

Orthodox Philanthropy

Stewardship Advocates

Volume 1, Issue 3

Fall 2003

Orthodox Give Millions to Secular Charities

One Orthodox philanthropist gives \$20 million per year to various institutions. In addition, during the past ten years the following gifts have been made by other Orthodox Christians:

Northeastern University - \$6 million
Metropolitan Museum of Art - \$13 million
Emory University - \$6.1 million
Tufts University - \$12 million
University of Illinois - \$1.5 million
Hampshire College - \$2 million
Grady Memorial Hospital - \$4 million
University of Pennsylvania - \$10 million
Brown University - \$35 million
Johns Hopkins University - \$2 million
Lawrenceville School - \$8 million
William Paterson College - \$10.5 million

The University of Iowa - \$10 million
Duke University - \$25 million
Mercy General Hospital - \$15 million
Pennsylvania State - \$2.7 million
Library of Congress - \$2 million
New York University - \$5 million
American Red Cross - \$15 million
Five universities in Iowa - \$5 million
Children's Hospital - \$3 million
Regional Trail Corp. - \$2.25 million
Drexel University - \$5 million

This is a fraction of the total number of gifts by Orthodox Christians of \$1 million or more, many of which were made anonymously or remain unreported. Beyond giving money Orthodox Christians have also chaired national fund raising campaigns and have served as chairpersons of the boards of universities, major hospitals and eminent cultural institutions.

Orthodox Christians have established not less than 50 family foundations. The four largest of these foundations have assets exceeding \$165,000,000, \$82,000,000, \$65,000,000, and \$48,000,000, respectively. Surprisingly, these are not Greek-American. Another of these 50 foundations makes grants exclusively to Orthodox 501(c)(3) charitable institutions in a self-conscious effort to advance the Orthodox faith and enhance Orthodox ministries of social service. Grants made by this foundation to Orthodox Christian projects include support of mission work, orphanages, seminaries, cancer research, scholarly publications, monasteries, libraries, humanitarian concerns, abused and neglected

Tenets of Fundraising

No solicitation is a failure. At the very least, information about the mission, goals, and objectives of the parish are communicated. One never knows what seeds are planted.

People give emotionally, not cerebrally.

A very good friend is often not the best person to ask for a gift – although he or she may be the best person to make the appointment.

Good stewardship allows the Orthodox Christian to stand before God in a state of profound gratitude.

Parishioners are less likely to give to a parish program if leadership is ineffective or governance and management is problematic.

When visiting with someone concerning a gift, practice the forgotten art of listening.

Consider the interests of the potential donor before asking for a gift.



2840 Broadway #153
New York, NY 10025-7816
Office: 212.316.3525
Cell: 347.831.1848
www.StewardshipAdvocates.org

children, prison ministry, the homeless, Orthodox iconography and the restoration of ancient churches. In the ten year period 1993-2003 this foundation made grants totaling \$4.5 million.

Recently, nascent efforts have been made to form an inter-Orthodox alliance of foundations and philanthropists whose interests include Orthodox institutions and ministries. This intriguing prospect, which has enormous potential to raise the standard of Orthodox philanthropy and positively transform the manner in which Orthodox institutions are governed and managed, must be vigorously supported.

Interestingly, despite cynical observations that Orthodox make large gifts to non-Orthodox institutions because these philanthropists seek a level of recognition not attainable in the relatively small world of American Orthodoxy, they do in fact fall into a national pattern for all donors of major gifts, irrespective of their ethnic or religious background. In a study reported in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* April 17, 2003, in the years 1995-2000, 502 donors each made gifts of \$10 million or more that totaled \$29.3 billion. Four out of every five of these philanthropic dollars went to the arts, education and health institutions. Forty-three percent went to colleges and higher universities. Only one percent went to religion.

Why do Orthodox Christians give millions to universities, hospitals and cultural institutions and relatively little to their own church?

The director of the study cited above, Gary A. Tobin, speculated that donors may be more inclined to give to large, prestigious organizations because they feel assured that their money will be used for its intended purpose, and because those institutions have invested in sophisticated fund-raising offices that specifically seek big gifts.

Philanthropists feel a moral and fiduciary responsibility to accomplish as much good as possible with their limited ability to give. This is consistent with the Orthodox view of good stewardship. Furthermore, philanthropists, like any other person, do not wish to be treated as the local ATM – walk up; put in the card; take out the money; turn and walk away. This may be the all-too-common method by which philanthropists are treated by representatives of



Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee

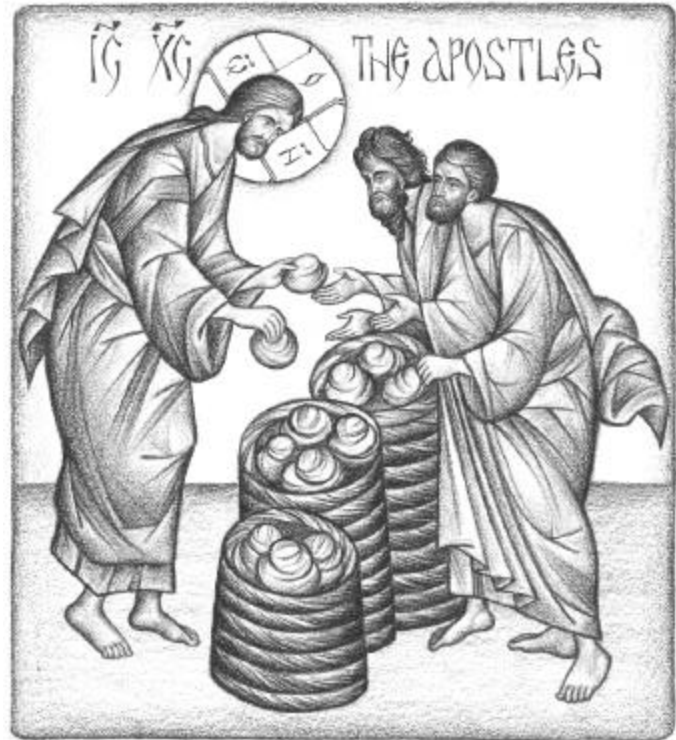
the church. This is certainly not the approach employed by the institutions listed at the beginning of this article. At the best, this is ineffective fundraising. At the worst, it is a callous disregard for the sacrament of the human person.

Orthodox Christians do make significant gifts to their church, though not nearly on the same scale as they do to secular charities. Leadership 100, a philanthropic organization of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, in which mem-

bers agree to contribute \$100,000 to a restricted endowment fund in support of Archdiocese projects and programs and occasionally, to charities sponsored by the Standing Conference of Orthodox Christians in America, lists over 650 members. In the past 10 years it is conservatively estimated that Orthodox churches, nationally and locally, have received between 40-45 gifts of \$1 million or more.

It may be useful to know that philanthropists invest their charitable dollars in nonprofit institutions in precisely the same way that they make personal financial investments in for profit businesses. Very few would make a sizeable investment in a company that consistently ran deficits, was poorly managed, had no vision for the future, trailed a history of accounting irregularities and exhibited a spotty record of successes.

If Orthodox churches and institutions wish to receive major gifts and the investment of trust that always precedes them, then hierarchs, governing boards, parish priests and the staff of Orthodox organizations must emulate the behavior of major charitable institutions and organizations with sound strategic planning, willingness to be accountable, financial transparency, good management, a compelling vision of the future, a careful plan for the incorporation of a major gift within the vision, a committed and advocating governing board, a demonstrated record of success and a professional approach to relationships with major donors. When this occurs, then it is likely that the church too, will begin to receive substantial gifts of this magnitude.



That which we give to God is
greatly multiplied and
comes back to us in
unexpected ways.

Note: this article is excerpted from a new publication by SVS Press entitled: *Good and Faithful Servant: Stewardship in the Orthodox Church*, edited by Fr. Anthony Scott. It includes articles by many theologians of the Orthodox Church.

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Stewardship Advocates
- Orthodox Fundraising
and Church Planning -
2840 Broadway #153
New York, NY 10025-7816