

September 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

The congregation where I have served since 2012, Peace Lutheran Church of Holbrook, Arizona, engaged the services of Pastor John Cross to conduct a Mission Forward (stewardship) campaign—and we're so pleased that we did! The personal, professional and effective services of Pastor Cross were just what we needed to move Peace from a plateaued congregation, constantly fretting about finances, to a more outward-focused, mission-minded congregation secure in our financial base.

Peace is not a large congregation nor a wealthy one. We average 50 at worship with over half of those people of retirement age. We are located in the tenth poorest county in the nation - Navajo County, Arizona. On the positive side, however, we had no debt and our building and grounds, while modest, were in good condition. We needed no significant funds for capital improvement.

We had depleted much of our savings for the ongoing costs of ministry, much of which was devoted to the pastor's (my) salary and benefits. Our congregation was growing, albeit slowly. (We had grown from ten to fifty at worship over the course of 7+ years.) Despite our small size, we were a fairly mature congregation, spiritually - with solid worship, good educational programs and sweet fellowship.

Most congregations our size would not have had the courage to engage a professional stewardship consultant and pay his fee - which to us seemed high although, in retrospect, was a bargain indeed. Having Pastor Cross come for an initial visit, during which he preached the Sunday sermon and engaged with our people before and after worship, was key. John - and I call him by his first name now because he's become a friend - is a very relational person, as well as a spiritually-grounded pastor. There's no high-pressure sales pitch with him.

Stepping ***Forward In Faith***, for that's what we called our Mission Forward Campaign, we signed an initial contract with John, not for the whole business - but for an "assessment" phase. We wanted to go slowly and prayerfully. John came and spent three days with us, meeting with each of our members/friends privately in our classroom. As I recall, every single one of our folks - with the exception of one person who was out-of-town, and John talked with him later by phone - talked with John for about 45 minutes. This was simply a getting-to-know-you session with some sharing of dreams for the congregation. John took careful notes and, later, helped our ***Forward In Faith*** Leadership Team (myself and three others) draft a Case Statement, using many of the comments made by our people during their interviews with him. The Case Statement provided the rationale for the campaign and specified how we would use any money raised.

After the Case Statement was drafted and disseminated, we called a special congregational meeting to decide whether or not to proceed with the campaign. The vote was overwhelmingly positive, but not unanimous. (In the end, we only lost one couple because of the campaign - and these folks were disaffected anyway. Even the few others who voted against the campaign, in the end, became enthusiastic supporters of it.) We signed another contract with John to proceed with the campaign and he made payment easy, allowing us to pay him the balance due over the course of six months.

Now the real work began for John and for all of us. The involvement of as many people as possible is a key to the success of a campaign like this, especially in a small congregation. People need to catch the vision, engage in the process and share the excitement. Six teams were established to work various segments of the campaign. There was the Events Team, the Phone Calling Team, the Prayer & Spiritual Focus Team, the Media Team and a couple of others. I worked hard to see that as many of our people as possible got involved - and they did!

Before I share with you the exciting results of our Mission Forward campaign, let me tell you about the other benefits, besides financial, that came to us as a result of our ***Forward In Faith*** campaign. The most significant other benefit is that we grew a lot spiritually. There is a strong spiritual emphasis to John's stewardship work. A short Bible study provided the foundation for the work we were about to do. Our Prayer & Spiritual Focus Team organized a 12-hour Prayer Vigil over Good Friday which we found very meaningful. Most Sundays of the three-month campaign there was either a written or verbal Mission Moment during worship. This gave many of our members an opportunity to share a piece of their faith story - good practice for them and good for the rest of us to read/hear. One of our members with literary skills put together a devotional booklet, written by our members and supplemented with contributions from others, which gave us additional spiritual nourishment during the Lenten season. It seemed as if our faith became even more evident during the time of our campaign.

Another benefit of the campaign, besides financial, was the renewed sense of fellowship - and fun - created by it. There were several special events that were planned to bring focus to the campaign - and these were highlighted with special meals, music and even a very funny joke - sharing time by one of our members. As our people worked and prayed, worshiped and fellowshiped together during this time, we grew closer as a church family. It was great to see and experience!

Our "stretch" goal was to raise \$150,000 via ***Forward In Faith*** - and this over-and-above our regular giving. When all was said and done, our pledges for the three-year campaign has totaled \$135,000 - and, because of good follow-up procedures, this amount is still growing, I'm confident that by the end of the giving period, we will have met and even exceeded our goal.

John's expertise taught us many ways of giving beyond just cash. The immediate gifts of cash, however, gave us such freedom, not just in our General Fund, but has allowed us to begin to tithe (we had only been giving away 4.5% of our income before), start to replenish our savings account (for future rainy days) and to pay for smaller immediate expenses (e.g. repair/painting of our signage). Of tremendous significance, our vastly improved financial status, along with our enhanced spiritual lives and renewed sense of fellowship, allowed Peace to grow to yet another level of mission in our community and beyond.

You should know that monies generated by this campaign did not reduced the giving to our General Fund. In fact, we saw our General Fund hold its own during the summer months, when there's historically been a drop in giving, and, overall, even grow a little bit. While most of the money for ***Forward In Faith*** came from our own membership, I reached out to many of our former members and friends, most of whom responded with a gift or pledge of some kind. This was very encouraging. There was also a fairly large bequest dedicated to the campaign from one of our dear

members who died during the course of the campaign. Unless your congregation is significantly different than Peace, you needn't worry that engagement in a special campaign will reduce the giving to the General Fund. Our experience has been just the opposite.

John has kept in touch following our Celebration Sunday, providing practical ideas, personal video clips, and many phone calls and emails. He did not just walk away, rather, he continues to instruct and encourage us throughout the follow-up process. There is also a Thank You Team which sends personal notes of appreciation to all our donors. While no longer on-the-scene, John continues to stay in touch with the people of Peace, seeing the campaign through to its very end.

I have no reservations whatsoever about recommending my friend and "partner in the Gospel" (Philippians 1:5), John Cross, as a stewardship consultant. Some might say, "We can do the same thing without paying a consultant a big fee," but I seriously doubt that this would ever take place. It takes an outsider - one with passion, experience, wisdom and time - to get the job done. Pastor John Cross is such a leader.

Feel free to contact me should you have any questions or what to discuss any matter relative of Peace's campaign or John's leadership. My personal email address is jeffjohnson8454@gmail.com and my cell number is 928-421-9061. My God bless you richly as you discern how to best steward His manifold graces.

Jeff Johnson

Pastor Jeff Johnson