

The Jesus School of Financial Management

I am struggling to become an apprentice in the Jesus School of Financial Management. My journey toward apprenticeship in this school is complicated by scarcity thinking, fear, and budget driven decision-making. Despite growing up in a family that lived generosity surrounded by others who gave unselfishly, I'm still a beginner.

My head tells me that resources are scarce, that money is hard to come by, and that there is never enough for my personal needs or for my local congregation or for the organizations I am trying to support from what's "left over" each month.

In the Jesus School of Financial Management those ideas are non-starters. With Jesus, there is always enough. With Jesus it's not about scarcity, but an overwhelming abundance of everything that really matters. With Jesus, the only thing you can really have is what you are willing to give away and the more you give away, the more you will have. Jesus is all about "first fruits" giving which turns my ideas about giving upside down. With Jesus, it is about getting my heart around an alternate financial reality. With Jesus all things are possible. With Jesus it is not about giving what I think I can or what I don't need anyway. With Jesus, it's not about meeting a budget but getting clear on the mission and suddenly finding that the money takes care of itself.

If you translate Jesus' call to discipleship into something like: "Come and join our congregation to help us pay the bills, don't be surprised if most people find that invitation totally resistible. On the other hand, if you or your community is caught in an act of foolish generosity or sacrificial advocacy, people will begin to show up around you, first because of curiosity and then will stay, because most people want to be part of something that offers real meaning and the chance to make a difference.

Let me share a story told by Saint Valerie Russell shortly before her untimely death in 1997. (Former Executive Director of the UCC's Office for Church in Society) Living on the edge of poverty as the only family of color in the small New England town where she grew up, Val talked about her family receiving the Thanksgiving food basket each year from her church. The year of the Ocean Spray Cranberry pesticide scare, when canned cranberry was suspect, the food basket her congregation delivered included 54 cans of cranberry sauce. Val used this story to begin a probing examination of the interface between racism, poverty, traditional charity, and justice in church budgets and our individual giving practices and in society.

Her words that day were my first invitation to become an apprentice in the Jesus School of Financial Management. She reminded me that it was not about the amount of my gift, because with Jesus the amount doesn't really matter because giving is proportional, and that all giving is multiplied by the wonder of a community giving together from their abundance not from their scarcity.

I have no doubt that many will notice that my ideas about giving and stewardship are a bit on the wild side, but then again, in the Jesus School of Financial Management, miracles happen whenever the followers of Jesus get a little wild when it comes to sharing!

Ron Patterson, Member, PNC Stewardship Committee