

## Are You Generis? Probably Not. But Your District Might Be.

A look at fund raising and the theology behind it.

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Times are hard. The money just isn't there, and synod districts are having to cut back, resorting to all sorts of ways to come up with cash. Why not hire a professional to raise the money for you? It works for other non-profits. Okay. Let's do it. Enter *Generis*.

Generis is a consulting firm that works with "churches and Kingdom focused non-profits in matters of stewardship, generosity and fundraising," and it is currently advising some of the districts of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Their mission: "Accelerating generosity toward God-inspired vision." They provide things like Generosity Coaching, Generosity Audits, Stakeholder Summits, Annual Fund Development, Lifestyle Stewardship Campaigns, and assessments to create "a culture that gives out of it's [sic] abundance and sustains giving in times of drought." They see "changed hearts toward a lifestyle of generosity, rather than [sic] a moment of 'feel good' giving that may wither and fade." (Unless otherwise noted, all quotes come from [the Generis website](http://www.generis.org).)

Generis has a large and diverse group of consultants, including many pastors, as well as laymen with a great deal of business and fundraising experience. There are at least nine pastors, four of whom are Baptists, one Methodist, at least one non-denominational, and several of unknown denomination. The laymen on staff include three Certified Fund Raising Executives, authors, MBAs, as well as several other business backgrounds. Also included is one Lutheran, Mr. Larry Ulrich, who served as the Director of *People Ablaze!* for the Northern Illinois District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, as well as the district's Lutheran Church Extension Fund Vice-President.

If you can speak the language of the [Transforming Churches Network](http://www.transformingchurches.org) (TCN), you'll feel right at home with Generis, because they both have as their goal *transformation*. Generis consultant Dave Anderson [sums it up](#):

I have a passion for assisting churches in resourcing their financial needs through developing a culture of generosity. But even more than that, I have a passion for helping church leaders catch a vision for how contagious generosity can completely transform their church's culture.

The transformation process begins with the leader casting a vision, generating enthusiasm and commitment to unity around the new goal, and then monitoring to make sure the vision is being carried out and the goals are met by ensuring accountability.

Pastor Matt Summers uses the lingo of transformation in his comments in the opening video on the [Generis home page](#):

For our staff, our generosity initiative has *really* created a great sense of alignment and togetherness, and unity, and really more than anything else that we've done in the life of our church, looking at generosity has caused us to get together and to move forward together as leadership.

You can see the transformation process rising to the surface in the comments of their consultants on the ["our people" page](#). Note again the consistent argot. Many of their thought processes aren't built on Scriptural truths (though you'll see the occasional Bible verse), but around business strategies:

Julie Bullock, CFRE:

People ask all the time the 'secrets' to raising money. There's no secret really. The key lies in a perception shift we **MUST** make. Money doesn't fund vision, it **FOLLOWS** vision. If you don't have any money, then you might not have any vision big enough to demand that money!  
It is my passion to help mobilize leaders and organizations to experience the joy that comes from a generous life....

Rusty Lewis, CFRE:

Every initiative requires its own uniquely creative approach to ignite passion for a project that will ultimately drive ministry expansion and effectiveness. From the first meeting to final completion, I help leaders and organizations create strategies that promote awareness, build momentum and stimulate action....

Craig Loscalzo:

...Together we will vision ways to produce the greatest Kingdom impact your church can have for today and tomorrow.

Brad Leeper:

For any generosity and giving culture to succeed, three key questions must be answered: 'Is God in this plan? Have church leaders cast a vision for the project that exceeds the brick and mortar story? And does each church member understand the sound, biblical basis for engaging in joyful

giving in support of that vision?’ Creating an environment where individuals ask God what He wants them to do—in light of what He has called their church to do—is my ultimate task.

Rev. Bob DeWaay breaks through the pious outer shell of these sorts of programs and gets to the creamy center where the real content lies:

We saw that in the New Testament, true unity is gospel-centric. The false unity that is being promoted today is not like that. In most cases it is unity under a religious leader’s “vision.” What is meant by the term “vision” is not the same as the Biblical usage. It is used in a modern marketing sense and relates to the leader’s mental image of what he wants the product and corporation to be like in the future.

The unity that is necessary to create a church molded from the mental image of a religious leader’s dream of an optimal future is unity under the religious corporation’s vision. To fulfill the dream each piece must work together and each piece must contribute to the purposes determined by the visionary leader. The wisdom of business gurus has been mined by Christian leaders who have created religious versions to help pastors market the church. ([Critical Issues Commentary, May/June 2005](#))

Let me point out that there’s not necessarily anything wrong with using business techniques to accomplish goals, and I’m convinced the Generis consultants (which they call *strategists* or *guides*) all genuinely want to help districts, congregations, and individuals to be good stewards, yet there’s something unseemly about the whole thing. The transformation process is not really a neutral process, and can be rather manipulative. (For a more extensive discussion on transformation, see “The Transforming Churches Network: Part 5, Whose Vision Is It?” [here](#).) More importantly, the theology behind this program, what little there is of it, doesn’t stem from a correct understanding of our sacramental life in Christ. A couple of quotes will illustrate this point.

Don Linscott, a founding partner of Generis says in his [biographical video](#)

...I become kind of a stewardship evangelist. At Generis we talk about a second conversion. We’re really talking about those Christians, those people who know Christ and walk with Him, but then they come to learn something about giving and cheerful giving and *generous* giving, and how it is almost a second conversion, and how it transforms their lives.

On the “our people” page he mentions

Lifestyle Stewardship recognizes that God’s primary interest is in people, not pocketbooks. At the same time, people’s devotion to God is always

reflected in the stewardship of daily life. Stewardship is the intersecting point between the Lordship of Christ and the Lifestyle of the Christian.

If your measuring stick for faithfulness is measured in the units of the stewardship of daily life, the first questions you've got to ask yourself are "Am I devoted enough? Did I give enough?" And the honest answer is "no." The intersection between Christ's Lordship and our lifestyle intersects in two places, one historical, the other contemporary. The historical intersection of Lordship and lifestyle occurred on the cross. Christ's death on the cross paid for our "lifestyle" of sin. The contemporary intersection of Lordship and lifestyle occurs in *repentance*. What the Lord requires of us is a broken and contrite spirit. He is primarily about *giving*, not *receiving*. It is *He* who is the giver, not us. We are primarily receivers. The historical cross, where Christ bought our salvation, is carried over to the contemporary font and altar, where He *gives* us what He previously purchased, forgiveness, life, and salvation. The water and blood which flowed from His side at the cross now cleanse us in Baptism and feed us in the Sacrament of the Altar. Our giving, our *generosity*, is secondary. It is not the glue which holds congregations together. (After all, God, being God, doesn't need *anything* from *us*. It is our neighbor who needs our help.) Without this sacramental understanding, your focus naturally drifts to your own good works. Consultant Joe Brand opines:

As a follower of Christ, I must learn to conform every area of my life to the contours of the Gospel. I cannot pretend that my life is my own. I am bought with a price. Nowhere is this more challenging than in my stewardship of resources. How I invest the talents and treasures of God for His kingdom reveals much about my conformity to the Gospel. At Generis, we strive to deepen the understanding of churches and their members around this basic truth.

We can certainly agree with him that we are bought with a price, and a stewardship emphasis isn't necessarily bad, but an overemphasis on how we invest our talents and treasures may turn a Spirit-filled response to the Gospel into a prideful movement of the Law. While Christians need to hear both Law and Gospel, it is the Gospel which should predominate, and the Gospel which should have the final word. When the Law serves up the final word, you run the risk of creating Pharisees. (See the graphic highlighting the Generis core values on their ["who we are" page](#), where the young woman exclaims "I became of Christian in 1992, I became a generous Christian in 2008.")

When Generis is invited into a district, they do an initial evaluation of the district, oxymoronically called a "[Generosity Audit](#)." Their report looks remarkably similar to the structure of a TCN congregational consultation report, complete with affirmations, concerns, and recommendations. Unlike the pious-sounding phraseology on their website, the Generosity Audit is business through-and-through. No Bible verses, references to "Mexican snack food theology" (from the video), or allusions to "trusting in the Lord," just talk about transforming congregations, market strategy, organization optimization, and revenue accountability to "accelerate generosity." It's all about the

money. The fancy label on the can may appear churchly, but inside, it's the same business stock puréed with a cup of Law.

Taking a look at stewardship can be a good thing when properly defined. Unfortunately, in the case of Generis, one gets the feeling that generosity is dangerously close to become their material principle. Who or what is driving the verbs? Is it Jesus Christ? No, it's *generosity*. "Contagious generosity can completely transform their church's culture." Church leaders are called upon to "vision ways to produce the greatest Kingdom impact;" the transformative power of the Word through the means of grace is slid to the back burner. Serving your neighbor in love through the course of your normal day is clouded over by an overemphasis on being generous. And behind it all is the cold hard Generosity Audit, which is focused on the bottom line. When districts initially look at a program like this, it isn't done so that their "stakeholders" are brought closer to Christ, it's done so that their stakeholders come closer to meeting the budget. Dollars come first; God-talk is tacked on at the end.

The forgiveness Christ bought for us on the cross is applied like a salve to suffering souls, crushed by the weight of the Law. Our failure to be "generous" enough, to be "earnest" enough, to be "conformed" enough – they are all washed away in Holy Absolution. We are free from the coercion of the Law, free to joyously go about our lives, good works flowing from the Gospel as we serve our neighbor through our vocations. Without this critical insight, we become slaves to a program.

What I've said is not meant to reflect uncharitably on the guides at Generis. No disrespect is intended. The truth of the Gospel *must* trump all other considerations. Don't let your district cook with the wrong ingredients. It's time to put an end to programs and movements based on questionable, non-Lutheran theological principles. Be a Lutheran.

Original graphic credit: Dane Homenick