

**Our Growing by Faith Campaign:
An Evaluation of Its Effectiveness at the End of Year One**
Derek Gentle

First Baptist Church, Tallassee is in a capital campaign we call, *Growing by Faith*. We used the *Challenge to Build* program from Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, just as we did for our Phase I building three years before.

Challenge to Build, like other capital campaign programs, has members give over the course of three years - weekly, monthly, however the family needs to do it. There is a special emphasis to start it off with sermons, testimonies, newsletters, a brochure, and a banquet. This time we called it by a new name and added some new features.

The first new feature was to bundle our missions offerings with our building offering. The reason was that we were running back to back campaigns and everyone was tired of talking and hearing about money. Also, our missions offerings had been hurt somewhat by the competition. There is another benefit to bundling: with the building offering coming week-in and week-out, when you come to Christmas and the Lottie Moon Offering for International Missions. It is hard for most young families to buy presents for the kids, pay their tithe, their building pledge, and add a generous missions offering on top of that. This way, families could budget both their building and missions offerings through-out the year. We would hit them up for another offering at Christmas. We set 7.77% as the percentage of the *Growing by Faith* offering to go toward missions. This allowed for a significant, yet reasonable, increase going to International and North American Missions.

The second new feature was to promote tithing as the priority. We even told members that if they cannot both give to the building offering and to tithe, to tithe to general church budget--and not feel guilty. In fact, we had some tell us they would not pledge through *Growing by Faith*, that they needed to get their tithe squared away first. So, yes, we hurt our building offering somewhat, but we had 25 families mark their commitment forms to indicate they were committing to begin tithing.

Did the campaign work?

We didn't reach our goal of \$975,000. In fact, on commitment Sunday, the grand total came to only \$626,000. We had received advanced commitments of \$335,000 from 32 families; so, with 300 families in the church, I was prepared to see us hit a million dollars. So it felt like "black Sunday." But during the week, additional pledges came in. Three weeks later, the pledge total stood at \$814,495. In hindsight, perhaps we were shooting a little high. But it wasn't bad for a back-to-back campaign.

The first year of the campaign

By the end of the year one of the campaign, our pledge amount had fallen somewhat - to \$811,315. Sometimes younger couples get excited about the project and over-pledge. Sometimes things happen in some families' job situation. So they revise their pledges during the course of the campaign (generally after one of the regular

statements is mailed out). That is OK; part of the pledge itself is a promise to revise the amount should circumstances make it necessary. I would rather these families revise their pledges to a more workable number and fulfill their pledge than to feel trapped in an impossible pledge and give up on it altogether.

At the end of the first year, our receipts represented 47% of the \$811,315 pledge amount. The rule of thumb is that you will receive around 40% of your pledge amount in the first year.

This leads us to how we had to handle the missions portion of GBF receipts after we reached the one-third mark. Since we don't want the missions giving to be weaker in the second and third years, once we reached the one-third mark for missions, we transferred the missions "overage" to an interest bearing account. We will withdraw the monies in year two and year three and send it in. With the interest, our missions giving will increase each year.

Successes of the Growing by Faith Campaign:

1. Our pledge amount stands at \$811,315 through *Growing by Faith* over the next three years. That is more than the \$804,854.79 we have received in the *Phase I Challenge to Build* campaign. Eight-tenths of a million dollars is very significant!
2. While they indicated that they did not feel they could specify an amount, 23 families returned commitment forms indicating that they will give something to *Growing by Faith*.
3. This means that over six years, we will have received over \$1.5 million for new buildings.
4. 25 forms indicated a commitment to start tithing through the general church budget.
5. We have heard numerous reports indicating to there was a conscientious effort made by numerous families to ask God to reveal the amount He wanted them to give and not to "just put something down." This is indicative of spiritual growth!
6. Numerous individuals and families joined our church during a building and stewardship campaign!

What Worked Best

Testimonies are not a new feature, but I wanted to emphasize their importance. The more self-disclosing they are, the more helpful they are. Those who are transparent in their testimonies help their fellow church members as they consider what they will do in the campaign. One person shared how this time, they decided not to “just put something down,” as they had in the previous campaign, that the couple had really prayed hard to give as the Lord led them. This testimony about obeying God led to another person who had attended our church for quite some time to come for baptism; the individual had been saved as a young person, but had not followed through with believer’s baptism.

This leads to the fact that we added a prayer vigil in the prayer room. We were careful to explain how the building program is part of a much bigger picture. We are trying to advance across a “broad front.” So we asked our members to pray through the church directory (and not just about how much people would pledge, but for the entire spiritual situation in each family). And we felt it in our services!

We added a video where we interviewed newer members. We did a pre-interview, when people felt more at ease talking about what were going to say in the interview - with the camera running. That was where we got some of the best answers. Questions started with “What attracted you to this church?” With music in the background, that worked pretty well.

We purchased the *Time to Build* kit from www.pastors.com. These are materials used at Saddleback Community Church. We used the devotional booklet that came in it. It was very good. This kit is also where we got the idea for the video segment described above. The kit is now called, *Building for Life* and can be found at:

<http://www.pastors.com/pcom/stewardship/>

The banquet is another campaign feature that is not new. There is always someone who just doesn’t understand and questions the expense of the banquet. Well, I can tell you: it more than pays for itself. It certainly did this time!

Some things I would do better include:

I would use more space in the newsletters reminding members not to forget to take their past missions giving into consideration when calculating their pledge amounts. Some members forgot to do that and had to revise their pledge amounts.

Some people had problems with the bundled offering - mixing missions and building funds. These were generally people who had been in church for years, were good missions givers already, and prefer to determine their own amounts for each offering. Quite a few of these “sweetened” their missions offerings during the Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong seasons. On the other hand, the younger couples liked the bundling

because it helps them budget their giving. Most everyone went along with the bundling to be team players and to not rock the boat. However, I would spend more time explaining how this will help younger couples and newer Christians get started in supporting missions. I will add, after the first year, people understand now this concept and seem to appreciate the difference bundling makes.