



Excellence in Giving Campaigns for 25 Years

HERB MILLER
WITH EUGENE GRIMM

CONSECRATION SUNDAY

Stewardship
Program Guide
with Download Library

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Why Consecration Sunday?

“Staying out of the red is a constant struggle in our church,” said one of the pastors in a coffee-break conversation at a denominational cluster meeting. “So many board meetings turn negative when our resident financial pessimist quotes the bank balance and says, ‘Can we really afford that?’”

“Balancing our budget has never been easier,” said the pastor of a nearby church of about the same size. “We often discuss the right way to spend the money, but getting it is not the problem.”

This conversation reflects two opposite financial conditions reported by thousands of congregations. What causes the sharp contrast? The cash-flow circumstances of “have” and “have-not” churches *correlate with the procedures by which they ask parishioners for contributions.*

Research has definitively answered the question, “What causes high per capita giving to congregations?” Churches across the United States ask people to contribute money in three different ways:

1. One kind of church takes *offerings*: They have no annual financial stewardship campaign. People in those congregations give an average of 1.5 percent of their income to support their church.
2. Researchers call the second kind of congregation a *pledging* church: The leaders build a proposed budget each year, then ask people to write on a pledge card the dollars per week or per month they plan to give and to turn in the card during an annual stewardship campaign. People in pledging congregations give an average of 2.9 percent of their income to their church. *In other words, people who write their financial commitments on paper give, on average, twice as much as people who do not write their intentions on paper.*

3. Researchers call the third kind of congregation a *percentage-giving* church. Instead of building a proposed budget, those churches conduct an annual stewardship campaign that asks people, “What percentage of your income do you feel God is calling you to give?” Parishioners then translate their answers into dollar amounts, write the figure on a card, and turn it in. The church creates the budget by totaling the cards. People in percentage-giving congregations contribute an average of 4.6 percent of their income to their church. *In other words, national research indicates that people whose churches repeatedly raise the question, “What percentage of your income is God calling you to give?” contribute three times more dollars per year than people whose churches only take offerings* (Dean R. Hoge, Charles Zech, Patrick McNamara, and Michael J. Donahue, *Money Matters* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996]).

This research also answers the question, “Why does the Consecration Sunday Stewardship Program Guide work so well?” Rather than requesting financial contributions to “pay the bills” or “support the budget,” *Consecration Sunday* asks people to grow spiritually by giving a percentage of their income to the Lord’s work through their congregations.

Perdue Research Group interviewed people in 150 congregations that have used *Consecration Sunday*. In 31 of those 150 churches, financial giving increased 25 percent or more the first year they used it. Another 37 of the 150 churches reported a 20 percent increase. Another 36 of the 150 churches experienced a 15 percent increase, and another 30 churches experienced a 10 percent increase. Only 16 of the 150 churches reported a 5 percent increase in giving. Of the 150 churches interviewed, 131 had used *Consecration Sunday* three or four years.

In one congregation, financial giving increased 25 percent the first year, 18 percent the second year, and 30 percent the third

year. The congregation's financial secretary said, "Three reasons produced these annual increases. First, virtually no households lower their giving during the annual campaign. Second, between 66 percent and 88 percent of the households make some degree of annual increase. Third, four to six new households decided to tithe each year we used *Consecration Sunday*. These households, some of which grew from giving 4 percent of their income to giving 10 percent of their income, were a major part of our enormous annual increases."

This research also answers the question, "Why does spiritually focused stewardship education work better than fund-raising methods?" Over the past several decades, leaders in many churches have substituted secular fund-raising methods for Christian stewardship procedures. This happens because many board members of philanthropic community organizations also serve on their congregations' finance committees. Thus, when committee members decide how to ask their church's members to support its ministries, they often opt for the fund-raising procedures they have seen work in community organizations.

Fund-raising for nonprofit organizations in the community is as different from Christian stewardship as a bicycle is from an eighteen-wheeler. Both are valid forms of transportation, but they are not interchangeable. They accomplish two different goals. The goal of secular fund-raising is dollars for a worthy cause. The goal of Christian stewardship is the faithful management of all that God gives so that God can use our gifts to transform us spiritually and to extend Christ's transforming love to others. The apostle Paul spelled out those two goals in his lengthy definition of stewardship in 2 Corinthians 9:11-13.

Jesus summed up the spiritual connection between money and God this way: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34). Financial stewardship is treasure management that helps us to escape the trap of selfishness by keeping ourselves spiritually focused on God.

Each of us makes one of two choices in life. We either become emotionally attached to our money, or we become emotionally attached to the God who gives us our money. Although we often hope to do both, in our hearts we know that cannot happen. Financial stewardship helps us to overcome the temptation to break the first commandment and put the false idol of money first, ahead of the God who revealed his love for us through Jesus Christ.

Yes, congregations that teach spiritually focused financial stewardship also occasionally use fund-raising methods. *Examples:* When the youth leaders collect money for a summer mission trip, when the women's organization holds a bake sale to support a worthy community cause, and when the church conducts a three-million-dollar capital campaign to build a family life center. All of these are fund-raising efforts whose objective is a specific amount of dollars to accomplish a specific ministry. However, those fund-raising endeavors are a tiny fraction of the annual giving in congregations that use spiritually focused stewardship education.

This research also answers the question, “Why are annual stewardship campaigns essential?” People do not drift into good giving habits. They decide into them. The reason they decide is because someone asks them to decide. An effective annual stewardship campaign is the best way to ask. In most congregations the illusion that high per capita giving can happen without some kind of annual campaign is just that: an illusion. Airplanes can fly all year, but they must land occasionally to take on fuel. Annual stewardship campaigns refuel church members' education regarding the spiritual connection between money and God.

Unfortunately, only four of ten Protestant congregations conduct any sort of annual stewardship campaign. This keeps many churches in the poverty-syndrome category (George Barna, *How to Increase Giving in Your Church* [Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1997], pp. 99-100).



The Big-Picture Overview of *Consecration Sunday*

Looking at the broad outline of *Consecration Sunday*, we see seven major topographical features, supported by a Download Library (see the “Instructions for Accessing the Download Library” on page 4) that contains user-friendly resources to help you implement the program (for the how-to-do-it details, see subsequent sections of this book):

1. ***Consecration Sunday* assumes that laypeople do not like to visit other laypeople in their homes and ask them to fill out a pledge card.** Many laypeople refuse to do this. Even if they do it, many of them do it poorly. Therefore, *Consecration Sunday* asks attendees and members to complete an *Estimate of Giving Card* during morning worship on Consecration Sunday. At no point in the program do laypersons ask each other for money or pledges.
2. ***Consecration Sunday* teaches stewardship on the basis of the need of the giver to give for his or her own spiritual benefit rather than on the basis of the need of the church to receive to balance its budget.**
3. ***Consecration Sunday* focuses on the question, “What is God calling me to do?” rather than on the question, “What does the church need in order to pay its bills?”** Thus the annual stewardship emphasis becomes a spiritual-growth experience, not a fund-raising effort.
4. ***Consecration Sunday* focuses on tithing and percentage giving, not as a legalism, but as an appropriate faith commitment for which God’s grace empowers us.** This does not mean that everyone in a congregation decides to tithe the first year of *Consecration Sunday*. But just because not everyone in a church is ready to give 10 percent of his or her income to the Lord’s work, that does not mean we should avoid holding up tithing as a spiritual ideal.

5. **By asking people to complete *Estimate of Giving Cards* during a worship service, *Consecration Sunday* models the idea that stewardship is part of our worship of God, rather than a fund-raising procedure.**
6. ***Consecration Sunday* conducts the campaign before building the annual operating budget.** Setting the budget first, then raising the money, holds giving down. Church members, remembering the “fair share” motto of many secular organizations, make minor increases in their giving when they see that the new budget is only 4 percent higher than last year. Building the budget after the campaign takes the lid off potential increases by eliminating the fair-share, dues-paying syndrome and by eliminating the inevitable negative reaction everyone has to one or two items in the printed budget proposal.
7. ***Consecration Sunday* assumes that people can enjoy rather than feel negative about stewardship programs.**

Let’s do a quick overview of how the *Consecration Sunday Stewardship Program* unfolds. This outline does not include the detailed how-to-do-it elements—found in subsequent sections of this book—but gives you a picture of how it works.

Step #1: *Your congregation selects as guest leader a pastor or layperson you are confident will follow the timeline instructions; can speak in an effective, interesting manner; and is available on the appropriate dates.* Guest leaders who meet those three criteria achieve the same results the first time they lead a *Consecration Sunday* as the tenth time they serve as a guest leader. *Consecration Sunday*’s results come from the process, not from the guest leader’s personality. You might select as guest leader a judicatory staff person, a retired pastor who lives in your area, a pastor in a nearby community, or a capable layperson from another congregation. Sometimes, two pastors lead *Consecration Sunday* in each other’s congregations (on consecutive Sundays, *not* on the same Sunday).

A guest leader is a necessity for several reasons. (a) People and pastor work harder. (b) The guest leader takes a fresh approach,

which results in parishioners giving more attention and serious consideration to the subject. (c) Consecration Sunday team members are far less likely to take shortcuts. (d) Consecration Sunday teams make fewer mistakes since the pastor can suggest that “we telephone and check with the guest leader about that.” (e) Since the presence of a guest leader makes a 10 to 30 percent difference in total financial results, he or she is well worth the small honorarium and travel expense.

Step #2: *The guest leader makes three trips to the church:* (a) About six to eight weeks prior to Consecration Sunday, the guest leader conducts a one-hour orientation session with the Consecration Sunday team that your church’s governing board appoints to lead *Consecration Sunday*. Using detailed instructions in *Consecration Sunday* and the included “Guest Leader Guide” (see pages 97-108), he or she helps the Consecration Sunday team personalize the program for their congregation. (b) The guest leader speaks at the governing-board dinner on Sunday or Monday evening prior to Consecration Sunday. (c) The guest leader preaches during morning worship on Consecration Sunday.

Step #3: *Several kinds of publicity unfold during the four weeks before Consecration Sunday*, using several model letters and announcements.

Step #4: *On Sunday, two weeks before Consecration Sunday*, a Consecration Sunday team member requests Celebration Luncheon reservations from each person present. The majority of members make their reservations at that time. Large churches, in which this Celebration Luncheon is impractical, select from among the several other effective options a strategy that accomplishes the objectives of the Celebration Luncheon.

Step #5: *On Sunday morning, one week before Consecration Sunday*, another layperson repeats the request for Celebration Luncheon reservations during worship and the adult church school classes. Nobody asks anyone for money. Everything focuses on getting people to attend the worship service and Celebration Luncheon on Consecration Sunday.

Step #6: *On Sunday evening, one week before Consecration Sunday* (Monday evening in some communities), the guest leader speaks at a dinner for governing board members, committee chairpersons, ministry team chairpersons, church staff, Consecration Sunday team members, and the spouses of all these groups. No financial commitments are taken at this dinner; the presentation is inspirational and motivational stewardship education.

However, governing board members are requested to help contact all members and friends of the church who have not yet made their reservation for the Celebration Luncheon next Sunday. These contacts are made on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Consecration Sunday. (This final week prior to Consecration Sunday is the only point at which large numbers of laypersons put time and energy into the program.)

Due to this systematic process, the attendance on Consecration Sunday is often 20 to 60 percent higher than usual. The whole church family shows up—the people who come every week, the people who come twice a month, the people who come once a month, and the people who come a couple of times a year.

Step #7: *On Consecration Sunday*, the guest leader preaches at morning worship and conducts a seven-minute commitment session at the end of the service, inviting people to fill out an *Estimate of Giving Card*.

When the guest leader invites members and friends to fill out their *Estimate of Giving Cards*, it is important to invite them to begin their new commitment period the week following Consecration Sunday or as soon thereafter as possible. If people put off beginning their new commitment until January (or the beginning of a fiscal year) a significant percentage of the increase will be lost.

Step #8: *The Celebration Luncheon on Consecration Sunday*, immediately following morning worship, is not a potluck. It is a catered meal that was not prepared by the people of the church. Some large churches with two, three, or four morning worship services successfully replace the Celebration Luncheon with a brunch after each service and a dessert fellowship for their

Saturday evening service. This accomplishes a key element of Consecration Sunday—namely, taking advance reservations. This ensures both a large attendance and large numbers of people focusing their attention on the question, “What percentage of my income is God calling me to give?”

Step #9: *The Celebration Luncheon involves no program except the announcement of the campaign results at the end of the meal.* The program preceded the luncheon; it was the worship service and the commitment session during worship. In most churches larger than 300 in average worship attendance, computing the results takes so much time that they usually announce the results in the newsletter and the Sunday morning worship bulletin the following week.

Step #10: *On Monday after Consecration Sunday,* the church office mails a letter that includes a stamped, self-addressed envelope and an *Estimate of Giving Card* to each household not present for Consecration Sunday.

Some people ask, “What is the best time of year to hold Consecration Sunday?” Many churches schedule Consecration Sunday in the fall between Labor Day and Thanksgiving. This fits perfectly if the congregation budgets on a calendar-year basis. It allows the budget to be created after completing the campaign so it can be put in force January 1.

Most congregations that budget on a July 1 fiscal-year basis schedule Consecration Sunday in the spring prior to Mother’s Day. This gives them time to construct the budget and put it in force July 1.

People who have never experienced *Consecration Sunday’s* dramatic results often say it is hard for them to get used to this approach. It is so different from the way they have thought about stewardship in the past.

That is true. *Consecration Sunday* is different. That makes it a bit frightening for people who have never used it before. However, on the average, *Consecration Sunday* increases a church’s financial contributions 15 to 30 percent per year. You will have no trouble whatever getting used to that.



Equipment for the Trip: *Consecration Sunday*

To effectively execute the Consecration Sunday stewardship program, obtain the following from Cokesbury by calling 800-672-1789 or by visiting www.cokesbury.com:

- three copies of the *Consecration Sunday Stewardship Program Guide with Download Library* (one for the guest leader, one for the pastor, and one for the Consecration Sunday chairperson);
- seven *Consecration Sunday Team Member Manuals*; and
- sufficient *Estimate of Giving Cards* for your size church. Have these shipped to the guest leader and ask him or her to bring the cards on Consecration Sunday. This procedure prevents accidental distribution of the cards. Under no circumstances should you mail or distribute the *Estimate of Giving Cards* in advance of Consecration Sunday or prior to the end of the worship service that day.

To gain a clear understanding of the program, read the full *Consecration Sunday Stewardship Program Guide*. That prepares you to begin the journey toward an effective Consecration Sunday experience that helps attendees grow spiritually and adequately finances your congregation's mission and ministries.