

NEVER AGAIN OR FOREVER AND EVER

Peter Bennett, Stewardship Committee

In my last article, I introduced the concept of planned giving, the new *Forever and Ever* brochure, and how it relates to our current stewardship journey. In this article, I want to look at some of the reasons why annual giving doesn't always translate into a planned gift.

The most recent research in Canada comes from an *Imagine Canada* report on a paper produced by Statistics Canada in 2004. It explored the nature of volunteerism and charitable giving among Canadian donors. Statistically, the research about why people don't give said this:

- 51% want money for future needs
- 46% want to spend the money elsewhere
- 47% don't like the way the request was made
- 46% think the funds will be used inefficiently
- 36% give directly to individuals
- 26% volunteer instead
- 15% can't find an organization worth supporting
- 9% don't know where to make a contribution.

Statistics aside, I place these reasons under the five Cs of Clarity, Confidence, Control, Complexity, and Conflict.

Clarity: Most of us have little idea of what it means to be financially independent. If you were to ask yourself how much of your current estate is surplus to your needs the answers might range from "none" to "I have no idea". Putting faith aside for a minute, we have little idea of our financial capacity, let alone our capacity for generosity. Assuming we have made the decision to make a planned gift, is there clarity from the recipient about what it will do with the gift?

Confidence: Another reason for not making a planned gift is confidence, or lack of it. Are you confident you have the financial resources to see you and your spouse through your retirement years? Are you confident the charity you wish to support will be good stewards of your gift? Will they be around when the time comes to realize the gift? Are you confident your family will understand your reasons for making the gift? Do you have the confidence that your advisors have your interests at heart? To express it more kindly, the lawyer who handles the sale of your house may know nothing about estate planning issues; or the competent tax accountant may not be in a position to give you advice on organizing your estate.

Control: The most effective estate or gift planning often involves the irrevocable transfer of assets to someone else, before you are ready to do so. In my own experience, the most difficult decision my parents had to make was to sell the retirement house they built less than 10 years earlier to enjoy their ‘golden years’. It occurred fully 12 years before my father died, and 17 years before my mother died. It turned out to be a wise decision to give up control (ownership) of real estate. Three years later, a sudden change in his medical condition would have forced their hand. Whether it is the family home, cottage, our invested assets, or business, we often struggle with the issue of control, to the point of paralysis. Conversely, how often do we hear of a will where the deceased is trying to ‘control from the grave’? Giving up or retaining control is a big reason why the gift is never made.

Complexity: Depending on the nature of your situation or estate, you can create quite an income for advisors who are trying to help you transfer your estate as completely as possible to your heirs, while paying the least amount of taxes. The complexity they create gets to the point of paralysis. Some of this may be the donor’s doing, but the complexity may result from failure to understand the nature of the planning being proposed, the lack of confidence in the charity or the remaining family to practice good stewardship.

Conflict: If you were to list the top five charities you donate to by dollar amount, and beside it list the top 5 you donate to by volunteer time, is there a conflict? Conflict takes many forms. It can be your internal conflict, between you and your spouse, your children, your family, and between competing charitable demands. Our response in the face of conflict is often to do nothing, and hope the problem goes away.

From experience in leading planned giving workshops, more often than not it is the disease that weakens us, or the hospital that cares for us in our last days that ends up as the recipient of any planned gift. ‘I’ve done my share, it’s time for the next generation’, is another reason why the church is not considered. ‘My family needs the money’ is another reason. After that, the reasons all relate to the five ‘Cs’.

Let’s look at these three reasons.

We are not in competition with the ‘secular’ world for your philanthropic dollar. I have an emotional attachment to the disease that threatened my life, but I need to balance that against the gift in Jesus Christ that has sustained me all my life. Your Christian philanthropy completes or complements your stewardship journey. It returns to God a gift of that which was given to each of us to use in its fullness.

Our journey as Christians begins with the gift of God’s spirit in baptism, and is built on the legacy of those who have gone before us. The introduction of the newest Christian in the baptism service requires that there be Christians who have gone before. Our baptismal

vows contradict the notion that my stewardship responsibility ends because another generation needs to assume its place. That is not what I promised!

There is nothing unbiblical about assuming responsibility for our families. However, there is something very biblical about looking beyond our families, to the people of God, the family of God.

Forever and Ever is a way of laying out an invitation to a more complete way of thinking about the meaning of wealth and how it continues your journey in faithfulness. In my next article, I will talk about some creative ways you can make your planned gift.

The information provided is based on current laws, regulations and other rules applicable to Canadian residents. It is accurate to the best of the writer's knowledge as of the date of publication. Rules and their interpretation may change, affecting the accuracy of the information. The information provided is general in nature, and should not be relied upon as a substitute for advice in any specific situation. For specific situations, advice should be obtained from the appropriate professional advisors.