

COMMITMENT #13

A STRONG CHURCH IS FINANCIALLY SUSTAINED, RESPONSIBLE, AND GENEROUS.

You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. —Philippians 4:15-17 NASB

DEFINITION

Financial sustainability varies based on model. A strong church may be established with multiple full-time staff, part-time staff, or bi-vocational/co-vocational leaders. Contextual and contemporary factors play a role. Strong churches have responsible financial systems in place which ensure accountability, transparency, and legality protecting against real or perceived mismanagement. Strong churches have a clear and sober budget, tracked monthly, along with clarity around the relative giving among members of the church. God's money is connected to our hearts so disciples must be equipped in gospel-driven financial generosity. Soma churches are partnering to see gospel saturation and give annually to the Soma central fund (3% of their church's annual budget), church planting (7% of their church's annual budget), and the poor (at the elders discretion). Some churches give as much as 26% to external planting and the poor. Each elder team must discern how the Spirit is leading them to steward the resources of the church.

QUOTES TO PONDER

To understand what really matters to a church, look past its vision statement, past its website, past its glossy brochures, and look at its budget. Follow the money. What a church treasures—how it spends money—reveals its heart, its values, and its priorities. —J.P. Dunlap

A philosophy of ministry—the guiding principles that determine a church's priorities and decisions—is tightly tethered to its budget. You cannot protect or change your philosophy of ministry unless you understand the budget's role in shaping it. — J.P. Dunlap

Does the work we are doing as Christian fundraisers testify to deep and certain trust in God's grace and abundance? Does it invite all those who are able in our communities to participate in God's work by appealing to their best qualities and their highest ideals and by asking them in appropriate ways to give generously and faithfully for a good and moral purpose? Does it demonstrate our commitment to seek, discern, and follow divine guidance, even when the course of action into which it is leading us seems curious or even foolish? —Jeavons and Basinger

A steward manages assets for the owner's benefit. The steward carries no sense of entitlement to the assets he manages. It's his job to find out what the owner wants done with his assets, then carry out his will. —Randy Alcorn



Budgeting is not ultimately about following the right rules. It's about right stewardship. We are all stewards as individuals—of our money, our time, our relationships, our skills—and as those involved in church budgeting, we bear a special additional responsibility to steward the resources contributed by God's people. —J.P. Dunlap

BIBLE STUDY

Read Matthew 25:14-30.

What is the main idea of this parable?

Where have you seen the small/big principle (faithful in small, given more) fulfilled in real time?

How does the tension between risk vs. fear/safety relate to stewardship in this parable?

How does this tension manifest currently with individuals and churches?

QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

What does your current budget say about what you value as a church?

What does your annual budgeting process look like? Does your budget reflect your stated philosophy of ministry (e.g. moving from Sunday to everyday)? How do you track your budget? Is the church financially sustained* with internal giving? (*Financial viability will vary depending on context [urban, international, wealthy suburb, among the poor] and the financial model, staffed or co-vocational.)



How and when does your church receive equipping on biblical stewardship? What does your content cover?

How and when are members challenged to invest financially in the mission of your church (e.g. membership process, sermons, DNA, etc.)? Giving is connected to the heart and one metric for evaluating faithfulness. How is the church doing on the following faithfulness metrics:

- Median/average giving per giving unit (family/single)?
- How has this number changed over the past three years?
- How many members are not giving or not giving regularly?
- What are some positive signs of faithfulness in your giving?
- What concerning trends do you see? What do you think is contributing to this?

What systems of financial responsibility and accountability do you have in place (e.g. two persons on each function for accountability, outside bookkeeping, etc.)?

How much are you currently investing in church planting? Do you have a working plan in place to get to at least 10% by the time you enter into the Soma Family? (3% to the Soma SLT's centralized work, 7% to individual church plants at your discretion)

What other insights would be helpful to better understand this area in your church?

COMMITTED TO ACTION

What's one thing you or your team could do this week to strengthen this area?

What would it take to see this commitment strengthened over the next year?

