

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



6 Types of Donors
Your Church Should
Regularly Thank

RICH BIRCH



As a church leader, are you wondering how you're going to make this year's budget?

Have you looked at your donations and felt concerned they're running behind?

It seems like every time I talk to church leaders the topic of increasing revenue comes up. It's understandable because oftentimes funding is the only thing standing between our vision and its execution. **Donations can definitely enable more ministry opportunities; however, I'd like to challenge you to stop thinking about ways to increase revenue if you don't already have a robust system in place to thank your current donors.**

It's our opportunity and our responsibility as a church to thank the people who have chosen to invest in our ministry. Those who give to your church are actively choosing to give to your ministry. Whatever your philosophy on giving, the reality is **that the donors who fund your ministry also encounter a number of other giving opportunities on a regular basis.** The fact that they've opted to support your ministry is pretty amazing. Rather than outlining another way to increase revenue, we need talk about how to show our appreciation for those who *already give*.

You see, people often repeat what gets rewarded. We all know this from what happens when we motivate our team members, whether they be staff or volunteers. However, the same is true for our donors. If people feel acknowledged and appreciated, they are more

likely to give to your ministry in the future. Now, I'm not talking about putting little brass plates on every object at your church saying, "Generously donated by Mr. Han Solo and Ms. Leia Organa." An elegant process built around thanking people who give to your church can both acknowledge and show appreciation to them at the same time.

First-time Donors

While Scripture is clear that Christians have a responsibility to give back and help push the ministry forward, many of those who attend our churches on a regular basis don't contribute financially. **The internal life change going on within a person who chooses to give up a portion of their income and invest it in your ministry is nothing short of profound.** And so, we want to go out of our way to make a big deal about people who have chosen to give for the very first time.

Here are a few ways you could acknowledge and show appreciation to this amazing group of people:

- Take the time to write a handwritten card. This would be a terrific opportunity for the pastor to say thanks and express that the church is honored the donor has chosen to give to its ministry.
- Send a letter of appreciation. It sounds simple, but it's the best place to start. Have someone in leadership thank the donor, explain the vision of the church, and give the donor an opportunity to reach out with any questions about how their donations are being used.

- Give a thoughtful token of thanks. Many churches will give a small gift to help reinforce the idea that we don't just want something from our donors—we actually want to give them something in return that can help them continue to manage their resources well. Books such as Randy Alcorn's *The Treasure Principle* or Dave Ramsey's *The Total Money Makeover* are practical and useful examples of this kind of gift.

Initial Recurring Donors

At some point, people will choose to go from giving occasionally to giving regularly. You might notice this in a monthly report that lists regular gifts that match the month before; it may show up when those who give online choose a recurring option rather than a one-time option. However, these regular contributors can sometimes feel neglected as our systems don't have a way to acknowledge their donations every few months.



Take notice of the donors who choose to give on a regular basis, and let them know you notice their generosity and are so thankful that they're choosing to give in this way. Some churches will not only send a note or a letter of appreciation when someone sets up recurring giving, but they'll also have their system track various levels of gifts or the number of months that people give recurrently. For instance, at three months of giving a phone call from someone within the financial services department might be appropriate. After a full year, the pastor might send a handwritten note saying, "Thank you so much for giving monthly over this past year; it's made a dramatic difference." Whatever approach you use, **establish the good practice of finding regular milestones to connect with recurring donors.**

People Who Give to Special Appeals

Can we have a bit of an honest moment? I know that we occasionally find ourselves making a special appeal to those who give to our ministries. Maybe we have a special project we need to fund or we are running behind in a certain area. We build a small campaign where we reach out to our community and invite them to participate in a short-term opportunity that usually goes towards a specific need. Oftentimes, I've seen churches invest a lot of time, effort, energy, and even financial resources on the front end of these campaigns with little leftover for showing appreciation to funders afterwards.

I want to challenge you to spend as much time, effort, and energy on acknowledging donors who give to special campaigns as you do on the front end. If you have five or six dessert nights where you call people together to ask them to give to a special opportunity, you can certainly turn around and have a gratitude barbecue to thank those who contributed to your campaign.

Stock Donation Donors

There will be a segment of your community that may give various negotiable assets (including stocks and bonds) to your church. This is an important group of donors to acknowledge; **these individuals are literally giving a piece of their future to the church.** Unlike income that's replenishable every month, when people choose to give you a stock today, they're giving you future earning potential. People could choose to hold onto these assets as revenue-makers for their own personal futures, but they're choosing to give it to your ministry instead.

This is an important, tactical area to thank, because a large percentage of all wealth is actually contained within equity like this rather than within income. Develop the habit of acknowledging and thanking people who choose to give equity to your church. This best practice can go a long way. **I would suggest making a personal phone call (or adding some kind of personal touch) as these individuals are giving at a deeply generous level when they decide to give from their future potential earnings.** We want to make sure that we match the emotional intensity of that gift in our appreciation.

Other Organizations

From time to time, other nonprofits or businesses in town will make donations to your church. These gifts are important because they represent a group of people within a business supporting the work of your church.

Sometimes gifts like this are a risk for the organization or business because there are many other opportunities for them to give to within the locality. Other nonprofits—like hospitals and food banks—do an incredible job of publicly acknowledging these gifts. With that in mind, **take the time to reach out to the leadership of the organization and ask them how you can publicly speak about this gift. Let them decide the best way to make any form of public acknowledgement.**

Core Donors

There are a group of donors who give a disproportionate percentage of your budget. This small group funds a sizable portion of what makes your ministry happen. These individuals need a regular connection with the leadership of your church to help them continue to invest in your ministry. **It's not a matter of giving this group special treatment; rather, it's about encouraging them in the amazing gift they have.** The Bible is pretty clear that some people have the gift of giving, and our job as leaders is to help everyone develop their spiritual gifts. If you don't acknowledge or work with someone who has the gift of giving, it would be as if someone had the gift of teaching and you denied them opportunities to use and grow those gifts or failed to provide feedback on the difference their teaching is making.



I've found that coordinating regular meals with the top 20 to 50 donors at your church is a best practice in this area. You don't need to overdo this, but if every one of those donors had a meal

with a core leader (if not the lead pastor of your church) on an annual basis, the relationship that develops through that interaction will help the church continue to thrive. The conversation around the meal isn't all about finances or the fact that someone's given. In fact, I think 95% of the time together is simply about getting to know them, understanding what's happening in their world, finding out how you can pray for them, and understanding their business.

Then in the last 5% of your time together, let the donor know how thankful you are for their investment in the ministry and ask them if they any questions about the church and its areas of growth. This will give them an opportunity to ask questions that they may feel a little bit sheepish about asking in other forums. Again, you're not giving these people special treatment or special influence over the church. You are acknowledging that their gifts are making a profound difference, and you want to make sure they have access to the information they need to continue to feel comfortable investing in the church.

A bonus tip for this group: After you've had lunch with one of these donors, why not ask to come and see their place of work? You'd be amazed what happens when church leaders ask to visit a donor's workplace. They're always coming to your place of work, and it's a great blessing for them if you return the favor. A lot of people love to show off their work environments and introduce you to the various people they work with. It also gives you more insight into how they lead and what's happening in their world.

Which type of donor do you need to thank today?

Taking time to thank donors is critically important for the future of your church. We want to acknowledge the amazing work that God's doing in people's hearts as they choose to invest in our ministries, and you want your people to know how thankful you are for their gifts.

Which area do you need to invest more time, effort, and energy into? How can you develop a more robust strategy to thank donors? I'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments [here!](#)

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