



St. Paul' about Stewardship

Paul's Fundraising Strategy

Paul's fundraising appeal is certainly well placed in the letter. He has just expressed his complete confidence in the church (7:16). Family feeling is high: the Corinthians have such a place in his heart that come what may, he will face it with them (7:3).

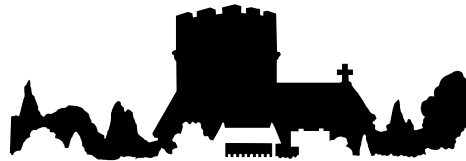
Titus's affection for them and their obedient response to his demands have just been pointed out (7:13-15).

This last fact, in particular, nicely prepares the way for Paul's announcement of his plan to send Titus back to Corinth to help bring the collection effort to a close (8:6).

To speak of "Paul's fundraising appeal," though, is to employ a kind of misnomer, for no direct appeal for funds occurs in these chapters. In fact, Paul does not even once use the term "money." His approach is much more subtle. His overall strategy is to provide the Corinthians with a number of powerful incentives for completing their offering.

These incentives are for the most part tied to what he knows about the Corinthians rather than to any generic fundraising tactics.

So what does Paul know about them? He knows that they are a fiercely independent and competitively minded congregation.



This is why he cites the exemplary generosity of another church (8:1-5), compares the Corinthians' sincerity to that of others (v. 8) and puts before them the model of Christ himself (v. 9).

He also realizes that they have a strong drive to excel at what they do and consequently pushes them to excel in the area of giving (v. 7).

He is further aware of their fear of losing face before others. So he reminds them of the reputation that he has noised abroad about them (9:1-2), appeals to their embarrassment should visitors come and find them unprepared (9:4) and announces the forthcoming visit of one or more colleagues to make sure this does not happen (8:6; 9:3, 5).

Paul's approach is also realistic. He is keenly aware of the practical aspects of a collection effort such as this.

This is evident in his concern to provide guarantees that the delivery of the funds will be handled in a responsible manner (8:16-24), to present the church with some practical guidelines for giving (8:11-15; 9:6-7) and to point out the benefits they will reap (9:8-15).

In many ways the cumulative picture is not a particularly comfortable one. Is it legitimate to use comparative strategies in fundraising?

Is it wise to appeal to a church's ego to motivate giving? For all of Paul's talk in 6:14--7:1 of the need of Christians to sever their ties with secular society, is he not capitulating at this point to the way the world works?

Our Western capitalistic society, in particular, is so competition-oriented--be it in business, education or sports--that it may not be spiritually healthy for the church to engage in such "**let's get ahead of the next guy**" tactics--or is it?

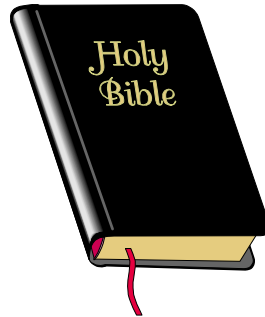
Several observations can be made.

First, the strategy Paul employs is intended to motivate the Corinthians not to new giving but to follow through on a commitment already made.

The distinction is important. Paul is not soliciting a pledge. In fact, it was the Corinthians who had

expressed interest in the collection in the first place (1 Cor 16:1-2).

Second, Paul aims to motivate by comparing attitudes, not dollar amounts. It is the Macedonians'



joyful, willing and earnest attitude that is set before the Corinthians, not the size of their contribution.

Third, the collection will not benefit Paul personally. He is not involved because it will look good on his résumé, enhance his reputation among the Gentile congregations or improve his relationship with the Jerusalem church.

Indeed, at the time he gave the Corinthians an initial set of instructions, he was not even sure that it would be appropriate for him to travel to Jerusalem with the funds (1 Cor 16:4).

Fourth, the cause is an eminently worthy one. These are Christians of his own race who are in need of the basic necessities of life--food, shelter, clothing.

Moreover, they are churches that Paul had started out persecuting. And even though he had done it out of zeal for God's honor, he never stopped thinking of himself as the worst of sinners because of it (1 Tim 1:15).

A collection of this sort was a small step in rectifying the wrong that had been committed.

Finally, Paul is quick to point out that generous giving is an act of divine grace (8:1). It is only as God blesses and enables that we are able to give in the first place.

(Compiled by Fr. Srboljub)