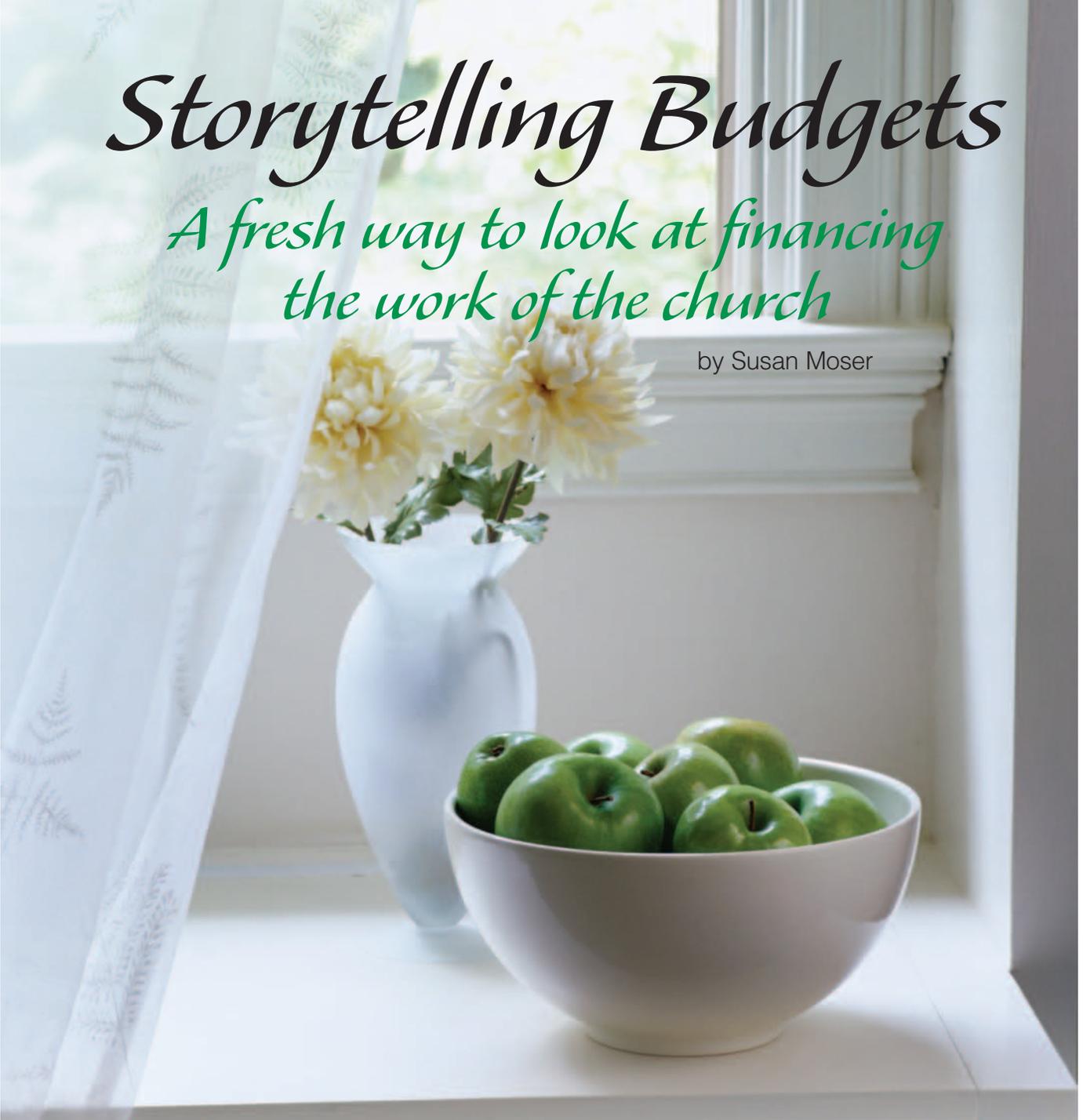


Storytelling Budgets

*A fresh way to look at financing
the work of the church*

by Susan Moser



A little boy was crying as he tied his shoelaces.
“Why are you crying?” his mother asked.
“I have to tie my shoes,” he replied.
“But you know how to do that. It isn’t hard, is it?”
“No,” he sobbed, “but I have to do it the rest of my life.”

*The storytelling budget concept and content were adapted by Susan Moser, with permission, from the fall 1995 issue of Let’s Talk... newsletter, which is written by Robert H. Roberts and published by American Baptist Churches U.S.A. It was originally called a testimony budget. **Susan Moser** is a writer and church resource developer and the founder of Silver Lining Concepts of Silverton, Oregon.*

Getting your church budget process started may create for the pastor and the budget committee the same feelings that little boy had tying his shoelaces. But here's an idea that may give you some relief in the same way Velcro or loafers would help the little boy. Create a "storytelling budget" as a simple and effective way to focus on what God is doing in and through your church's ministry.

An emphasis on telling the story of your ministry turns the budget process away from the tyranny of dollars and toward an opportunity for growth in grace. With this approach, your budget tells what God is doing in your lives as an active faith community.

Storytelling: A vital tradition of transmitting the culture and identity of a community.

Jesus' disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you use nothing but stories when you speak to the people?" Jesus answered: "I have explained the secrets about the kingdom of heaven to you, but not to others...I use stories when I speak to them because when they look, they cannot see, and when they listen, they cannot hear or understand" (Matthew 13:10-13, CEV).

To summarize, a storytelling budget is a presentation of your church's ministries, and the cost of each ministry, illustrated and authenticated by stories of the people whose lives have been touched and transformed by your ministries and generosity.

A Storytelling Budget

- Personalizes ministry.
- Communicates what God has done in the lives of people.
- Answers the question "What are you doing with my money?"
- Affirms the percentage of giving that goes beyond the local community through denominational mission and other agencies.
- Models proportional giving.
- Educates members about—and welcomes them to support—the variety of church ministries.
- Focuses on people instead of programs and administration.
- Illustrates the fact that people are not giving to pay the church bills, but rather to support the work of the kingdom of God.
- Communicates stories related to the church's ministry and creates feelings of accomplishment.
- Presents the budget in a form that people will actually read.

5 Ways for Pastors to Get Ready for the Storytelling Budget Process

1. **Adopt an Upbeat Attitude.** Take a personal attitude check before the budget process begins. Talk to leaders about attitude. Don't apologize for talking about money. Encourage greater financial support in your church by tithing and telling people that you do so.
2. **Work for Paradigm Change.** A dominant paradigm at work in the church is the secular "raise money, pay the bills" model. Christian stewardship models "raise disciples and the bills will be cared for." Your budget can be an opportunity to deepen the spiritual life of your church by creating a storytelling faith community and increasing awareness of the need to support it with financial commitment.
3. **Use Sound Theology.** Think through your theology of stewardship, money, and giving, as well as your convictions about ministry and the church. Your theology profoundly affects your leadership in the budget process. Challenge the assumption that the budget is financial and the rest of the ministry is spiritual.
4. **Expect Growth.** Talk about vision, mission, and ministry. Avoid traditional budget words—*dollars, increase, decrease, reduction, crunch*. Don't buy into people's negativism—"We can't afford it" or "We are giving all we can." A clearly communicated vision of ministry will encourage greater generosity. Contributions to religious centers represented about 2.2 percent of gross household income in 2003. That leaves room for a lot of growth.
5. **Open the Windows.** Often the first time church members see the budget is when they are asked to vote on it. Involve as many people as possible in submitting ministry requests. Announce and print the names of budget committee members. Publicize meeting dates. Report on the process. Commission the budget committee during a worship service. Challenge them to stretch the church toward God's vision of ministry. Hold a prayer vigil to support the preparation of the budget. Receive the budget committee's work during a special congregational gathering.

7 Steps for the Budget Committee to Take to Produce a Storytelling Budget

- 1. Itemize expenditures and income.** A systematic plan for meeting expenses is a necessary part of the financial management of your congregation, so you must begin producing this new budget as part of the typical budget-building process. But don't try to protect your people by keeping the budget low. Anything less than the Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus one percent requires a cutback in ministry. If your church has a vision or mission statement, use it to create your expenditures list.
- 2. Define ministry categories.** Create a list of four or five ministry categories that focus on your church's mission. Do not use the typical "pastoral or staff ministry," "administration," "building or office expenses" categories in this list. These ministries will be allocated in another step. Try using the following categories for your first storytelling budget:
 - Invitation (evangelism)
 - Nurturing (worship and education)
 - Service (outreach)
 - Sending (mission beyond your congregation)The sample worksheet on page 27 uses these categories. Other categories that may also work for your church include "personal witness," "social witness," "discipleship," "leadership," "congregational growth," "stewardship," and "identity."
- 3. Recast the budget as a storytelling budget.** One by one, assign your budget items to the ministry categories you listed in Step 2. Some will translate

easily; others may relate to more than one ministry and will have to be divided among the categories. Use the best judgment of people who know how to divide these costs (such as the pastor, church secretary, or trustees). Every budget item will be divided among your areas of ministry. Don't worry about precision; a general proportion is all you need.

- 4. Identify stories and storytellers.** Identify people who have given or received in each ministry category. Ask people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds to share short personal stories. Encourage people to respond to this request. It will help strengthen their witness and build up the church.
- 5. Put it all together.** With the new ministry categories and amounts and short personal stories about some of those ministries, create a visual storytelling budget. Use different media for the best results in your church setting—print, audio, video, and/or PowerPoint.
- 6. Ask for support.** A good time to present the storytelling budget to your congregation is the Sunday following the four-week period of the "Generations of Generosity" conversation groups and the congregational storytelling event (see center insert). People will be feeling good about the ministries of your church and aware that financial support is necessary to keep them going. Do a short presentation during the worship service or a longer one after the service. Have a brochure to hand out to everybody, along with a commitment card if your members are accustomed to pledging. Follow up with a letter, brochure, and commitment card to all members and friends in the coming week. Include how to return commitment cards, in a manner that suits the style of your church.

Remember, informing people of the value of ministry is not enough. You must ask them to continue and increase their support in the coming year. Think as carefully about your "ask" as you do about any other part of this budget process. The issue is not "What is my share of this budget?" but "What is God's share of my resources?"

- 7. Use it!**

- Print a storytelling budget brochure to mail to

Expect growth: talk about vision, mission, and ministry.



- every member or hand out on Sunday mornings.
- Create a video of storytellers to show to small groups and homebound members or share with the community via your local cable company.
- Use the budget all year for new member classes, church retreats, baptismal classes, church council meetings, and preaching illustrations.

Sample Storytelling Budget Presentation

First Christian Church—Our Story

Sample Storytelling Budget

First Christian Church Proposed Budget		First Christian Church Ministry Budget			
		Invitation	Nurturing	Service	Sending
Pastor					
Salary	\$25,000				
Housing	15,000				
Retirement/Health Insurance	8,000				
Payroll Tax	1,500				
Professional Expenses	2,500				
Total	\$52,000	\$13,000	\$26,000	\$13,000	
Worship					
Organist Salary	\$8,000				
Choir Director Salary	2,500				
Choir Music	500				
Total	\$11,000	\$5,500	\$5,500		
Christian Education					
Church School Supplies	\$1,500				
Youth Program & Retreat	1,000				
Recreation/Equipment	500				
Total	\$3,000		\$3,000		
Property					
Custodian Salary	\$8,000				
Utilities	9,000				
Insurance	5,000				
Maintenance	5,000				
Total	\$27,000	\$9,000	\$9,000	\$9,000	
Office					
Secretary Salary	\$6,500				
Supplies & Postage	2,500				
Total	\$9,000	\$2,250	\$4,500	\$2,250	
Outreach					
Denominational Mission	\$12,000				
Home Mission	1,000				
Total	\$13,000				\$13,000
Grand Total	\$115,000*	\$29,750	\$48,000	\$24,250	\$13,000

*The average annual operating budget for Protestant churches in 2000 was \$115,000.

Invitation

Total resources required = \$29,750

Together for Christ we minister. We invite those who do not have faith to open their lives to Christ and the church. We do this through worship services, personal visits, church school classes, "Invite-a-Friend" Sunday, new resident outreach, baptism, and membership classes.

I have attended this church for two years. This year I decided to make this church my church. Initially it was a hard decision because there are so many families in this church with generations of family members, and my family all live far away. But the membership class deepened my faith, and people have welcomed me into this family as if I were related. I feel closer to Christ now than ever before, and I am thankful.

—Sally Searchin'

I was living what I thought was a cool life. My mom made me go to youth retreat. At a bus stop I saw a sign: "Be cool. Try a little kindness." The teen leader said, "Try Christ." I have, and will be baptized next month. Thank you for the youth retreat. It changed my life.

—Joe Cool

We baptized twelve people this year. I wish everyone could experience the exhilaration of baptizing a believer. Thank you for making this ministry possible.

—Pastor Hope

Nurturing

Total resources required = \$48,000

We nurture each other in faith through Christian education, worship, counseling, and developing disciples. We do this through a church school that ministers to 120 children and adults, Bible studies and prayer meetings, two worship services each Sunday morning, pastoral counseling and spiritual

guidance, teaching holistic biblical stewardship, and encouraging proportional giving.

We love Sunday school. Our teacher has been showing us how to make scrapbooks. We're making one about our class so someday our kids will be able to see us as kids even when we're old.

—Never-Ending Story Class

Since my stroke I don't get to see you like I used to. I watch and listen to each Sunday's worship service on videotape. They bring God—and each of you—to me, and that keeps me going.

—Faith Fuller

After Stella and I took the financial planning course last winter, we decided to start tithing. We didn't know if we could do it, but God has blessed us so much! We wish someone had taught us about tithing as children, but we intend to teach our kids. Thank you for helping us stretch.

—Buster Smart

Ask people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds to share short, personal stories.



Service

Total resources required = \$24,250

We serve by discovering the real needs of people in our community and meeting those needs in the name and spirit of Christ. We do this by providing our building for Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, hosting the food shelter one week a month, encouraging our members to serve the community, providing free Christmas dinners for 500 homeless people, and providing emergency aid to people in crisis.

I have never seen most of you; you have never seen me. By providing your building for our Thursday night

AA meetings, you have helped me stay sober for twenty-nine months.

—Jack Daniels

I volunteer as a "Loaves & Fishes" worker one week a month. I get such a blessing providing food for people who are hungry. If you told me when I took an early retirement that the highlight of my life would be peeling potatoes, serving soup, or cleaning tables, I would not have believed it—but it's true! And an added blessing is that my teen granddaughter has been helping out, too.

—Donna Boomer

Sending

Total resources required = \$13,000

We support ministries and missions of invitation, nurturing, and service beyond our local community by giving to our denomination's global mission fund and through the four annual offerings and other mission work that our church and members have been involved in. Our pastor and leadership also participate in regional meetings, boards, and committees.

The region is so grateful for your support. It directly affects your church. Last year you met several times with your regional minister to talk about renewal. I'm sure you'll enjoy hearing the story of our new mission work in Nepal when the Smiths visit your church during your mission fair.

—Regis Townsend

I am pastor of the new Church in the Valley. Your gifts to the church planting fund and the region made this church start possible. We had 160 people in church last Sunday. Wow! Thank you for your part in this marvelous ministry.

—Pastor Newton

How much will you give to support the ministries of First Christian Church?

We love to tell our story! The ministry of First Christian Church is worthy.

Our story needs you! First Christian Church needs your increased support. We challenge you to increase your support by 1 percent of your income.

Our story belongs to God! It is God's work. To God be the glory! ■