

Chapter 3

Establishing a Budget: The Dollars & Sense

Now that we've been doing [our Christmas outreach] for a while, people in our church give weekly during the offering or online to this project throughout the year.... It's pretty amazing how people will donate their time to help build scenes or make costumes.

—Fran Emmons, GraceWay Bible Church, Hamilton, NJ

Believe it or not, finances are not the deal-breaker for your Christmas outreach. Sure, it would be fabulous if your church budget held a line item for the occasion; money is necessary to pull off a community-wide event. However, the first question shouldn't be, "How are we going to pay for it?" On the other hand, neither should the assumption be, "We'll just do it and worry about the money later." May the Giver of all good things provide us with wisdom as we think about what it means to be good stewards of what He has freely and graciously provided.

You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year. And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. Deuteronomy 14:22–23 (ESV)

With some entrepreneurial effort, people using their natural gifts and skills, and a spirit of stewardship, your church can embark on Re-creating Christmas and not break the bank. As a matter of fact, most of the churches interviewed began with sparse funding, and as the energy grew, so did the financial commitment. Of the few churches who started with a larger budget, they chose to spend money in ways other churches would not necessarily have to spend.

Gayle Shriner, a volunteer from Discovery Baptist Church in Gig Harbor, Washington, relates, "We had zero budget our first year, so we thrived on whatever people would donate." Later, the church would establish a line in their budget, as deacon David Christensen attests: "We made all our costumes, used tents for buildings, and built structures. Props either were purchased or donated over the years as we grew in presentation. We budget \$2,000 per year for this event and hold to that fairly close. All cast and labor for set up and cleanup is donated time."

Fran Emmons from GraceWay Bible Church in Hamilton, New Jersey, said the 350-member church she attends prioritized a quality sound system because they held a gathering at different places throughout the evening: "I looked at everything we needed and wrote it down.... Initially, our budget was pretty steep because we rented a sound system. Our church eventually purchased its own sound system, so that helped our bottom line tremendously."

Many churches will not need to prioritize a sound system as GraceWay chose to do; nevertheless, organizers of the outreach will need to think about resourcing several aspects of

the event. The remainder of this chapter outlines those areas and offers creative ways of saving money.

Costumes

- Visit thrift stores, especially on half-price days, for decorations, sheets, towels, and fabric for costumes, and if you're fortunate, even tents and tables.
- Ask the local school's family science department or 4-H club to help sew the costumes.
- Order fabric by the bolt through a local fabric store who has the flexibility to sell it at wholesale price. Some local stores might even be willing to donate the fabric or offer it at cost.

Structures

- Ask local businesses to donate their pallets, as they usually dispose of these wooden items. You can tear them apart to build storefronts, homes, and the nativity stable.
- Look through online garage sale sites for individuals who want to sell lumber, canopies, or tents. They might be willing to negotiate their price if they know the reason their goods are being used.
- Ask churchgoers to borrow or donate tents and canopies.
- Ask the local Boy Scouts to donate their time and help secure the structures.

Decorations

- Cover the tops of canopies with donated hay from local farmers.
- Ask floral shops for their throw-away greenery.
- Schools are oftentimes willing to provide decorations from their staging resources.
- Visit thrift stores and garage sales.
- If families and small groups volunteer and adopt a scene, they can bring decorations they already own, or they may be willing to purchase decorations for the church to keep.
- For a number of the storefronts, the owners will already have what they need; for example, the potter can bring his own potting wheel and items he already has made to outfit his shop.

Lighting

- Hold your event during daylight and avoid lighting issues altogether.
- If your event is indoors in your fellowship hall, multi-purpose room, gymnasium, or classroom, lighting will not be a problem.
- If you're holding your event outdoors, lighting becomes a bit trickier, but certainly solvable. Ask people from your congregation who work in construction or who camp; they might offer lighting services and expertise.
- Set up luminaries along outside walkways made with lunch-size paper bags, sand, and candles.
- Inexpensive, small spotlights or shop lights can be purchased at big box stores.
- Hang star-shaped Christmas lights throughout the area.

- Warner Press offers a free online tutorial on how churches can create lighting that also mimics a campfire. **You receive the URL with the purchase of this book.**
- Tiki torches are always an inexpensive option, but live fire can be a danger in public events. Proceed with caution.
- A simple online search yields other numerous, inexpensive lighting possibilities.

Kids' Activities

Most of the kids' activities are incorporated into Re-creating Christmas; however, a separate activity area can be set up for children to work on projects. Also, activities can be part of a take-home package for families.

- Ask a local woodworker to cut out ornaments from inexpensive wood.
- Purchase wooden clothes pins and have someone donate scrap pieces of fabric to make a clothespin nativity scene.
- Gather pine cones for students to paint or attach bird seed to.
- As a part of the food offerings, allow kids to decorate their own sugar cookies. Ask churchgoers or the high school family science department to bake sugar cookies and make frosting; purchase cookie decorations from a bulk store.
- Warner Press offers free downloadable templates for more activities. **You receive the URL with the purchase of this book.**

Food

- Purchase dry beans or lentils to make an inexpensive soup. Lentils were a readily-available source of protein during Bible times. You can find a lentil soup recipe on the Warner Press website. **You receive the URL with the purchase of this book.**
- Local grocery stores oftentimes will donate or sell items at a reduced price, when purchased in bulk.
- Naan bread, a seasoned flat bread, is fairly inexpensive to purchase or can be homemade.
- Like the kids' activities, some of the booths offer food such as bread, fruit, and cheese. Purchase these items in bulk or ask small groups or families to donate to the food fund.
- Oftentimes, the individuals in charge of a particular marketplace booth, cart, or storefront are willing to purchase their own supply of food they're "selling" at the outreach.

Advertising

Advertising just might be the biggest expense for your Christmas outreach, but this piece of the puzzle definitely should not be skipped on. Whether or not we want to admit it, in order for people to trust that your event will be excellent and worth coming to often is determined by the excellence of the communication behind Re-creating Christmas.

- Download free artwork for invitations, newspaper advertising, and posters when you purchase this book. The design work has been done for you; the only cost you incur is the printing cost.
- Equip volunteers with other ideas to reach out to visitors, as outlined in chapter 11.

- Leverage social media to get the word out.

So many people donate their time and energy! God just provides the people every year. Even people from other churches come in and help. I don't seek them out, but if they call and ask if they can have a part, we give them a part. It's been exciting to meet pastors who bring people from their churches to view the event as well.... One thing that has amazed me: when we started to do our event, it was to reach the unsaved. That was my main purpose, but it turns out, along with that, it has helped stabilize our church attendance, and the people inside our church have grown closer together....

It takes brilliance to pull off such an organizational feat. This is how I know without a doubt that this event is a work of God!

—Fran Emmons, GraceWay Bible Church, Hamilton, NJ