



# Preaching The value of Testimony

## Introduction

A national welfare charity had an annual income of £3 million from legacies alone but the general trend was downward. A new legacy strategy was planned that would motivate trustees, fundraisers and volunteers. Prior to the presentation of the new strategy to the Board of Trustees one trustee was identified as a potential legator, who agreed to leave a £10,000 legacy to the Charity. At the trustees meeting the trustee supported the presentation and announced his own personal legacy gift. Within six months other pledges from trustees were received and the strategy was successfully rolled out. (Source *Legacy Fundraising ed Sebastian Wilberforce 2001*)

## The power of personal advocacy

This account of a successful legacy initiative illustrates the power of personal advocacy, the power of story telling, of leadership and personal example. These are crucial elements in successful fundraising and in biblical stewardship. Somehow they put a human face to the financial need; a personal story gives permission to other people to act decisively, to follow an example. St Paul did not hesitate to tell the reluctant givers of Corinth about the stirring example of the church in Macedonia as a means of motivating their own giving (2 Cor 8:1-5).

In the local parish setting there is a powerful place for simple lay testimony, a sharing of a personal engagement with stewardship issues. In one parish an older lady, a rather reluctant member of the finance committee, was persuaded to talk for two minutes to the church during a budget presentation. She spoke simply and personally about how membership of the committee had opened her eyes to the realities of church finances. This had

motivated her to review her own giving and she expressed the hope that the presentation would do the same for the congregation. The impact was as powerful as any sermon and was complementary to the literature and preaching that made up the budget presentation. Income increased the following year by over 25%. In today's church the value of lay advocacy or testimony from within the congregation cannot be underestimated. Parishes should consider whether such lay testimony has a complementary role alongside the preaching in Giving in Grace. Careful thought should be given to how this might best support the proclamation of the word.

## Accountability and advocacy

In 2 Corinthians 9 we read that Paul sent three brothers to Corinth in advance of his own arrival. The purpose: "to arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as extortion" (2 Cor 9:5).

Certainly the three brothers were there to give the local churches confidence that the money was being handled correctly. There was an issue of accountability that needed to be addressed by Paul (2 Cor 8:19-20). But the qualifications of the three suggest a much wider task. They had the confidence of both the receiving churches and also of Paul. The way he talks about them as partners, co-workers, messengers of the churches even "the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 9:4) suggests a key role for story telling and personal advocacy. Within the Corinthian church they can give testimony to the integrity of the collection, of its apostolic importance, the need in Jerusalem and the promise of blessing to those who sow richly in giving.

## Guidelines for advocacy

When it comes to advocacy brief is beautiful; the shorter

it is the more powerful it becomes, and the more preparation that must go into it. It is essential to spend time with someone willing to share their testimony and to prepare it well, much as a witness is prepared before giving evidence in a trial. There are two broad approaches:

- The advocate may have a specific story to tell, perhaps of an incident or a conversation which led to a change of heart and action. Make sure that the story is told briefly and to the point. There is always a danger of the story telling overshadowing the point that is to be made. Focus on the single point that contains the message of the story that the advocate wishes to convey to the congregation. The power of the parables of Jesus lay in making one powerful point that made the audience sit up and take notice.
- The advocate may have no specific story to tell but wishes to give testimony to changed way of looking at financial matters as a Christian. In this case the following framework for giving testimony can be used.

put on the plate but she explained why they helped the church and why the church needed my support. It grew from there; I began to understand more about finances

- **The difference it has made:-** I took envelopes, gift aided my giving and now am planning to take standing order. Everything else with money I try to plan by standing order if it is a priority and giving is a priority for me now. I suppose that is the difference - it is a priority for me now. But also there is a greater sense of belonging to the church and also a feeling of freedom - as though I am letting God be God in a bit more of my life.

### A framework for giving testimony

A simple framework is as follows and a fictional example has been used as an illustration:

- **How I saw things then:** - e.g. "I used to think that the church was incredibly rich. As a girl I remember the procession of Sunday hats that went past our door on their way to church. So when I started coming to church I just put £1 on the plate; I never thought about giving more and no one ever said anything.
- **What changed my thinking:** - I got into a conversation with a friend who had church envelopes. I thought they were to hide what you

