



December 1, 2008

Dear Friend,

In our conversations around the state, we hear concerns about this uncertain economy and how it will affect giving to our churches. The assumption on the part of many seems to be that until the economy stabilizes, a decline in giving is inevitable.

We think this may be a mistaken impression about giving and here is why:

1. Looking back over the last several decades, our nation has suffered numerous economic recessions. While none may be quite as dramatic as the one we are currently experiencing, this country has, from time to time, lived with economic uncertainties. The 40-year history of philanthropy during these recessionary times indicates that even when adjusted for inflation, annual giving to religion has only declined by an average of less than one-tenth of one percent.
2. We believe this current economy, and the stories that are coming from it, may present congregations with unique opportunities to positively influence giving. During difficult times, people, of course, are mindful of their own economic realities, but they are also more attuned to the difficult realities of others. We have observed that congregations who effectively communicate the palpable connection between giving and lessening the hardship of a neighbor are very successful in their fundraising. Especially during this season of giving, we encourage our leaders to be *bold* in telling the stories of the needs of others by sharing tangible ways in which our giving directly impacts lives.

Recognizing the tension between leading boldly and managing effectively, we offer the attached paper from The Lake Institute on Faith & Giving, an organization we have partnered with to help create “cultures of generosity” in our congregations.

These are, indeed, difficult economic times. But hardship can serve to strengthen our community of faith by reminding us that we are not governed by financial markets but by generosity and grace. And as always, we have choices in how we respond to these times. One of those is to choose an attitude of abundance versus an attitude of scarcity. The Christian faith is grounded in the abundance of God’s love and our response is to love and serve our neighbor. Many people in our communities need the church right now to be at its very best. We encourage you to go and lead your congregation *boldly* toward that attitude of abundance, love and hope.

Our very best wishes and Christmas greetings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "TOM".

Tom Locke  
President