



Resource Centre

From our Churches

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Date: December 2007

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Theology and Fundraising: How does current Canadian Mennonite Praxis compare to Paul's Collection for Jerusalem?

Lori Guenther Reesor, December 2007

Why this question? I have been a fundraiser and a pastor. My experiences have convinced me that thinking theologically about fundraising is important for the future of Mennonite institutions. Theological studies are often supported by fundraising and I believe theology can and should contribute to the study of fundraising.

How to answer it? I began with donor interviews because donors are the living texts of Mennonite praxis. I did not want to assume that I knew why donors give or how they give. Moreover, the research needed a more objective knowledge base than my own understandings of Mennonite giving which are based on proprietary and confidential information from my work as a fundraiser. I conducted two focus groups in Canada in January 2007 with 12 donors. The remaining donors contacted me mainly through referrals from Mennonite Foundation Canada. I asked all 25 donors the same questions about their favourite charities, how they decide which charities to support and how giving connects to their faith. The results raise a number of issues about church structures, accountability, individual versus communal giving and motivations for giving. I also talked to four Mennonite fundraisers who confirmed many of the trends from the donor interviews and gave a fundraiser's perspective on Mennonite giving.

I compared the living donor texts with the biblical texts, which are normative for the Mennonite church. Paul's collection for Jerusalem provides the best documented example of fundraising within the primitive church. The key texts are Romans 15:25-32, 1 Corinthians

16:1-4, and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Paul collects funds for the poor in Jerusalem from among his Gentile churches. A large delegation of representatives from the contributing churches delivers the money to Jerusalem, a model borrowed from the Jewish temple tax procedures. I focused the exegesis on issues raised by donors and fundraisers which largely concern how and why donors give. The exegesis examined accountability, ecclesial structures and motivations for giving, plus a particular focus on the delegation which is the backbone of the project. Finally, I compared the results from the donor texts with the Pauline texts. These are summarized in the following chart.

Comparing Mennonite theology and praxis with Pauline theology and praxis

	Mennonite theology and praxis	Paul's collection for Jerusalem
Motives for Giving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty/tithing, obligation, empathy • Involvement, relationship, community • In response to need • Example of Christ • Joyful celebration of God's abundance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voluntary expression of ecumenical unity • Involvement, relationship • In response to grace • Example of Christ • Joyful celebration of God's abundance
Familiarity as Motive for Giving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • familiarity (value alignment and TV) lead to wide dispersal of Mennonite giving to many causes and contribute to lack of common causes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give even to those believers with whom you disagree to build <i>koinonia</i>
Fiscal Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong concern for fiscal and administrative accountability • Paradox of fiscal accountability – transparency costs money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong concern for fiscal and administrative accountability • Regular giving expected • Delegation of representatives from contributing churches
Directional Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donors value influence and respect accountability of governance structures • Paradox of directional accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How Jerusalem will spend funds not stressed • Anticipated outcomes of praise and thanksgiving to God
Ecclesial structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing emphasis on individual discernment as opposed to communal discernment – “low cost” community • “Costly community” – donors seeking mutual accountability • Need for improved communication between Mennonite institutions and constituency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide participation through large delegate model • Emphasis on inclusiveness, unity and autonomy • Proportional giving means everyone can contribute • Collection is part of the good news, preacher travels with delegation
Theology of Fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Us/them” paradigm for donors and recipients contrasts with integrative model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrative model for donors and recipients – all have received God's grace
Use of Professional Fundraisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraisers appeal to “baser motives,” neglect spiritual component 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul is not shy about asking for money or reminding the Corinthians of their previous pledges
Noteworthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple living to facilitate giving • Willingness to break taboos about discussing money 	

