

MAJOR GIFTS



Notes:

Introduction

Just as the body needs food, the soul needs meaning.

The meaning found in German concentration camps kept inmates alive. Meaning shapes human happiness. The ministry of midwifing major gifts is a ministry in which we help wealthy people to make meaning out of their lives and their money. We no longer tell them what we want them to fund. We now host meaningful conversations so that major donor prospects may come to see the overlap between what they want to happen in the world and what the church wants to happen in the world. Donors are trying to make meaning. Many very wealthy people are as unhappy as a human can become, simply because without meaning, the money is only security at best and isolation at worst.

In the second half of life, we begin to see a return to simplicity and an increased search for meaning. By mid-life, donors have been hurt enough or have hurt others enough to have had their hearts broken, and with that break, comes some measure of potential for new growth and meaning making. They begin to let go of things they fought so hard to attain, and as they do, they seek ways to make meaning of their lives. It is this meaning, and not building church-empires, that major gifts work is all about.

Like planned giving, which is a form of major gifts management (the last gifts), major gifts is not usually a campaign, but is rather a program. It is managed day in and day out in small increments, but measurable increments. Major gifts work in a diocese or a parish requires little more than a car, an index card with some top prospect names and contact info, a blank index card for notes after visits, a pen, some time (about a half day per visit -in town) and a phone. That is all you need. Computer programs which track how you interact with donor prospects are of value, but not essential.

The essential requirement of major gifts ministry is the willingness to set aside our anxieties about talking openly about money, and the willingness to schedule and make time to make personal visits. How do you know if you are doing good work in major gifts? If you have made three or more visits this week. Simple. You, your committee, your vestry, your bishop can easily see if you are doing your job, by seeing the list of visits or phone calls you made this week to deepen relationships and seeing the outcomes. Just as easily, no matter what you say about your work, they can see if the job has not been done. As can you.

This is wonderful work. In it we make friends, midwife longings, and build the church's mission.