

missions fundraising

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intro





perspective

Think about the last time someone asked you for money.

If you can, slow down whatever is replaying in your mind and try to remember what you thought and felt as it happened. Maybe someone on the street asked you for a few bucks, or a family member wanted a minor loan. It could've been something more significant, like an item you wanted to buy from a stranger who demanded a price higher than you hoped to spend.

Perhaps it was a kid trying to get you to buy a candy bar as a fundraiser.

Some “asks” probably seem like no-brainers. This is especially true if what you're getting seems reasonable for what you're spending or if it's for something or someone you care about. Other situations cause you to be less generous, whether it's because you feel that you can't afford something or that this won't be money well spent.

What's your track record when it comes to generosity? That's not a question about if you give a lot or a little, or if you have a lot or a little. Generally, do you have an open or closed spirit when someone approaches you with a request for your God-given resources?

Chew on this before you keep reading, because two things are inherently true:

- The way you've responded in past situations doesn't dictate the way you'll respond in future situations. Keep this in mind if you try out an idea in this book that doesn't generate many positive responses this year. People might be more open to the idea the next time you ask them.
- Not everyone will respond to your fundraising solicitations as you do to other people's. (Maybe that's a good thing if you're a tightwad; maybe it's a bad thing if you're an extravagant giver.)

The bottom line? Continually pay attention to what happens inside of you when you're asked to give up money you had other plans for. The next time your church talks about tithing or Girl Scouts stand in a grocery store doorway, notice how your inner voice might try to assert itself over the Holy Spirit. You might be pretty good at that, which is often the same tension others may experience as you approach them.

Consider: Are you about to ask people to do something you aren't willing to do yourself?



all things are spiritual

Fundraising is really about faith-raising.

You may not see it that way yet. Faith tends to hide out rather well in everyday tasks, events, conversations, and opportunities. Somewhere within that-thing-you-have-to-do-so-you-can-do-the-other-thing is the potential for a moment that will lift up another person to a life bigger than whatever they've been staring at.

Because all things are spiritual.

Think about when God created Adam and gave him the task of naming the animals. Would you consider that to be a spiritual thing? Really, would you?

Before you answer, consider why you'd categorize something as "spiritual." Here's the typical short list:

- God is present.
- Humanity is being responsive to God.
- Whatever happens is different because it involves God.

These apply to everything—even fundraising. You can view it either as a necessary task so you can do the "spiritual" stuff later or as an act of worship, evangelism, service, fellowship, or discipleship in itself.

At any given moment, "secular" money can be "holy" money. Even Jesus Christ and his disciples were personally supported by Roman dollars. Luke 8:3 (NASB) says, "Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others...were contributing to their support out of their private means."

- Have you ever noticed that verse?
- What are its implications for the next person or organization you approach?

We'll move on to some practical ideas in the pages that follow. People just like you have shared them because they work well, but don't let that keep you from seeing this foundational point:

You're a dealer of hope. How well do you know your product? Are you sure your missions experience hasn't already begun?



church fundraising 101

Although money was one of Jesus' favorite teaching metaphors, it's often a hot topic within churches. You can overcome these stereotypes by seizing opportunities to share the vision God has given you. Because this is best done in community, form a fundraising team who can make these action steps a priority. This will also free you up to lead the charge in other areas.

Take these steps to ensure success:

- **Evaluate your group or church.** Gather your leaders and discern any goals or vision statements about why you exist. Ask questions that probe what you want to achieve, preserve, and avoid. Make sure everyone can share this verbally in a quick summary.
- **Create a portfolio.** Create a one-page summary of your vision and how the upcoming missions experience will add to what you're generally trying to accomplish. Add pages and pictures that detail the trip or camp experience, including personal stories of how life-change took place in similar situations in the past.
- **Plan a calendar of events.** Determine a flow of events for before and after your missions experience. Only plan for initiatives your group is most passionate about by assessing the potential spiritual and fundraising impact each event could create.
- **List liabilities.** Don't overlook any hidden hurdles, such as a debt from past trips or challenges within your church. Evaluate the local economy, identifying if you should do any of your fundraising online or outside the community.
- **Remember logistics.** Create a wish list of what you need for the trip, such as van rental, gas, food, and more. Share these items with your church so they can help you find donations, grants, or loans to cover costs.
- **Offer options.** Provide a postage-paid envelope with the church's address written on it. You can also create a PayPal or online-giving option for your church website, or purchase an attachment that turns a smartphone into a debit-card machine.
- **Affirm giving right away.** Write a sincere, specific thank you to each giver as soon as you can. Personalize each note, affirming God's joy over their giving and how their investment will support the trip's participants.
- **Follow up.** Save the contact info for your donors and invite them to an event after the missions experience to celebrate their role in what happened.

Stay optimistic, always remembering, “Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant” (Robert Louis Stevenson).



what time is it?

When it comes to fundraising, you're in one of two seasons right now:

- **Time is of the essence.** Maybe you just signed up for a missions experience or camp that's coming up soon. You need ideas with a quick turnaround "today" so you're able to do your thing "tomorrow."
- **Time is a luxury.** Perhaps you're trying to think ahead about a trip or event you'll do several months down the road. You have the unique freedom to consider ideas that have more layers to them, which in turn can bear more fruit. The key will be in identifying all the logistics, including when you schedule them.

Neither approach, the "sprint" or the "marathon," is more correct than the other. You may even want to experiment with both. Just make sure you consider these tensions that are present with almost any fundraiser:

- **Integrity vs. opportunity**—Don't become someone you aren't just to make a buck. For example, if your church takes a negative stance on gambling, then you may want to avoid Bingo nights and raffle tickets ... even if they yield well financially.
- **Payoff vs. investment**—If you'll only earn \$1 on something you're selling for \$10, consider another option that provides more in return.
- **Labor force needed vs. labor force available**—It doesn't make much sense (or cents) to tackle projects requiring multiple participants when only a few will take part. Make sure everyone has the ability and time to do what the fundraiser requires.
- **Internal money vs. external money**—The households of your congregation only have so much money. For that reason, you might want to do fundraisers that generate revenue mainly from people who don't attend your church. That allows church members to be generous under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, while simultaneously forging an outreach connection with locals.
- **"My idea" vs. "dumb idea"**—Some fundraisers won't have a great payoff and you'll be tempted to shoot them down. Don't move so quickly, especially if they foster community among participants. Remember, all things are spiritual; a "dumb" idea can be as godly as a big missions experience. Listen to the Holy Spirit.

God is eternal yet part of things all the time. Have divine anticipation for what's ahead.

ideas





sponsorship

You may occasionally encounter generous people who seek you out on their own, hand you money, and say, “This is for any kid who needs it.” Meanwhile, other individuals or organizations will need to be inspired to become a sponsor. Here are some ideas:

- **Trading Cards**—Create a display of envelopes designating different dollar amounts. Place “trading cards” inside for the people going on the mission trip. The higher the dollar number someone picks means the more cards they get. Each trading card can include a picture of the participant, along with their “stats” (grade in school, what trip they’re attending, how many trips they’ve been on, etc.). Have donors use these cards to pray for the kids and form a bond between sponsors and participants. Donations tend to be bigger when a higher top-dollar amount is available, usually around 10% of your goal. For example, if your goal is \$10,000, then start at \$1,000, going down to \$500, \$200, \$100, \$50, \$20, \$10, and \$5. (Ben R., Minnesota)
- **Box o’ Bucks**—Buy white gabled cardboard boxes (like Dunkin’ Donuts Munchkins boxes, but a little bigger). Have each student personalize a box with pictures, Bible verses, information about the trip, and its date. Display the boxes in a visible location of your church so families, individuals, and small groups can take a box and adopt that student. They, in turn, will place the box in a visible location. Dare them to contribute money during the fundraising season and share the story with visitors or guests. Make sure everyone turns in their boxes on time, and invite sponsors to a follow-up celebration. (Tom B., Massachusetts)
- **Sell Stocks**—Create categories of investment, such as “Platinum—\$100, Gold—\$75, Silver—\$50, and Bronze—\$25.” Assign an appropriate “dividend” to each category that can be claimed throughout the year; for example, students can work on someone’s home during a service-project day or make a special dessert for that person sometime. (Barb M., Kansas; Donna D., Illinois; Ray V., North Carolina; Amy E., Ohio)
- **Partner Up**—Identify any local or national organizations that are aligned with your efforts, such as a department in your denomination, a generous company, or a philanthropic group of donors. There may even be some federal grants worth exploring, provided they don’t affect your church’s status as a faith-based organization. Evaluate the strengths and challenges of pursuing a partnership with them through an event or a lasting relationship. Define these potential goals and the nature of the relationship up front and in writing. (Jon J., Ohio)

Collect the donors’ contact information so students can send postcards to them while on the trip.

Ask students to send out their support letters well before Christmas, asking people to sponsor a portion of their trip in place of a typical gift.



- **Buy a Mile**—Add up the total amount your group needs and divide it by the miles you’ll be traveling. This is your “amount per mile” number, usually an obtainable amount between \$1 and \$20 per mile. Place a map with a vehicle on it, and move it closer to its destination as people sponsor miles. (Kris W., Arizona)
- **Work Day**—Create an eight-hour work day of service projects by contacting community leaders and soliciting ideas. Challenge students to spend the weeks and months before the event soliciting sponsors who will pledge a particular dollar amount per hour. For example, a sponsor who pledges \$1 per hour will donate \$8 for the entire day. Provide forms that sponsors can keep, including something that indicates the amount of their gifts. (Rob M., Michigan)
- **Old-School/New-School Letters**—Give kids a generic letter they can use or adapt that shares the vision and goal of the upcoming mission trip. Include a URL link that goes to a website or YouTube profile so people can watch that student (and others) share why they want to go on the trip. Use the video only as a supplement; otherwise, people who aren’t as tech-savvy (i.e., grandparents) may feel left out. (Earl H., Florida; Rob M., Michigan)

Meet with the people or companies your church does the most business with and ask for a charitable gift or concession, such as a free month of rent or an added bonus to your next supply order. Use the money you save to fund your overall church budget or special events.



sales

The bottom line with selling something is that you have to account for the cost to buy the product as well as the effort to sell it. The first idea in front of you may not be the best one, especially if you look at local and national options. Don't be afraid to negotiate for a better return on what you're selling, especially if you can tell a company what its competitors offer instead.

- **Think seasonally.** Sell things that people will already be spending money on during different seasons of the year. Communicate all this at least a month in advance.
 - **Super Bowl:** Sell sub or hoagie sandwiches for people to eat at their parties. Create a menu of four choices (including a veggie-only option) and have people request their toppings. Purchase the ingredients on Friday, make the sandwiches on Saturday, and give them out at Sunday services the day of the big game. (Robert G., Illinois; Bill S., Ohio)
 - **Valentine's Day/Mother's Day:** Offer an assortment of flowers to sell and hand out in church during (or near) the holidays. Let people order ahead and write a note you'll attach. Have extra flowers on hand for anyone who spontaneously buys them that day. You can also deliver any extra flowers to shut-ins. (Desiree A., New York; Simon F., Maryland)
 - **Summer:** Take part in a local farmer's market each week, asking different families in your church to create baked goods you can sell. Make sure you comply with any health- department requirements. (Steve S., Ohio)
 - **Thanksgiving:** Sell the pies of a local baker or enlist the help of a volunteer team to make them yourself (and get ingredients donated). Take orders in advance, and have students deliver the pies before the holiday. (Jacky D., Wisconsin)
 - **Christmas:** Have students bake cookies to sell at church or a local grocery store entrance in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Bundle the cookies in decorative tins and market them as last-minute gifts. (Brenda C., New York)
- **Hold an auction.** Spend several months soliciting area businesses for goods or services donations that you can auction off at an event. Think about larger travel destinations within a short drive, such as a weekend stay at a bed-and-breakfast. Ask students to submit donations individually or as a group, such as baby-sitting hours, car washing, yard work,

Be sensitive to selling things in your church, especially during worship services. Although it's a great time to find customers, it can send a mixed message that makes people feel uncomfortable.

Most businesses are limited on how much they can donate each year. Approach them early and take note of when they're able to make a contribution.



and more. Look for similar donations within your church, including weekend and weeklong stays at summer homes, auto repair, cake decorating, and more. Advertise the auction well, ideally hosting the event in a public location where unchurched people will feel comfortable (such as a town hall, school, or library). Host the first portion of the event as a silent auction, where people can write down their bids until a certain time. Allow for larger items to be presented in a live-bid setting. (Tom W., Maine; Nancy S., Connecticut)

- **Sell firewood bundles.** Connect with someone in your church or community who has trees that can be turned into firewood. Have the adults chop it and the students bundle it. Make the firewood available by the half cord, whether it's stacked at your church or delivered on request. (Curt B., Minnesota)
- **Hold a yard sale.** Ask church members to donate items to an annual yard sale. Advertise it well to the general public, ideally hosting it on a well-traveled street. Either mark the items for sale or don't price anything and let items sell by donation (without haggling over prices). Donate any remaining items to a resale shop or homeless agency. Start soliciting in January (right after Christmas) to ensure the maximum amount of donations for a spring sale. (Simon F., Maryland; Dan B., Texas; Cathy C., Nebraska)
- **Open a business.** Create a for-profit business that's administratively and organizationally separate from your church. Examples include a coffee shop, landscaping company, resale store, or T-shirt printing company. Use the profits from this business to support your fundraising efforts. (Brian B., Michigan; Rob M., Michigan)
- **Plant a youth garden.** Find land that can be turned into a garden, ideally through a donation of someone in your congregation or a local farmer willing to share a section. Grow and sell produce (or make it available by donation) to your church. Let people know what will be available during different seasons. Take advantage of larger sales around holidays, such as watermelons around Independence Day and pumpkins in October. (Curt B., Minnesota)
- **Have a "kids stuff" sale.** Offer to host a local sale where everyone can use your location and tables to sell children's clothing, toys, and more. Instead of collecting money on items sold, rent tables at a reasonable price to sellers. You can also feature a "large-item room," where you collect a percentage on those sales. Charge a small admission fee to customers, and advertise in advance. (Linda H., Michigan)
- **Offer after-church meals-to-go.** Create a rotating menu of items people can order in advance so they'll have lunch or dinner available as they leave a church service. Ideas include pizza, walking tacos, chicken, and burgers. Take orders each weekend for a meal you'll sell the next weekend. (Katie A., Iowa; Jacky D., Wisconsin)

Ask a local business or high-capacity giver to match the funds you raise in order to double the profit.

When selling food, make it available in a clean, germ-free area. Make sure all workers have washed their hands.



events

Some fundraisers work better as fun events that build relationships. These shared experiences create something to talk about, involve people who might not normally get to know your students, and ultimately give young people something special to look forward to.

- **Rock-a-Thon**—Challenge teens to collect pledges for an event where they'll be “on the go” for a number of hours in a row (with a five-minute break every hour). Each hour, have a leader plan some type of activity, or have teens take ownership by sharing games, movies, lessons, meals, and more. Pledges can be per hour or a flat rate. (Mindy P., Massachusetts; Katie W., Massachusetts)
- **Home-Business Bazaar**—Invite 15 to 20 home businesses or personal sales consultants to set up booths and sell their products. Solicit a variety of presenters, from educational toys for kids to designer purses. Ask for a portion of any profits from sales, and have your students sell cookies and drinks with a basket for freewill donations. (Eva D., Kansas)
- **Parents' Day Out**—Host a baby-sitting event for younger children (potty-trained on up) that students run on a Friday or Saturday night. Charge a flat rate, such as \$10 per child. Offer a variety of activities, from an appropriate movie to active games. Schedule this near a holiday such as Christmas or Easter so parents have time to shop and wrap or hide gifts. Offer follow-up child-care opportunities to any parents who need a regular sitter. (Holly T., Kentucky; Mindy P., Massachusetts; Katie W., Massachusetts)
- **Chili Cook-Off**—Announce the cook-off to the congregation, asking them to either bring a pot of their own chili to be judged or just come to taste everyone else's chili. Have contests with categories such as spiciest, most original, best vegetarian, and so on. Charge a fee for people to come taste all the different types of chili and vote for their favorites. Have the youth group provide cornbread, drinks, and toppings (such as cheese and sour cream). You can also purchase disposable containers and sell leftover chili to go. For an added bonus, conclude everything with a Dessert Auction. (Sara S., North Carolina)
- **Monthly Luncheon**—As a youth group, host monthly luncheons following a particular church service. Meal ideas include baked potato bar, pizza, chicken, baked ham, hot dogs and hamburgers. Provide drinks (lemonade, water, and coffee) and dessert (one large cake and cookies). Invite parents of the youth to take turns assisting. (Jennie T., Indiana)

Some events may seem trivial compared to others, so only do the ones you and your students really believe in. If anyone asks, tell them all the fun you're having prepares them to be a team on your trip—because it does!

Plan to adapt as needed. At any given moment, something can change the margin, situation, or people you were counting on. Always be ready for this!



- **Dance Marathon**—Hold a 12-hour dance marathon, charging a flat fee at the door or having each youth group member raise money to attend. Change the theme every hour, from break-dancing to country. Decorate your area with disco lights, laser lights, mirror balls, and so on. Have a “crash room” for people who want to take a quiet break.
- **Old-Fashioned Family Carnival**—Feature classic games, such as ring toss, bean bag toss, and more at a small carnival. Don’t forget the cake walk, which has been our biggest moneymaker. Have members of the congregation donate the cakes and cupcakes. (Mindy P., Massachusetts; Katie W., Massachusetts)
- **Dinner Theater**—Sell tickets for a drama or play that students put on together, such as a murder-mystery night. Serve a nice meal as well, charging about \$10 per ticket. (Mindy P., Massachusetts; Katie W., Massachusetts)
- **Tacky Prom**—Decorate your hall with streamers, set up a punch bowl, and announce to your congregation that it’s time to pull out their old prom gowns or bridesmaid dresses. The tackier, the better (think 1950s prom, blue tuxedos, shoulder pads, etc). Make a music playlist and set an area aside for a photo-booth room. (Mindy P., Massachusetts; Katie W., Massachusetts)
- **Trivia Night**—Enlist the help of a trivia buff to host a fun night, with teams trying to answer questions. Limit teams to about five members, and ask for a flat entry fee from each team, such as \$25. Or let teams be as large as they’d like, but with only four or five people playing at a time. Give every team a small dry-erase board or chalkboard slate to write down its answers. After about 15 seconds, have the moderator call “time” and the teams read their answers. (Valerie V., Iowa)
- **Video Awards Night**—Create a variety of short films featuring students who will be going on the trip. They can lip-sync to a song or do something else creative. Invite students’ friends and families to the two-hour event, where people watch the videos, receive prizes, and eat dessert. Create a fun atmosphere where students are the stars. Suggest a donation of \$5 to \$15 for admission, and let guests purchase tickets to vote for their favorite video at the end of the night. (Josh S., Pennsylvania)
- **Drive-In Movie Night**—Turn the church parking lot into an old-style drive-in. Have students serve as waiters and waitresses, with a menu that includes candy, hamburgers, hot dogs, and more. You can also have hula hoop and bubble-gum blowing contests.

Ask community businesses for donations of food and door prizes to be given away to each student.



visuals

When's the last time you stopped in your tracks because of what you saw? Maybe a beautiful sunset made you stop your car or a clever billboard caused you to do a double-take. Visually-based fundraisers are a form of viral marketing because they keep people coming back for more to see if anything has changed.

- **Envelope Fundraiser**—Place 100 envelopes on a bulletin board, writing a dollar amount on each (from \$1 to \$100). Place this in a well-trafficked area of your church for several weeks, encouraging people to take an envelope that they're willing to return with that dollar amount in it. You can raise thousands of dollars in a way that lets people give at an obtainable level. Pick a day where everyone turns in the money, and celebrate how God has worked through them. (Bucky W., Kentucky)
- **Jar Collection**—Place jars in a common area, labeling each with the name of one of your church's pastors, youth leaders, or volunteers. Give people a month to fill the jars with random amounts of money for the trip. The person whose jar has the most money by the final day will have to endure something awkward, such as shaving their legs, getting a buzz cut, getting dunked in a dunk tank, and so on. Make sure all your participants are good sports! (Doug S., California)
- **Flamingo Wars**—For a month, take orders for pink flamingos to end up in people's lawns. (Plastic flamingos are available at most lawn and garden stores.) After the flamingos land in a church member's yard, they must call the church so a student can pick them up. That church member can then hire the student to "flock" another yard or return them back to the church office. Members can also purchase "flamingo insurance" to prevent the flamingos from landing in their yard. Provide a note or sign for each flamingo that explains their purpose. (Bucky W., Kentucky; Dee E., Minnesota)
- **Fill the Can**—Give each family an empty can or jar as they leave church. Attach a note asking them to fill it with change or paper money over the next few weeks and return it. (Mike P., Wisconsin)



services

People spend money on several services quite regularly that you can provide. Enlist students whenever possible, using adult supervision when necessary.

- **Video Transfer**—Have a tech-savvy person help students transfer old videos or DVDs into a digital file. Encourage people to preserve whatever they can, such as their child’s first steps, baptisms, recitals, weddings, and so on. Charge a set fee or ask for donations for this service. (Curt B., Minnesota)
- **Colossal Clinic**—Assemble people with special skills, from auto mechanics to computer techies. Gather everyone in one place for a half-day, having folks who need those services donate money for the work that gets done. (Curt B., Minnesota)
- **It’s in the Bag**—Spend the day raking and cleaning up yards for local shut-ins and disabled people. Instead of charging for this service, recruit sponsors to pledge an amount of money for every bag the group fills. For example, if 15 to 20 people fill an average of 300 to 400 bags and someone sponsors a penny per bag, then you collect \$3 to \$4 from them. Dare people to sponsor at least a nickel or dime per bag, if not more. If possible, take all the bags to the church and place them where everyone in the congregation (as well as passers-by) will notice and be reminded of their pledges. (Paul F., Arkansas)
- **Not Your Usual Car Wash**—Place students at the church entrances, each with a clipboard, key collection box, and labels to mark the keys. As people enter the church, have students ask if they’d like to have their car washed while they’re attending worship. Everything is by donations only. If the person says yes, they hand over their car keys and the student tags them appropriately. Adult volunteers drive the cars to the washing spot and then return them to the parking lot. Make sure all the youth and volunteers attend a church service that day, or else you send a message that raising money is more important than growing with God. After the church service, give people their keys as they exit the building. (Brenda C., New York)

Whenever possible, have your students do the majority of the work for fundraisers. It helps them bond and prepares them for the responsibilities of the upcoming trip.

final thoughts





Don't boil this all down to asking people for money.

Instead, let them know what God is doing, how he's called you to join him, and how they can be part of it. People will give more willingly to vision than they will out of guilt. Throw yourself into that with prayer and sweat, whether the money comes quickly or slowly. In addition, be wise in who you ask to become a supporter:

- **Make a list.** Certain people likely stand out from others in every season of your life. These could include people from previous churches, classmates, teachers, employers, co-workers, neighbors, friends of your family growing up, and more. Consider relatives as well, from extended family members to people they know.
- **Categorize.** Pray over who God wants you to reach out to first. Make a list of the top 10 people you sense you need to reach out to first, and categorize others into similar groups of 10 to follow.
- **Appeal.** Create a one-page letter that outlines the opportunity you've been given, the timeline you need to raise your funds, and the gift range you'd like them to consider. You may also want to provide a link to the website of the organization you're using for your trip so people know it's reputable.
- **Contact.** Determine who to send your letter to and who to sit down with personally. Don't be afraid to make a big ask, and never say anyone's "no" for them. You may also want to contact churches you've been part of to see if they'll take an offering for you or give a gift out of their budget.
- **Connect.** Create a blog, email list, or newsletter that helps supporters journey with you before, during, and after your trip. Share pictures and stories so everyone can follow the trip and feel part of it.

The Lord may make raising funds really easy for you, or you may have to throw yourself into it with all you have. Either way, note that God will provide for you through the people around you and the sweat of your efforts. Trust him to build what you need, or else you'll labor in vain.

On that note, good for you. Seriously...good for you.

If God has called you to a missions experience or trip, nothing can stop it. Every person he wants on that trip will be able to participate, whether or not they're financially set right now. Your sweat is part of that, so now is the time to find some solutions to your financial hurdles.

One thing that will help you is clear, concise communication. Pick fundraisers that are simple enough for everyone to talk about and powerful enough to generate the revenue you need. If you're a relational person, maximize every connection with everyone you know. If your personality enjoys making lists, start creating spreadsheets.

Whatever it takes, have faith in God as you get the job done so his kingdom and will can be done on earth "as it is in heaven."