

## THE ISSUE OF FUND-RAISING HAD LINGERED IN OUR CONGREGATION FOR YEARS.

It finally came to light last May at our regular voter's meeting when a motion came to the floor to ban ticket selling in the church narthex. A few weeks prior, students from our school were selling tickets to the school's annual spring tea which is a major fund raiser. Over the years, our school, nursery school and youth group have supported their programs and activities by selling tickets to cheesecake cafes and fall suppers, selling chocolates, frozen foods and a host of other items.

The council chairman realized this was a bigger issue than just selling tickets to a spring tea. He offered a new motion to establish a committee to look at the larger issue of fund-raising. The objective of the committee would be to develop policy and guidelines for fund-raising in our church. This new motion was adopted quickly by almost all voters.

In July, four committee members, the pastor and the chairman of the Board of Elders met to discuss the next steps. We identified three areas to investigate.

1. What does Scripture say?
2. How does fund-raising fit into biblical stewardship principles?
3. How are other congregations handling this issue?

### Looking at Scripture

In our voters meeting, some members brought forward Jesus clearing the temple of moneychangers as a Scripture passage against selling in church. Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," He said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (Matt. 21:12-13).

The moneychangers and temple markets Jesus encountered that day were established by Moses. At Mount Sinai, God gave Moses instructions to establish the Sacrificial System, which was the offering of animals, grain, and wine as a part of Old Testament worship. As part of Moses' Law (Deut. 14:22-26), those travelling great distances to Jerusalem could buy their offerings rather than carry them from home. Also, every adult was required to pay a temple tax. Since people would come from many different countries, they needed to exchange their money for the temple currency.

The temple market was located in the Court of the Gentiles, which surrounded and was separated from the temple proper. Only Jews could enter the temple proper while the Gentiles were forbidden to enter on penalty of death. The Court of the Gentiles was the only place where non-Jews could gather to worship, but the noise, smell, and distractions of the market made it impossible for the Gentiles to have a reverent and orderly worship or to come in peaceful prayer.



# Chocolate and envelopes

## Should we allow fund-raising at church?

by Corinna Andriulaitis

All the while, some members were uncomfortable with money changing hands inside the church, while others felt there was nothing wrong with it. The motion presented at the voter's meeting reflected the greater issue of fund-raising and stewardship within the church.

### Concerns

The discussion at the voter's meeting reflected many issues and concerns:

- Jesus threw the moneychangers out of the temple so we shouldn't have them here.
- If everyone tithed appropriately we wouldn't have to fund-raise.
- But the money raised goes to support our church's programs and school.
- Youth would benefit from having to raise at least some of the funds for their activities.
- People feel obligated or intimidated to buy when selling happens at church.
- Visitors feel uncomfortable when we try to sell them things on Sunday morning.
- This wasn't allowed in the church where I grew up.
- The church where I grew up had no problems with this type of fund-raising.

For the Jews, the market had become corrupt. Sellers took advantage of the travelling pilgrims by charging high market prices and exchange rates. The temple priests not only condoned the corruption but took part by declaring sacrificial animals not adequate and requiring people to purchase “perfect” animals from the sellers.

In this context we looked at Jesus’ actions and words when He cleared the temple. Jesus’ accusation was one of judgement He called the Jewish leaders a ‘den of robbers’ quoting from Jeremiah 7:9-11.

Robbers would gather in dens to plot their illegal activities and to store their illicit wealth. The leadership was trying to hide its corruption behind its ritual piety and in the perceived safety of the temple.

Other details also support the idea that Jesus’ actions were a judgement upon Jewish authority. In his gospel, John notes that Jesus uses a whip of cords to clear the temple. A whip of cords was a symbol of judgement and the Romans used such a whip with metal or bones attached to its cords as punishment. The incident of the withered fig tree is also a warning of judgement. In Matthew’s Gospel this incident directly follows Jesus’ cleansing of the temple. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus’ cleansing of the temple is sandwiched between the description of the withered fig tree incident.

Jesus may also have been foreshadowing the coming of a new order when He quoted from Isaiah 56 where all believers would be welcome at God’s altar. “...for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa 56:6-7).

Isaiah says God’s blessings would be for all people. While the Jewish leaders should have been reaching out to the Gentiles, they were threatening them with death if they came to God’s house. By using this Isaiah reference, Jesus may have been looking to the future when all peoples will call on the name of the Lord.

Jesus’ actions also foreshadowed the end of the entire Sacrificial System with His death and resurrection. Matthew and Mark note that Jesus threw out both buyers and sellers. If the buyers stop purchasing animals for sacrifice and stop paying the temple tax then there would be no need for temple priests and the Sacrificial System would end. This led the priests to ask Jesus by who’s authority was He threatening to change worship practices. (See John 2:16-22.)

After our closer look at Jesus’ clearing of the temple, we realized it was not the buying and selling but the corruption, both physical and spiritual, which angered Him. However, we also recognized the need to balance the buying and selling with our responsibilities to others in this issue. Paul gave us direction. “Everything is

permissible” but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible” but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (1 Cor. 10:23-24).

We concluded that while buying and selling on church grounds may be permissible, it may not be beneficial given the layout and physical limitations of our church building. Some fund-raising activities in the tight confines of the narthex can be intrusive.



*Rembrandt's depiction of Jesus cleansing the Temple*

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## While buying and selling on church grounds may be permissible, it may not be beneficial

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### **Fund-raising and stewardship**

Our next task was to look at how fund-raising fits into stewardship. We turned to the LCMS Biblical Stewardship Principles for guidance in how we are to approach fund-raising within our church. Some key points we identified were:

1. Respect fellow believers. Don't just consider them donors, clients, customers, or just a means to an end.
2. Emphasize we are members of the body of Christ, and are working together in His kingdom.
3. Stewardship is not just meeting budgets or financial goals. It is serving and being served for the benefit of the community and the world. Our church's activities and programs should be seen as mission projects or community service and not as a budget liability.
4. Recognize Christian stewards are at different points of spiritual maturity, and offer varying

opportunities for growth. Challenge stewards to serve the Lord with personal acts of compassion and service as well as financial gifts.

5. Do not employ techniques and fund-raising techniques that fail to emphasize God's love in Christ as the basis and motivation for Christian stewardship. (i.e. Don't use approaches that appeal to our sinful nature or selfish interest).

### **Other churches and fund-raising**

Fund-raising happens in most congregations, largely to support youth activities, nursery programs or Lutheran schools. Most use a combination of freewill offerings and the buying of goods and services (chocolates, apple pies, Christmas ornaments, car washes, entertainment books, dinner theatre, fall suppers). All tried to limit or control how these activities occurred.

Most congregations had an approval process in place and limited the number of events per year. Collecting funds on Sunday mornings was done discreetly. One pastor told us he knew tickets to functions have been sold on Sunday mornings after service, but he has never noticed it happening. Buying and selling goods in the narthex is done in some churches, however they are generally churches with a large narthex.

### **Policy and guidelines**

As we continued our research and discussions we began recognizing that God has blessed our congregation and that much is expected of us—understanding Scripture, respecting fellow members of the body of Christ and finding God-honouring solutions through compromise.

The policy we presented to the congregation is based on the following points:

1. Fund-raising activities respect the holiness of the sanctuary.

2. Fund-raising activities do not interfere with worship services.

3. Fund-raising activities do not create a barrier to worship for believers.

4. The proceeds of fund-raising activities support church mission and program projects.

5. Fund-raising activities should not be used to meet the church's budget.

6. Fund-raising activities shall not include games of chance.

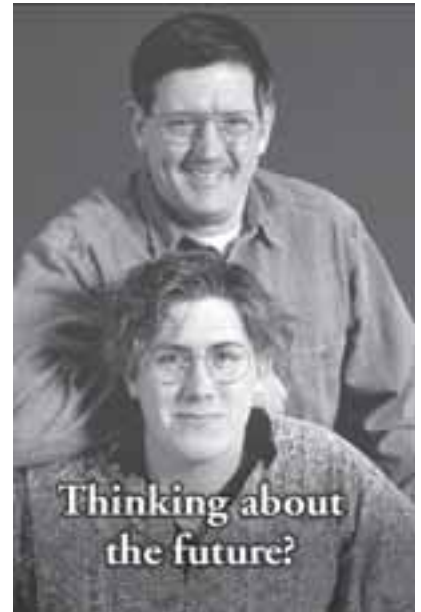
7. Fund-raising guidelines are administered and maintained by Church Council.

The guidelines we developed limited the number of fund-raising events held at church (20 weeks per calendar year) and restricted fund-raising activities to after service. Fund-raising in the narthex should involve only one person collecting funds for the future delivery of goods and services (e.g. selling tickets or collecting orders for Christmas ornaments). We also suggested that fund-raising activity could take place in the nursery room off of the narthex and in the church basement. The delivery of goods and services was also limited to those two areas.

We knew we had to share our research so that the congregation would understand the reasoning behind the proposed policy and guidelines. A Bible study based on our research was developed and offered to the congregation. At the November 2003 meeting, voters adopted the proposed policy and guidelines as presented.

Our task now is to keep a right perspective on stewardship; for organizers and supporters not to lose sight of the purpose for our fund-raising; look at mission commitments as our calling, not a burden; and challenge ourselves to serve and be served. This we will do with the help of God.

**Corinna Andriulaitis** is a member of the *Word&Deed* editorial board and Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Winnipeg. The Bible study referred to in the article is available at [www.lutheranchurch.ca/congresources.html](http://www.lutheranchurch.ca/congresources.html).



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#### *For more information contact:*

**Dwayne Cleave**  
Lutheran Church—Canada  
Financial Ministries  
1-800-588-4226 (ext. 18)

•  
**Ken Fredrick**  
Concordia Lutheran Seminary,  
Edmonton  
780-474-1468

•  
**Donna von Hauff**  
Concordia University College,  
Edmonton  
780-479-8481

•  
**Dr. Roger Humann**  
Concordia Lutheran Theological  
Seminary, St. Catharines  
905-688-2362

•  
**Brian Wonnick**  
Lutheran Church—Canada  
Financial Ministries  
1-800-663-5673

  
**LUTHERAN CHURCH—CANADA**  
**ÉGLISE LUTHÉRIENNE du CANADA**