

New Consecration Sunday Campaign

by David Hughes, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Winston-Salem

“Stewardship campaign.”

Pastors rarely admit it, but these two words usually give them a bad case of heartburn. That’s because we have sour memories of stewardship campaigns that involved intense effort, only to produce less-than-spectacular returns. Pastors know church members greet sermons about giving and money with the same kind of enthusiasm as a trip to the dentist. Adding insult to injury, pastors often feel self-serving as they beg and plead with members to pledge and give more to the budget so - in effect - their salaries can be paid. Sometimes, stewardship campaigns feel like “sanctified begging.”

For these reasons and more, I was relieved several years ago when leaders at FBC decided to give our annual stewardship campaign a rest. Now I didn’t have to crank out those uncomfortable sermons about sacrificial giving. And our office staff didn’t have to produce multiple large-scale mailings. The Finance Committee could even point to savings in postage and other campaign expenses.

At first we seemed to be doing okay without our campaign. But gradually, our offerings began to sag. And enthusiasm about giving began to wane.

Then, in 2005, with some fear and trembling, our church set a goal to raise \$2.8 million for a capital funds campaign. For the first time in our congregation’s history, we hired an outside consultant to help us with our campaign. The campaign was very intense, and we were stunned when we raised our monetary goal - plus some!

This positive experience with a campaign caused our leadership - myself included - to rethink stewardship campaigns. We knew we needed to have some concerted effort but weren’t terribly interested in returning to our old tried and true campaign format. Our capital funds campaign consultant suggested we try a new approach known

as “New Consecration Sunday.” After reviewing this plan, we decided to give it a go.

New Consecration Sunday (NCS) is a lay-lead stewardship emphasis that lasts three weeks, culminating in a “New Consecration Sunday.” A NCS team begins meeting several months in advance, and lays the groundwork for the effort weeks in advance according to a manual that spells out each step in detail. I liked this approach because I felt like one leader among many rather than the point man that carried most of the weight. As well, NCS calls for a guest leader who helps with guiding the process and preaching the final sermon. Most importantly, NCS focuses not on raising a budget but on challenging people to grow spiritually by growing in their giving.

Although the NCS campaign can be done anytime, we opted for January of this year rather than the traditional fall schedule. January is a less busy time than the fall, and a natural time to consider new commitments. Moreover, having the campaign in January rather than October reinforced the idea that this effort was about growing in giving rather than raising a budget.

This campaign felt different to me from day one. It avoids legalism, duty, and guilt as motives for giving. It involves lots of work, but the workload is so evenly spread that it never feels cumbersome. It depends on personal testimonies rather than gimmicks. Not surprisingly, it challenges people to tithe. But it also encourages folks who give little or nothing to grow in small steps, while encouraging people with considerable resources to go well beyond tithing. The campaign created an immediate buzz in our church. People actually seemed to enjoy the process. And guest leader, Larry Hovis of CBFNC, did an outstanding job in shepherding us through the campaign, along with lay

leaders in our church.

In the 17 years I’ve been at FBC Winston-Salem, I’ve never seen a campaign produce such results. On the climactic New Consecration Sunday, our Estimate of Giving Cards did not amount to a fully pledged budget. But they did give our Finance Committee confidence to move forward without budget adjustments. More importantly, we rejoiced because two-thirds of those submitting cards indicated increases in giving. In some cases, people indicated they were doubling or even tripling their giving levels in the new year. Consequently our 2008 giving is up significantly over 2007, even though we are still receiving offerings toward our 2005 capital funds campaign.

I now have a new feeling about stewardship campaigns—I actually look forward to next year’s effort! If you find yourself dreading your next campaign and looking for something different, check out “New Consecration Sunday” (visit www.cbfnc.org for more details). You’ll be glad you did!

CBFNC Councils Begin New Year of Work

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The Councils meet together on the same day four times per year. A portion of these “All Councils” gatherings are spent meeting together and a portion are spent meeting separately. They hold additional individual council meetings as needed, including monthly conference calls for some of the councils. All Councils meetings for 2008-2009 will be held on May 1-2 (orientation retreat); August 28; October 16; and January 15, 2009.

Councils often form teams or task forces that include additional persons and focus on a particular ministry, mission or task. If you would be interested in serving on a team or task force in a particular ministry area, contact one of the coordinators.