

times, for example, have you been to a movie and found it hysterically funny -- with gales of laughter throughout the packed house. And the film was so much fun, you eagerly awaited its feature showing on TV a year or so later. Finally, the evening came. You parked yourself in front of the TV to watch. Later, when the show was over and you turned the set off, you were sorely disappointed; you had hardly chuckled once. 'Twasn't funny this time! What had happened? The film hadn't changed; you hadn't changed ... but, the fellow viewers you had in the movie house weren't there! The energy of assembly was gone. The feeling was not there.

(As an aside: The energy of assembly is so potent, in fact, that entire peoples in certain countries today -- South Africa among them -- are forbidden by law to assemble. In pre-Revolutionary America, we indeed were forbidden to assemble, but our great Constitution -- bless its framers 200 years ago! -- took care of that!)

But back to the topic at hand: With stewardship banquets, you get the full benefit of the wonder-working energy of assembly that is lacking in practically every other stewardship technique. And the opportunity to establish, in a very real sense, the feeling of joyous giving.

Let's face it: No one gives to the church solely on the basis of intellectual, rational, facts-and-figures thought. Giving does not start in the brain; it comes forth from the heart and from the soul. Giving is emotional and spiritual. Where there is no feeling there is no giving. And what you must demonstrate over and over in all your stewardship work is the feeling.

What exactly is the "feeling"? In a word: cheer. Or gladness. Or joy. Or thankfulness. All of these words are rooted in the Biblical antecedents in relationship to the act of giving.

But many of us in this present-day world of computers, software, spread sheets, data banks, bottom lines, stock indexes, arbitrage, and all the rest, tend to forget that giving, as opposed to earning or purchasing, is based on the "feeling," not on statistics and programmable thought processes.

My point is this: Show me a church that concentrates solely on facts, and figures, and budgets, and projections to raise its monies, and I'll show you a church that has -- and that will continue to have -- financial difficulties. On the other hand, show me a church with a cheerful, glad, joyous, thankful atmosphere, and I'll show you a thriving church.

Now, to come directly back to how this fits in with the planning of your overall stewardship program in general -- and your stewardship banquet in specific -- be cheerful about it! (For our purposes, we'll consider this word to be the distillation of all the other descriptive Biblical terms.) Starting today ... now ... this moment: be optimistic! Remember: giving does not arise out of grimness. And, attitudes are not as easily disguised as we would sometimes like to think! They show, believe me, they show!

Now that we're in the right frame of mind (I hope!), let's look at some more-or-less tried-and-true do's-and-don'ts about stewardship banquets ...

1. Do set the date just as soon as you possibly can. And start publicizing it now in your newsletter, in your Sunday morning bulletins, and on small posters or notices pinned up in the parish house or office. Even if they are only general "Circle the date and save it" statements, you'll ward off possible "didn't know about it in time" comments later.