

Strategically Generous?

By Andrew Warner

Ever find yourself thinking, "too many nonprofits ask me for money!" Or, "why does the church have so many offerings?" The number of ways that we can make a difference in the world can feel overwhelming.

Phil Buchanan, author of "Giving Done Right: Effective Philanthropy and Making Every Dollar Count," speaks to this situation, "Most givers start as charitable bankers – responding to requests without a lot of clarity about what they're trying to achieve."

Instead of responding to whatever request comes across our desk, Buchanan suggests adopting a strategic approach. I realized many of the donors whose generosity inspired me gave strategically.

Joe Pabst, a Milwaukee philanthropist, shared how he focused on organizations working in innovative and collaborative ways. One gift exemplified his approach. Joe knew people in abusive relationships sometimes stayed out of fear for what would happen to their pets if they left. He funded a partnership between a center for domestic violence survivors and the Humane Society to make it possible for people to create a safety plan for themselves and their pets.

Inspired by philanthropists like Joe, I began to articulate my philanthropic strategy. I built my plan around a

- Framework (what core values shape you?) – for our family, this was Jesus' Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25: 31-46), "as you do to one of the least, you did it to me."
- Context (what issues and areas do you pay attention to?) – beyond supporting our local congregation, the parable led us to focus on youth experiencing homelessness and development projects in Guatemala, the birth country of our children.
- Marks (what defines a faithful ministry or nonprofit to you?) – we prioritize nonprofits with a demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As you begin to think about your giving, create a list of all the organizations you gave to last year. Did you give everyone about the same amount? Did one organization stand out? Can you see a goal emerging from your pattern of giving? Does a particular scriptural story inspire your choices? Could your spouse or children explain your giving strategy?

Consider using the Season of Lent – a natural time of reflection – to develop or clarify your philanthropic strategy.