



THANKING SIX TIMES: Donor Appreciation

StewardShop 103

Description

During its 55-minute duration, the workshop “Thanking Six Times” helps participants learn and practice some principles of donor appreciation. The workshop includes presentation, brainstorming and guided practice in the development of a “donor gratitude tool” by individual participants.

Audience

“Thanking Six Times” is aimed at pastors and other stewardship leaders who have a spirit of gratitude, but lack knowledge of effective techniques and basic principles about donor appreciation.

Skills

Participants in this workshop will gain insight into the rich variety of thanking methods, practice brainstorming ideas, and create a (new) donor appreciation tool for their home setting.

Materials

- Handout, “Thanking with Delight,” one per participant
- Handout, “Thinking Thanks,” one per participant
- Handout, “Construction Zone,” one per participant

Schedule

Presentation, “Delighting Donors”	(15 minutes)
Brainstorming Possibilities	(10 minutes)
Tool Construction	(10 minutes)
Peer Review	(15 minutes)
Wrapup	(5 minutes)

WORKSHOP DESIGN

Presentation, “Delighting Donors” (15 minutes)

Distribute copies of the handout, “Thanking with Delight,” one per participant. Using the content of the handout as the basis for your presentation, spend about ten minutes with participants, examining how “donor appreciation,”

expressed gratitude, or gifts-acknowledgement – all facets or features of thanking people for their gifts – might work in congregations. Participants can take notes on the handout, or in case they intend to use these materials as photocopying originals in their congregation, write on the reverse side or another page.

The presentation should include these matters:

- The opening statement, paraphrased from a Lyle Schaller presentation some years ago, “The major difference between the fund-raising work of major charitable organizations and that of congregations is that in charitable organizations donors are thanked for their contributions.” (You may need to repeat the sentence in order for participants to understand its full import.)
- Gratitude to donors becomes a sign of gratitude to God. Another way to say this: “My thanks to God are embodied in my thanks to you.”
- “Thanks” can be an empty word unless it is accompanied by appreciation – i.e., affirmation, curiosity, wonder, specific knowledge – of donors’ giving. (See Item 7.)
- You always offer your own thanks, but you also bring with you the gratitude of others throughout the church and the world.
- Items 1 – 4 are the most basic principles, and the easiest to undertake, as well as the easiest to forget!
- Creative methods in expressing gratitude are good, but should not get in their own way or call attention to themselves.
- Accuracy in small details is important. Names, addresses, the specific nature of the gift – each brings the thanks-giver close to the donor.

Provide about five minutes for participant reactions and comments to your presentation, using their participation as a segue to the next activity, brainstorming new possibilities and methods for expressing gratitude.

Brainstorming Possibilities

(10 minutes)

While you review the process of brainstorming, distribute copies of the handout, “Thinking Thanks,” which will help participants jump-start their idea-generating capabilities about methods of expressing gratitude. Provide about three minutes for a quick review of the handout, and then ask the entire group to engage in a process of brainstorming such as the one suggested here. (If the group is larger than 25-30, break into two groups, asking a co-leader to serve as the recorder of participants’ ideas.)

1. On newsprint or chalkboard, write the heading, "New or Effective Ways to Say Thanks."
2. Give the group some beginning prompts, such as "What makes givers feel appreciated way down deep?" or "What kind of gratitude-expression do lay leaders do best?" or "What's just 'so crazy it might work'?"
3. Write quickly, paraphrasing what participants call out. Keep the group focused away from clarifying comments, explanations, disagreements, note-taking or anything that deters from a rapid generation of ideas.
4. Take about four minutes for this exercise, and then another four for examining, categorizing or analyzing the list of ideas. (You can ask participants what they notice, what similarities and differences they notice among ideas, what broad categories seem evident, or what really excites them.) This is a good time for participants to quickly note what they want to remember as especially helpful ideas.

Post or otherwise display the ideas participants have generated so that the ideas can serve as reference for the next activity.

Tool Construction

(10 minutes)

Distribute copies of the handout, "Construction Zone," a worksheet that participants can use to construct their own "thanks-tool." Briefly characterize the various prompts – as starting places only and NOT "assignments to be completed." Ask participants to spend a few minutes "constructing" a tool for expressing gratitude to donors, by completing as many of the categories as fully as possible. Participants might refer to the other handouts and the results of the brainstorming.

During this time, circulate among the group members, answering questions and encouraging participants.

Peer Review

(15 minutes)

The next activity is a time of small group sharing. Divide the large group into groups of three participants, and direct each group to use this time to share and critique what the small group members have envisioned as "new tools for gratitude." (If members of the same congregation are attending as a group, this is a good time for them to collect and reflect on their wisdom.)

Emphasize the amount of time available, and the need for economy of language. Circulate among the groups to get a sense of what's being shared.

Wrapup

(5 minutes)

During the final five minutes, offer observations about especially helpful insights from participants. You might:

- Talk about recurring themes or questions you've heard.
- Share further resources about this subject.
- Review cautions and other wisdom about gratitude.
- Identify participants who might serve as especially skilled resources for the rest of the group. (Ask these individuals to list their name, address, phone, and e-mail address for reference.)
- Share your personal enthusiasm one more time!

If time remains, restate especially important principles or especially joyful possibilities. End the session by expressing your thanks in an especially delightful way!



THANKING WITH DELIGHT

Principles of Donor Appreciation

It goes without saying that donors and congregations benefit from heartfelt expressions of gratitude. Unfortunately, our gratitude sometimes *does* go without saying, and donors are left with a feeling that their congregation does not appreciate their generosity. The principles on this handout will help you sort out when and how you can say “thanks” to the generous people who support your congregation with money and time.

- 1. Thank donors continually.** Don't wait until “the end” of a program, event or process to thank donors. **BASIC IDEA:** When a gift is given, a donor is thanked.
- 2. Thank donors personally.** Formal and generalized public expressions of gratitude are necessary. So are informal, individualized words of thanks. Use every face-to-face encounter with members to thank them. Use telephone conversations as opportunities for personalized thanks. Add personally handwritten notes to form letters or general announcements. Use donor's first names where possible. Be specific about the reasons for your gratitude (e.g., the effect of the gift or your personal reaction to the giver's generosity).
- 3. Express your gratitude immediately and often.** In fund-raising enterprises, 24 - 48 hours is the preferred turnaround time between receiving the gift and acknowledging (or thanking) the donor. That same immediacy can be accomplished in congregations. Remember this fund-raising maxim about donor appreciation: Thank every donor seven times, in seven different ways. Check all details for accuracy.
- 4. Expand the circle of thanks-givers.** Those who do the asking are most likely the best individuals to do the thanking. But also consider the effect of a pastor's or key leader's personal gratitude. Think of the impact of the congregation's thanks when it comes from several different sources. Provide methods – e.g., pre-printed pew rack cards – that encourage congregation members to thank each other!

- 5. Plan thanking methods.** Think about the goals, resources and methods by which gratitude will be expressed. Include “thanking donors” as part of your overall plan to strengthen relationships in the congregation.
- 6. Keep your expression of gratitude fresh and lively.** Check the language of thank-you letters, consider new and engaging methods, ask congregation members how they prefer to be thanked. See where “delight” occurs among givers who are thanked.
- 7. Add “appreciation” to “thanks.”** Simple acknowledgment of a gift is a kind of thanking. So are simple words of thanks. But when you add a measure of donor appreciation – i.e., affirmation for the qualities of the donor, the donor’s motivation, or the donor’s hopes – the expressed thanks encourage and bless donors.
- 8. Add new methods of donor appreciation.** If possible, hold a “donor event,” – e.g., as simple as a special luncheon or as complex as a special trip – to share information about the part of God’s mission donors have helped fund. Consider small acknowledgment gifts – e.g., certificates, signed photos, home-baked cookies. Use e-mail and special mailings.
- 9. Gather and distribute thanks.** You serve as a “gratitude broker” when you gather the expressions of thanks you receive – from Churchwide officials, recipients of the congregation’s generosity – and redistribute them to donors, individually or as a group.
- 10. Pray thankfully.** During corporate worship, devotional time in meetings or in your own private prayer, bring your gratitude to God’s throne of grace.
- 11. Be ready to accept thanks.** Be prepared to receive back the gratitude of givers for the opportunities you have provided for them to live their lives in God’s services. Accept their thanks on behalf of the congregation, and acknowledge the love and appreciation of those who thank you!



THINKING THANKS

Ideas for Thanking Donors

Use the ideas on this handout to expand the possible ways in which your congregation thanks those who contribute to God's mission. Use the margins and empty spaces to add your own notes!

Use bulletin board space.

Find places where "Thanks to You" notes could be posted, for everyone to see. Keep the information current, and encourage all members to add their notes. Get donors' permission for their names to be displayed.

Give out whimsical awards.

As you thank volunteer workers, or team members, invent award categories and award items to add a touch of special appreciation for special work!



Write better letters.

Ask congregation members who teach or practice writing – e.g., high school English teachers – to assist you in crafting especially engaging thank-you letters.

Use your regular mailings.

Newsletters, special announcements, seasonal letters – all afford an opportunity for a post-script or hand-written message of thanks.

Focus on a group of donors.

For periods of time, direct special thanks to groups such as congregational leaders, youth, homebound, or quiet volunteers.

Distribute thank-you notes.

Mail or otherwise distribute thank-you cards, pens, or stationery w/ envelopes to all congregation members, with a challenge to "thank God by thanking others."

Make thank-you visits.

Institute a plan for informal visits of gratitude in people's home – or at their places of work – by congregational leaders or the pastor.



CONSTRUCTION ZONE

Worksheet

Use this worksheet to describe a possible plan for one tool or method by which donors in your congregation will be thanked. While you are planning, think how you might carry out those plans in the near future!

WHO WILL BE THANKED

WHY THEY WILL BE THANKED

SPECIAL WORDS AND PHRASES OF THANKS

WHO WILL THANK THESE GIVERS

HOW THESE DONORS MIGHT MOST WANT TO BE THANKED

A USUAL METHOD OF THANKS I MIGHT CHANGE SLIGHTLY

A NEW OR UNUSUAL METHOD OF THANKS I MIGHT USE

FIRST STEPS I WILL TAKE

1.

2.

3.

WHAT I HOPE WILL HAPPEN BECAUSE OF THIS

OTHER THOUGHTS
