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*Sunday November 30, 2014*

## **The amazing appeal of crowd funding**

By Jim Taylor

The ALS organization hit the jackpot. Latest reports say that people dumping a bucket of ice water over their heads contributed somewhere around \$16.2 million to ALS research. Even President Obama got involved the “ice bucket challenge” on the White House lawn.

It’s a phenomenon called “crowd funding.” Instead of seeking support from a few wealthy individuals, or from banks and charitable foundations, crowd funding solicits small contributions from the general public, using electronic networking and social media.

According to the Wikipedia, the first example of crowd funding occurred 15 years ago, when Mark Kelly of the English band Marillion used an Internet campaign to raise \$60,000 to finance a U.S. concert tour.

Since then it has become a favoured fund-raising method for charities, non-profits, and occasional nutcases.

George Zimmerman, the white vigilante in Florida who shot black teen Trayvon Martin, raised \$500,000 by crowd funding to pay for his legal expenses. Also, apparently, his living expenses.

Crowd funding can be hard work. Public broadcasters and alternative news networks have to run constant appeals to keep dollars rolling in.

## **Not a new idea**

Many think of crowdfunding as a new phenomenon. As a concept, it has though, been around for centuries. The novelty lies in the current technologies and the mindset it taps.

In a sense, every public stock offering has been a kind of crowd funding proposal. The infamous South Seas Bubble of 1720 seduced thousands to sink their savings into its soaring shares, before it crashed. Government lotteries depend on millions of ordinary people risking small amounts.

Taxes don’t qualify as crowd funding, by the way. They’re not voluntary.

In the mid-1980s, my friend and publishing partner Ralph Milton came up with his own crowd funding proposal. The United Church of Canada’s 1971 *Hymnbook* felt a little dated. Our company, Wood Lake Books, wanted to produce a supplement that revised some of the *Hymnbook*’s patriarchal language and included the best of the new music being written.

We called the supplement *Songs for a Gospel People*, but it was more widely known as The Green Book.

But our company didn’t have the funds for a project of this size. So Ralph offered congregations across the country a crowd sourcing opportunity. By ordering and paying in advance, they could become co-publishers and get a discount on their order.

Up to that point, our company’s biggest print order had been 3,000 copies. Thanks to crowd funding, the initial print run for *Songs for a Gospel People* was 165,000 copies – the biggest run the printing company in Manitoba had ever done. Sales eventually topped 400,000 copies.

## Out in the cold

I am currently involved in a different variant of crowd funding. It uses the new electronic media for votes, rather than cash.

My community's Food Bank presently operates out of two small rooms – about 600 square feet – in the basement of a former elementary school.

The Food Bank helps about 800 people every month. They're members of the community, whose money often runs out before the month does. Single moms, on minimum wage jobs. Seniors whose pensions have not kept up with the cost of living. Couples working two or more jobs to meet their mortgage payments. FIX

Because the two rooms are jammed to the ceiling with food supplies, people have to line up outside, in the cold.

Now the Food Bank could find itself out in the cold. School District 23 has put the former school up for sale.

The local Rotary Club spent three years searching for possible re-locations – houses, offices, malls. The only long-term solution was a permanent building designed for an efficient food bank operation.

The municipal government made land available. Local businesses promised \$250,000 in materials and services. Trades students at Okanagan College will gain working experience; UBC-Okanagan contributed design and engineering guidance. About \$130,000 has come as cash donations.

But the Food Bank needs at least another \$100,000 on hand before it can sign construction contracts.

## Votes, not dollars

Here's where the social media get involved.

Aviva Insurance donates \$1 million a year to community projects across the country. Those projects compete with each other. Only the projects with the highest number of on-line votes get funding.

Lake Country's Food Bank has applied for a \$100,000 grant. Successful lobbying for votes got it into the semi-final round of voting. The semi-final round starts tomorrow.

So I'm asking for your support, wherever you happen to live. Go to <https://www.avivacommunityfund.org/ideas/acf19456>. Register on line. And then vote. Vote every day, for ten days.

If you think you might forget to vote every day, send an e-mail to [newhomeforthefoodbank@gmail.com](mailto:newhomeforthefoodbank@gmail.com) and ask for a daily reminder.

Crowd funding may be a fad. It can be misused. It can even be abused. But if it can build a desperately needed, permanent home for the Lake Country Food Bank, it's worth using.

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## YOUR TURN

Cliff Boldt questioned my focus, in last week's column, on marijuana as treatment for PTSD: "The debate isn't about marijuana. The debate is how we through our society treat those in our society who risk their lives to protect society (fire, police, military, ambulance drivers and other emergency services). It is totally irresponsible that government can put people in harm's way and then stand back when they suffer because of their experience."

Similarly, Don Schau wrote, "While there is no question that addiction should always be a concern, it makes no sense to me that we put that as a priority when someone is suffering... As long as they can be fully informed and have an advocate who is working for their best interests, let's help them. My mother needs pain killers to make it

through the day. Some of them are addictive. At 88, why should she live out her days in pain for fear of addiction, a [risk] she cannot understand due to dementia? Luckily, common sense has prevailed in this case.”

Don made a further connection. He’s part of an on-line discussion group which (serendipitously) happened to be discussing PTSD and its connection to the Resurrection. Don sent along a paper by Serene Jones, which used the Emmaus Road experience as an illustration, and suggested that persons experiencing a traumatic event needed: a) opportunities to tell their story, b) witnesses willing to hear their story, and c) a community willing to help them think their way through to telling a new and different story.

Don commented, “It suggests a possible PTSD connection in the experience of Jesus followers post-resurrection.”

Art Gans offered some background to the history of anti-marijuana sentiment: “I would venture to say that most people under my age [78] probably do not know that marijuana was a standard medication in the Pharmacopoeias of both the U.S. and Canada prior to the mid 1930s. Interestingly enough, it was a period when the Drug, Alcohol, & Firearms (DAF) unit of the Treasury Dept. of the U.S. was looking for something to do after Prohibition had been overturned. Fitting in with this, marijuana was largely used by blacks at a time when the U.S. was at the height of its anti-black period of racism. Big new target. Make marijuana illegal. Problem solved. DAF had a new job and it wouldn't bother many of the ‘white folks’.”

The issue of harassment doesn’t want to go away. Marguerite Irvine wrote, “My understanding is that harassment is any behaviour that the receiver finds objectionable. For illustration, I will use the names Jack and Jill. Jill does not like the innuendoes from Jack. She must tell him that she doesn't like it and that it must stop. If Jack does not stop, that is harassment.

“The key is that the receiver must communicate the objection and the need for the behaviour to stop.”

Don Chau’s letter (above) also had a few words about harassment: “I think Steve and Ted have missed the point. While it is absolutely correct to say that ‘harassment is in the emotions of the harassed’ (I prefer ‘perception’ to ‘emotions’), that in no way moves the responsibility to the victim. Knowing that you don’t get to choose how someone else perceives your actions means you should think about how your actions might be perceived, and JUST DON’T DO IT -- unless you have enough of an existing relationship to know how they will receive it.”

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#### TECHNICAL STUFF

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If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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#### PROMOTION STUFF...

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Other sources worth pursuing:

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslikeGod" page, [www.seemslikegod.org](http://www.seemslikegod.org);

- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [www.traditionaliconoclast.com](http://www.traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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