't know anything about it either, I couldn't guide them.

I read many books and discovered all sorts of helpful general principles, but answers to the core questions remained very vague. What do you teach about money? How do you ask for financial support without offending people? How do you promote generosity? How do you overcome the stingy streak in your own nature? Finally I stumbled across some practical stewardship material.¹ While culturally it was a long way from Figtree's context, I believed the basic principles were sound and grounded in the scriptures. The material certainly challenged me to be more prayerful and more generous myself. Over my last ten years at Figtree and since, I tried to apply those principles, supplementing them from my own experience and with insights from other church leaders and authors. That does not mean I endorse every theological position or practice of those writers but merely that where I found ideas of value, I was happy to learn from them.

It is now my belief that rather than being an uncertain, fretful, anxious endeavour, raising money for God's work should be a positive, exciting growth in faith. So if you are a minister who knows money for ministry must come in and somehow you have to do something about it, or if you are an elder who wants your church to blossom or a regular member who loves your church and wants it to flourish, then this material is for you.

Getting the most out of this book

This book is written to be useful so that churches will grow strong and healthy. It is also to help ministers and church leaders know practical steps to raise money for ministry and create a unified, joyful congregation in the process. For this reason I describe four foundational principles in Chapter 1. The rest of the book then expands on those principles. While it is intended to be extremely practical, good practice in ministry must also be based on a solid foundation.

Principle 1 explains the crucial role of the minister (chapter 2). Principle 2 is devoted to vision because money follows vision (chapter 3). Principle 3 lays the theological foundation for generosity and raising money. I have tried to integrate a theology of money under the practical heading of generosity (chapters 4–6). The theology is set out in this way so it can be preached and communicated easily. Principle 4 is the most practical



section, explaining how to ask a congregation to support the ministry financially (chapters 7–16).

I have emphasised the role of the minister and often use the term ‘senior minister’ to mean the leader of a ministry team in a large church. This reflects my own experience. I must stress that nothing I write here is confined to large churches. The process can be fruitful in large churches, small churches, city churches, country churches, easy areas and difficult areas. This is because it is based on principles that are not confined to any particular church size or location. I include a small church case study in chapter 11.

It is also written from the perspective of a minister as the leader. This has directed the way the material is structured. It is based on the conviction that raising money is a subset of leadership and so I have commenced with the role of the minister as a leader. This is followed by the chapter on vision because before the minister asks for money, there must be a very clear vision: a reason for people to give. Only then do I discuss the topic of generosity and finally an appropriate way to ask.

The book is also written for other leaders and members. I was always delighted when staff and others introduced me to new ideas and then helped put them into practice. At the end of each chapter are a summary, a set of discussion questions and a statement of the chapter’s key idea. These are particularly important to the success of any attempt to raise church income. This is because the book will be of most value if it is read and studied collectively by the minister and other church leaders. It would be ideal for a chapter to be discussed at each elders’ meeting or in other groups where leaders meet. Many exciting ideas in churches fail because a minister or elder goes to a conference, reads a book, gets excited and then tries unsuccessfully to persuade colleagues who were not part of the original experience. It is far better to learn together in an environment where people are able to wrestle with ideas and have misunderstandings explained to their satisfaction. While this is true in any new ministry endeavour, it is particularly applicable in the area of raising money because of its sensitive nature.

Acknowledgments

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I also thank especially my wife Helen who has given enormous support as well as invaluable insight into the not-for-profit sector, and scrutinised the document with meticulous thoroughness.

Naturally any mistakes that remain are solely my own.

*Rod Irvine
Brisbane, Queensland
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Endnotes

- 1 John C Maxwell, *Proven Principles of Successful Stewardship*, Audio Tapes, Injoy, 1994.

1 Four foundational principles

If it is done in the right way, raising money for ministry can be a very positive and enriching experience for both the minister and the congregation. Even if the church has income from property or investments or a super-generous benefactor, I still advise teaching and preaching about the raising of money in a godly way. In fact, it may even be more necessary, for if a church simply relies on independent income streams, this could stunt the spiritual growth of its members. The process described in this book rests on four basic principles.

First, the senior minister must spearhead the raising of resources.

Ministers often shrink from this because they are often not trained for it, nor do they go into ministry with any desire to be a 'money person'. I certainly didn't. I have known that feeling of fear and inadequacy that many experience when approaching this topic. However, as the church leader and the person who is doing most of the preaching, the senior minister is the logical and indispensable driver of this vital component of parish



life. I would strongly contend that the raising of money is a subset of the leadership responsibilities of the minister, and the fruit of this ministry can often be traced to how much prayer, wisdom, planning and courage have been demonstrated.

Second, the church must have a credible, shared vision for its future.

The simple fact is that money follows vision. The churches that receive the most donations are not the neediest. There are many struggling congregations that could use extra money. Often they are doing good ministry. But unless the parishioners believe the church is going somewhere and making a difference in people's lives and in the community, appeals for resources fall on deaf ears. Furthermore, it must be a shared vision, one that the congregation feels genuinely part of, rather than an edict imposed from the top. I remember one minister of a church that was struggling to meet its weekly financial obligations saying that he was bringing in a professional stewardship organisation. My recollection is that it had some limited initial success, but this was not sustained because of the lack of a credible vision.

Third, raising resources is not fundraising but faith-raising.

If vision is the essential component in the collective life of God's people, the community of the church, then discipleship is the equally important component in the life of the individual. Successful campaigns to raise money for ministry do not merely raise dollars; they grow Christians who love Christ more and wish to be useful and fruitful in his service. Any process that does not build disciples will have no lasting fruit. It will probably leave the congregation with a very bad taste in its mouth that will dry up any urge to give in the future. There are many aspects to discipleship, but the particular area where people often grow the most is in joyful generosity. Joyful generosity is not an oxymoron, because when people are truly committed to Christ, they will love to give to worthy causes that advance his kingdom.

The flip side of what I am saying is that this book is not about fundraising. I will not be talking about fetes, cake stalls, car washes, art shows or fundraising barbeques. Those types of events are common at the local sporting club to raise funds. The problem is that even if they are wildly successful, they don't raise faith. They don't challenge people to greater commitment or deeper discipleship. They don't expose the shallowness of consumer society. They don't inspire people to live for a cause that is greater than themselves. Does the humble cake stall have any place at



all? I would not advocate starting such a venture if one doesn't exist. But if a fete or some such activity happens already, it probably serves a fellowship, community-building function, and its proceeds could be used for extra funds—*extra* funds—for mission. A church I know well has a mission barbeque after church each month. At the end of the service the smell of hamburger wafts through the air. People gather and stay and talk, enjoying each other's company. Particular missionaries are promoted and the proceeds are given to their support.

This is, however, the icing on a very impressive cake. This same church has an incredibly exciting mission focus and each year has a dedicated mission month where they cast vision, build disciples and conduct a mission-appeal where several hundred thousand dollars are raised. The barbeques certainly happen, but they are not the primary way money is raised for mission support. It should also be apparent that the process described in this book is directed only towards members and attendees of the local church. Giving to God's work is part of the responsibility of a Christian disciple. The gospel should be proclaimed free of charge to inquirers or others outside the church who need to hear its life-changing message.

Fourth, there must be a gracious way to ask people to give.

The minister must know how to ask the congregation to give money. For many this is the scary issue. Generally ministers are uncomfortable with asking. They have never been taught how to ask and are afraid that people will be offended and leave the church.

Smith, Emerson and Snell, in their excellent book *Passing the Plate*, note that there is an unstated agreement between many ministers and their congregations: the minister will not speak very much about money and the congregation will give just enough to keep the church running.¹ At Figtree, we held an annual Commitment Day when people were asked to sign a response card indicating how much they would contribute to the ministry of the parish for the coming year. This was wonderfully well supported and gave the opportunity to cast vision, build disciples and raise the necessary resources to fund future ministry.