

Organic Economics

Suggestions on financial contributions as an organic church network.

By Mark Willis

The Church does not exist for you and me. *We are the Church for the sake of the world.* The Church has a storied past with how it has used its finances to contribute to the greater work of God's inbreaking Kingdom. The earliest church sold possessions to give to the needy among them, to support traveling missionaries, and bring hope to the hopeless. This was more than an obligatory tithe; it was an offering of love to the greater work of God in the world. They didn't have a lot of the contemporary budget items like building maintenance, multi-staff salaries with benefits, et cetera. Their budget was lean in categories, but potent in purpose.

They say that "money is neither good nor evil; it only makes you more of who you already are." If you are a jerk, then with money you will be a really big jerk, if you are a selfless peacemaker, then the world will never forget your contributions of love. As an organic

network of churches, we have an opportunity to reimagine how God's money flows to contribute to his inbreaking Kingdom.

Here are some ideas to get started:

Use a Shoe Box. Each faith community can easily transform a small box into a place to keep a common fund. If, like Paul recommends the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:3), a community of Christians can contribute cash contributions into a common fund, there is easy access to mission funds within each community. Anytime there is a church member or neighbor in need, it only takes an email or a few phone calls to funnel that money to the needy among you. This cannot be considered a tax deduction (unless the money is contributed in an envelope with your name on it and it is recorded and sent to the Underground Network's Treasurer.)

Adopt a Communal Cause. God has sculpted you with specific passions, and he has brought you into your faith community for a reason. Maybe there is a common purpose that your community can rally behind: Sponsor a child in a developing country, invest in a local charity or community organization, start a garden, whatever your community feels called to contribute funds, time and talents to.

This is tax deductible when the organization is considered a non-profit. Usually each member will send separate checks to the Underground Network Treasurer and earmark the funds to be attributed to a certain cause.

Optionally, members could write a separate check directly to the organization to receive the deduction, or they could collect money and one member sends a check.

Contribute to the Network. There is a ministry expense checking account used by leaders in the Underground Network. It works much like any other church bank account; it is used by church planters in the network who have been issued a debit card to do ministry in the city. All their work is transparent, completely documented, and available for contributors to view. Money is generally divided up into local missions, administration, and benevolence. It allows the Underground Network to afford network gatherings, support part-time church planters, guest speakers, and develop training resources for leaders. All donations to this account are tax-deductible.

Private contributions. Of course, nothing is as precious to God as an emblazoned heart to privately give to observed needs. Passing cash to an

anxious neighbor, paying the light bill of a fellow church member or complete stranger is one of the great joys of the Christ-life. You are welcome to use the Underground Network account to receive a tax-deduction from this, but it usually hinders the face-to-face relationship of direct offering of love.

May God bless you and your community in discerning how to offer your time, talents, and treasures to God's great movement of love!

Isaiah 55:1 – *"Come, all you who are thirsty,*

*come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.*

Luke 16:13 – *"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."*

Acts 4:34, 35 – *There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.*

1 Cor 16:2 – *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*