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## The Truth about Ministry Fundraising

WRITER'S OPINION

By Phil Cooke  
Special to ASSIST News Service

**SANTA MONICA, CA (ANS)** -- For churches and ministries across the country, fundraising has become a vital tool that's used to raise the necessary money to make ministry happen. It's a noble effort, because people need to understand that without financial support, significant outreach is nearly impossible. However, in many cases, the tail has started to wag the dog, and some ministries focus on raising money more than their actual mission.

The science of fundraising has become a massive business. It has spawned financial consultants, direct response companies, fulfillment businesses, telemarketing, and more. Helping ministries raise money has become an industry in itself.

The fact is, the "personal" ministry letter you receive each month was probably not written by the ministry leader at all, but by a direct mail strategist, and designed by a graphic designer for maximum response. Today, color scheme, spacing, layout, and structure are some of the most important features of monthly letters – and the most effective fundraisers can even compare responses based on different colors of the envelope. They mail the letters on just the right day each month so it arrives when people get their paycheck – either from the mail or direct deposit. Statistics prove that if it's only a few days late, the response will drop considerably. I've seen people fired from ministries because they mailed the monthly letter 48-72 hours behind schedule – it's considered that important.

In fact, I spoke to one "Christian" fundraiser who said that the single most important thing is getting a person to open the envelope - and he would be willing to do anything to make that happen.

Even lie about what's inside.

It's important to note that I'm not against fundraising with integrity. There are some marvelous ministries out there doing great work because of effective relationships with their supporters and partners. But I do think you need to know how the business works – because believe me – it's a business, and they're trying to work you.

Here are some suggestions to consider as you pick up the next fundraising letter from your mailbox:

- 1) They've timed the letter to arrive when you have the most money in the bank. Giving will be easier for you, but that shouldn't control your decision.
- 2) The cute little underlines, exclamation points, and arrows that look like the writer inserted with a pen after it was written - weren't marked by a person, but a computer. Each one was strategically planned for placement and effect.

- 3) The amount of the “suggested gift” on the reply was calculated by a computer based on your past giving history, and often with the goal to nudge you to give a little more.
- 4) Even the color of the paper was researched based on past responses to that particular shade.
- 5) The trinkets (Jesus junk?) the ministry sends you actually gets results! You’re more likely to give because they ministry sends you something in return.

Sadly, we wouldn’t even need fundraising if Christians gave as the Bible teaches. So am I suggesting that we stop fundraising? Absolutely not. As I said before, great ministries are impacting the world because good people give. Plus, there are many gifted fundraising experts who are ethical and operate with utmost integrity. Frankly, I wish people gave more to deserving churches and ministries.

But I am suggesting we become informed givers. Don’t be a ministry zombie and give on impulse – for any reason. Give because you’ve researched a ministry, believe in what it’s doing in the world, have confirmed its integrity and track record, and then prayed about the gift.

Giving for any other reason, is usually a waste of money.

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