



How a Car Dealership Helped Fuel the Work of a Christian Seminary

What would you do if you could give more without ever touching your bank account?

Fran McGowen did just that by adopting a charitable strategy that allowed him to use his car dealership to give 40% more to ministry. By intentionally making his gift before he sold his business, major tax burdens were removed in the process, which allowed him to increase what he could give to the work God had laid on his heart. It was a win-win for Fran and the Kingdom.

So, what led to Fran being able to give away his business to benefit God's work?

From Car Dealer to Disciple Maker

In the early 1980's, Fran McGowen was working hard to run a car dealership he had inherited from his late father when he received an invitation to a men's Bible study that would change the trajectory of his life. There, he heard the gospel, accepted Jesus as his Savior and Lord, and formed a pivotal relationship with the man who was leading the study, a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary.

This relationship was key to Fran's spiritual growth as he would later enroll in classes at the seminary in a season where he took time away from his dealership. His intention was simply to learn more about his faith, but the theological training was transformative. It granted Fran a stronger connection with the Lord and a new outlook on both his family and career.

Soon, God gave Fran the vision for a new business - a car dealership that was less dependent on manufacturers, more customer-friendly, and one where Fran's beliefs and business could become integrated.

The dealership found early success and became profitable within a year and a half. Over 16 years, it grew to 5 locations in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. For Fran, however, the most exciting part was seeing the business as a way to serve God and others. "Starting in 1983, we began placing a Bible in the glove box of every car sold," Fran said. "The Bible was just explosive to me, as I had never had one before coming to Christ."

Using Business to Fuel Gospel Movement

From those early years of success with the business, Fran and his wife Polly knew they wanted to begin practicing generosity with the resources God had blessed them with. They increased their giving year after year but were seeking a way to make a greater impact.

Following a season of prayer, Fran and Polly felt drawn to the ministry that had radically changed Fran's life: Westminster Theological Seminary. Fran had experienced firsthand how the seminary helped people experience the transformative power of the gospel and the relationships he had maintained over the years granted him added perspective into its work locally and around the world. Desiring others to experience this same hope and freedom in Christ, Fran and Polly began more intentionally supporting Westminster and aimed to deploy their resources to partner in the seminary's mission to spread the gospel.

As Fran's heart for supporting gospel movement grew, he came to understand the power of giving complex assets, instead of just cash, to reduce taxes and give more. So, when it came time to sell the dealership, Fran decided to give a portion of his stock to a donor advised fund, which provided him with a larger income tax deduction, reduced capital gains tax burden, and more charitable dollars to support the important work of Westminster and other gospel-centered ministries.

"Asset giving helps you give more and increases what your heart wants to give," Fran says. "Giving the stock multiplied what I was able to give by 40%." Referring back to his family roots in the Pennsylvania coal mines, he believes that the calling to be a generous Christian is like "stoking the fires" of gospel work. "Giving assets is like getting a bigger shovel-full going into the locomotive engine," he says.

A Legacy of Generosity

Fran and his family continue to write their legacy of intentional generosity through donor advised funds at The Signatry. Fran has developed lasting friendships within The Signatry team and describes his relationships as "marked by absolute trust." The Signatry has helped Fran in structuring his giving, and he leans on them to provide charitable solutions when opportunities for Kingdom impact arise. "I know that when I have quandaries, I can call The Signatry and be helped. We use The Signatry for your prayer, your competence in charitable giving, and the tools that you offer us."

Fran often shares about the opportunities to maximize generosity through The Signatry and advises others wherever possible to think big for Kingdom causes.

"Just as I used a lot of ingenuity and strategic thinking to acquire resources, so God has impressed upon me in using those things in the deployment of those resources, and I am prayerful that He will fulfill His purposes for me," Fran says. "I hope it includes becoming a better, wiser, more generous giver."

Take Your Next Steps

Maximizing donor resources benefits both major donors and the ministries they support. Through The Signatry's Major Gift Accelerator program, higher education institutions can discover potential major donors in their network and understand how to efficiently maximize gifts through the process of accepting asset donations. To learn more, contact us at info@thesignatry.com.

For more information, visit www.thesignatry.com.