

## Why December 25<sup>th</sup>? December 2023

Did you ever wonder why we celebrate Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup>? Jesus didn't have a birth certificate, so how do we know when Jesus was really born? Because the Bible offers no date for Jesus' birth, the placement of the nativity is up for debate. But there are three explanations that land us on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

First, the Christian historian Sextus Julius Africanus had identified the 25<sup>th</sup> as Christ's nativity in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Chronographers reckoned that the world was created on the spring equinox and four days later, on March 25<sup>th</sup>, light was created. Since the existence of Jesus signaled a beginning of a new era, or new creation, the Biblical chronographers assumed Jesus' conception would have also fallen on March 25<sup>th</sup>, placing his birth in December, nine months later.

The second theory proposes that early Christians were convinced that Jesus must have lived upon earth for an exact number of years. Therefore, the date on which he died would also have been the same as the date of his conception. Because they believed that he was crucified on March 25 (and therefore conceived on March 25), his birth would have been placed nine months later, on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

The final theory concludes that December 25<sup>th</sup> was chosen at Rome because it was also the date of the winter solstice in the Julian calendar and a popular pagan feast celebrating the birthday of the invincible Sun. The pagan feast was established by Emperor Aurelian in 274 A.D. After Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, he wanted to draw people away from these pagan festivities and point to Christ as the true Sun of Righteousness, and so instituted at Rome the feast of the Nativity on the same date.

So, you can take your pick as to which theory you believe has us celebrating Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup>. No matter what option you choose—or even if you believe we have the date all wrong — Christmas is a reminder that God has come near and that the world and our lives will never be the same.

*Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation*

## Help for the Stewardship Team

### Ways to Help Children Grow in Generosity at Christmas Time

During Advent, give your child a “charitable certificate” for a certain amount per day (\$1.00/day = \$25, \$2.00/day = \$50), or whatever sum feels right, and ask them to decide by Christmas to give it to a good cause. Then give it in their names. You get the deduction, but they get the thank-you note. It could help them to see how fortunate they are – and spark in them the joy of giving. Here is a sample:

## Happy Birthday, Jesus!

As we wait for Jesus' birthday this year, my/our Christmas gift to you includes a gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_ per day from December 1-25, for a total of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

And you get to decide who this gift will help!

Please decide by Christmas what good cause you want to give this gift to. We can talk about it together if you want. It is up to you how you will help others know the love of Jesus through this gift.



Merry Christmas, with Love

FROM:

TO:

**If you have questions or want to learn more, contact:** Jason Mahnke, Director of Programming & Campaigns, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at 608-837-9582 or [jmahnke@wumf.org](mailto:jmahnke@wumf.org).

## Don't Keep Silent November 2023

I started preaching when I was just 18 years old. I was invited by my home pastor to preach, despite my age, because he knew I had a call to the ordained ministry. By the time I was 20, I had preached a whopping three sermons. With my call and this vast amount of experience behind me, I was invited to serve a small, rural congregation in Southeastern Wisconsin as their supply pastor — which basically meant I would visit the members in their homes and preach every Sunday. And so, in November of my junior year of college, I began to preach every Sunday for a congregation of 52 people. As I remember my first year there, I have fond memories of a group of faithful people who had to listen to, probably the worst sermons ever given.

Despite my inexperience, the congregation was very supportive — often offering a tip or an encouraging word. Particularly, I remember one gentleman who came up to me to give me a pat on the back one Sunday morning. After a particularly difficult sermon he said that he truly enjoyed my messages. A little surprised, I responded by simply saying, “Really?” He continued by saying, “Oh yes. You know, you stand up every Sunday and try to tell us about God’s love and grace. But what I really like is the fact that, in the whole year you’ve been preaching, you’ve never mentioned money once.”

Considering that comment, I suppose it could be seen as a bit ironic that my ministry as a part of the Foundation is helping congregations and pastors learn how to comfortably talk about money in relation to our faith (maybe even excitedly). What I’ve discovered, however, is that talking about stewardship is about focusing love and grace. It is about helping people realize all the ways we are blessed by God, that God has given to us abundantly. God has given us so much, in fact, that we have enough to give generously in love for others.

I encourage you to speak about stewardship boldly. Talk about how you have experienced God’s love, grace, and abundance. Share how generosity has transformed your life. Talk about the blessings others have experienced in your church that are made possible by your community’s generosity.

*Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation*

## Help for the Stewardship Team

### Preparing for Year-End Giving

#### **Plan a year-end appeal**

Nearly one-third of annual charitable giving occurs in December. Everyone else will be asking members of your congregation to donate at year’s end. They will be primed. You should remind them that the church could be a target of their charitable giving, as well. Here is how:

**Identify targets of Giving** - What will you be asking donors to support? Choose one or two programs or funds to support. For example, a few years ago in a church I was serving, we were planning on starting a new worship service. We included funding particular aspects of the new service, like the additional cost of nursery care or sponsoring the estimated cost of one service — as part of a year-end appeal.

Note: Balancing the budget is never an appropriate request of an appeal (at any time of the year). Choose the needs of the church’s ministry and missions.

**Connect with donors.** You may want to talk to some of your major givers in person and ask for their support. Others can receive a special year-end appeal letter. Send this after November 1 or after Commitment Sunday, whichever is later. Emphasize how their giving can help, more than how great the need is.

**Ask for the Needed Level of Support.** If \$10 and \$20 gifts are not going to meet the goal, then suggest the right giving amounts such as \$50, \$100, or \$200. You may appropriately increase these amounts when meeting with your major givers. You also may want to tell donors what their gift will buy. A \$20 gift will pay for needed hand sanitizer, \$50, a booster toilet seat; \$100, one Sunday of the nursery workers’ salaries. Include a stamped return envelope.

**Thank Your Donors.** Send a handwritten thank you to everyone who contributes.

**Send a Giving Statement through the End of November.** Send a giving statement for the year-to-date through November as early in December as possible. This reminds givers of where they stand in their giving. Pledgers especially appreciate this reminder near the end of the year.

**If you have questions or want to learn more, contact:** Jason Mahnke, Director of Programming & Campaigns, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at 608-837-9582 or [jmahnke@wumf.org](mailto:jmahnke@wumf.org).

## God's Abundance October 2023

Parker Palmer, a Quaker theologian, once told a story about abundance. Palmer was a passenger on a plane that pulled away from the gate, taxied to a remote corner of the field and stopped. You know the feeling: the plane stops and you look out the window and see that you're not on the runway, the engines wind down and your heart sinks. The pilot came on the intercom and said, "I have some bad news and some really bad news. The bad news is there's a storm front in the West, Denver is socked in and shut down. We've looked at the alternatives and there are none. So we'll be staying here for a few hours. That's the bad news. The really bad news is that we have no food and it's lunch time." Everybody groaned. Some passengers started to complain, some became angry. But then, Palmer said, one of the flight attendants did something amazing.

She stood up and took the intercom mike and said, "We're sorry, folks. We didn't plan it this way and we really can't do much about it. And I know for some of you this is a big deal. Some of you are hungry and were looking forward to a nice lunch. Some of you may have a medical condition and really need lunch. Some of you may not care one way or the other and some of you need to skip lunch. So, I'll tell you what we're going to do. I have a couple of bread baskets up here and we're going to pass them around and I'm asking everybody to put something in the basket. Some of you brought a little snack along – something to tide you over – just in case something like this happened, some peanut butter crackers, candy bars. And some of you have a few LifeSavers or chewing gum or Roloids. And if you don't have anything edible, you have a picture of your children or spouse or girlfriend/boyfriend or a bookmark or a business card. Everybody put something in and then we'll reverse the process. We'll pass the baskets around again and everybody can take out what he/she needs.

"Well," Palmer said, "what happened next was amazing. The griping stopped. People started to root around in pockets and handbags, some got up and opened their suitcases stored in the overhead luggage racks and got out boxes of candy, salami, a bottle of wine. People were laughing and talking. She had transformed a group of people who were focused on need and deprivation into a community of sharing and celebration. She had transformed scarcity into a kind of abundance."

After the flight, which eventually did proceed, Parker Palmer stopped on his way off the plane – (deplaning), and said to her, "Do you know there's a story in the Bible about what you did back there? It's about Jesus feeding a lot of people with very little food."

"Yes," she said. "I know that story. That's why I did what I did."

Even amid what we think is scarcity, many times God has already given us what we need.

*Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation*

### Help for the Stewardship Team

#### Creating a Culture of Generosity

Ann Michel and Lovett Weems Jr., authors of *Generosity, Stewardship, and Abundance*, say creating a culture of generosity requires creativity and consistency. Here are seven strategies that they recommend to help any church deepen the link between faith and giving.

#### 1) Use the offering as a teaching moment.

Whether your church is back to passing the offering plate or if the offering time is just used to highlight how people can financially support the ministries of your congregation, take the opportunity each week to educate congregants on how offerings are used to live out the church's mission and make a difference in people's lives.

#### 2) Exercise the vocabulary of generosity.

Congregations with a generous culture let the themes of gratitude, abundance, and generosity to frame every aspect of congregational life.

#### 3) Tell the story.

Sharing success and impact stories are critical to helping people connect their generosity to real world results.

4) **Offer testimonies.**

While it is important for pastors to regularly talk about financial stewardship from the pulpit, it is just as important for congregants to hear why and how others from within their church give.

5) **Say thank you.**

Gratitude and generosity are two sides of the same coin. Saying thank you promptly and regularly is one of the simplest and most effective things a church can do to reinforce a sense of gratitude and enhance giving.

6) **Teach about giving during Advent and Christmas.**

Because generosity is deeply engrained in secular culture, Christmas is a fantastic opportunity for the church to teach about generosity.

7) **Involve children and youth.**

Emphasizing generosity in ministry with children not only prepares a future generation of givers, but it helps form parents and families as well because adults often pay extra attention to what their children are taught.

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## Practice Makes Perfect September 2023

In the last six minutes of the University of Kentucky's 1996 national semifinal men's basketball victory over the top-ranked University of Massachusetts, Mark Pope – Rhodes scholar candidate and senior – calmly sank all six of his free throws. Twice he stepped to the line with Kentucky clinging to a three-point lead. Pope did not miss.

Putting to rest the speculation that Kentucky would wilt in the national spotlight, Pope remarked after the game, "We go through those exact situations every day in practice. That gives us all confidence in ourselves because we have confidence in our preparation."

Just as Pope recognized that practice is the key to playing a good basketball game, we understand that the same is true in every aspect of our lives. Children are reminded to do their homework so they can do well on their tests. Youth learning to drive can practice for up to 12 months with a permit before they get their own driver's licenses and set out on their own. Speeches and presentations are reviewed and practiced, giving the deliverer the familiarity needed to speak confidently and clearly.

Christian discipleship is no different. Routine and practice are needed to give us the foundation we need to face the dilemmas we encounter in life. The habitats of worship, generosity, daily prayer, study, and the sacraments help us develop our relationship with God so that we don't find ourselves scrambling when hard times hit. While it is true that God will never abandon us in difficult times whether we have this foundation or not, it is easier to rely on our faith while the seas of life are calm instead of trying to anchor ourselves amid a storm.

*Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation*

## Help for the Stewardship Team

### Remember to Say Thank You

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary is a great resource for the Stewardship Team (<https://www.churchleadership.com/tag/stewardship/>).

In a recent article, Charles Lane reminds us that, while it is not difficult to say thank you, remembering to do so often is. After a child gets a gift, how often do we hear their parents saying, "What do you say?"

Here are some tips for where and how to say thank you.

#### Saying thanks in worship:

- Keep it short.
- Stick to the point.
- Make sure it contains a clear thank you.

#### Thank you notes:

- Pastors – make it a goal to send out 10 handwritten thank you notes a week, for people's generosity of time, talents, and financial gifts.
- Include a thank you when sending contribution statements along with a brief story about a ministry their giving made possible.

#### In the moment:

- Take opportunities to say thank you in-person and in the moment, as the occasion arises.

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## Quick fix or lifestyle change? August 2023

I have tried just about every diet known to humanity through my adult life. Low carb. Counting calories. Intermittent fasting. Weight Watchers. I've lost weight on them all. I've gained weight on them all.

One commonality I have found between losing weight and not, no matter the weight loss system, is my approach to the diet. Do I see it as an overall diet and activity lifestyle change? Or is it simply something I need to suffer through to achieve a goal weight? The former is more about health and less about numbers on a scale but requires a plan and discipline. The latter frequently allows me to get to the number but is often unsustainable in the long-term, resulting in rebound weight gain.

I would argue that we, in the church, too often approach stewardship as a crash diet. We take four weeks in the fall to talk about the importance of giving generously, we look at the church budget, and then ask people to make a pledge to support the ministries. In my mind, this approach tends to resemble (ineffective) fundraising rather than Christian Stewardship. It has little chance of either impacting people's lives or truly funding life-giving ministries.

True Christian stewardship is about discipleship. It is about lifestyle. Its goal is helping people learn how to relate to their finances and possessions in terms of their faith and their relationship with God. Success is determined on the metrics of financial healthiness, not on the number on the scale (i.e., the income line on the church budget).

This type of stewardship cannot be contained to just three or four weeks in the fall. It is about helping equip people to earn enough to meet their needs, to learn how to get and stay out of debt, to use tools like a spending plan (i.e., a budget) to wisely save and spend thoughtfully, and to experience the full benefits to giving extravagantly. I believe churches need to be as committed to helping people learn how to be faithful financial stewards as we are helping people learn how to pray.

I have learned – whether it comes to dieting or learning how to be a faithful steward – I will never fully arrive. But I am slowly learning that the true treasure of each is in the experience and the growth each journey offers.

Are you interested in helping people in your congregation take this journey? Consider helping your pastor or stewardship team put together

a yearlong stewardship plan which may include offering a financial wellness class like [Financial Peace University](#) or [Saving Grace](#), holding an appreciation celebration thanking people for all they give to make a difference in the church and community, and simply making time to regularly talk about the challenges and joys of faithful financial stewardship.

*Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation*

### Help for the Stewardship Team

**The Foundation is Here to Assist You**

The staff at the Foundation is here throughout the year to assist your stewardship team, leadership, and your congregation in financial stewardship. Most of our services are available to United Methodist churches and ministries at little or no charge.

- **Preaching** – Foundation President Rev. Krystal Goodger, and Director Rev. Jason Mahnke are available to preach on a wide range of stewardship topics throughout the year (although their fall calendars fill up fast). (Free service.)
- **Year-Round Stewardship Plan** – Not sure where to start putting together your stewardship plan? We will meet with your Stewardship team to help you put together a plan that makes sense in your context. (Free service.)
- **Consecration Sunday Leadership** – Looking for a guest leader for Consecration Sunday? Our staff has a list of people trained at leading this fall stewardship emphasis. (Free service if led by Foundation staff; honorarium and mileage for other trained volunteers.)
- **Stewardship Conference** – Want to learn the basics of church stewardship or increase your skills? Attend the **Stewardship Conference at Pine Lake** either virtually or in-person on August 11-12. Hear from lay and clergy stewardship practitioners about how to help people grow in faithful financial stewardship. (Small fee to cover camp and technology costs.)

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## Perspective July 2023

Some things are simply a matter of perspective. We can be reminded often how words can be used to skew the truth. For instance, an interoffice softball game was held every year between the marketing department and support staff of one company. The day of the game, as hard as the marketers tried, the support staff whipped the marketing department soundly.

In its best tradition, the marketing department decided to find the best “spin” they could on the dismal result. They showed how they earn their keep by posting this memo on the bulletin board after the game: “The marketing department is pleased to announce that for the recently completed softball season, we came in second place, having lost but one game all year. The support department, however, had a rather dismal season, as they won only one game all year.”

On the other hand, hidden beauty can also be found by looking at a situation in a different way. A little girl named Lauren (age 5) reports, “I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones.”

I think Lauren is on to something. Our entire lives can be shaped by perspective. How would I approach money, “stuff,” and giving if I knew that God had already given me everything I need, rather than seeing all the things I “need” in the store windows? How would I treat others if I focused on the ways I could serve rather than making sure everyone respected my rights? How would my marriage change if it were based on being one another’s servant rather than a struggle for power? What would my attitude be toward work be if I saw it as my God-given vocation rather than someplace I had to go to earn a paycheck? What if I saw Sunday as a true Sabbath . . . a time for connecting with God and family and rest . . . rather than a day to run the kids to more activities the day I must get things done at home before I go to work?

Sometimes we need God to help us see the world differently before we can live differently in it.

*Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation*

## Help for the Stewardship Team

### Legacy Giving

Many of our churches spend so much time and attention focusing on meeting the annual budget, little enthusiasm is shown for considering a planned giving program. However, people can make a tremendous impact on a church’s ministry through a gift from their estate, retirement plan, life insurance, or a gift annuity. The key is to take a moment to educate people about the opportunities and to ask. Beyond the financial benefits, talking about planned giving:

- Provides a tremendous opportunity to make a powerful witness to their faith and their values. Those who have been faithful throughout their lifetime can continue to make a witness at the time of death.
- Planned giving enables people to make larger charitable gifts than otherwise possible.
- Planned giving allows persons to establish permanent living memorials for themselves and others.
- Planned giving also provides tax advantages for the donor.

If you’re interested in helping people in your church learn about the impact Planned Gifts can make, we here at the Foundation are here to help. We will lead a Planned Giving Seminar for your church, explaining the options people have to give and why they should consider it. Planned Giving Seminars tend to last 45-60 minutes and are best attended on Sunday mornings after worship. Contact us today to find out more or to schedule yours today!

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**Registration is now open** for this year’s **Stewardship Conference at Pine Lake** on August 11-12! New this year: new schedule to make the Conference more accessible and more participation options. For more information, details, and to register, visit: <https://www.wumf.org/upcoming-events/>

## AI Generosity June 2023

AI (Artificial Intelligence) has been all over the news lately as technology companies begin to break new ground with things like [ChatGPT](#). The conversation usually centers around whether AI technology will be helpful (increasing productivity), harmful (taking people's jobs), or cataclysmic (leading to machines taking over the world).

Out of curiosity, I asked one of my social media apps that has AI to tell me a story about the impact of generosity. This was its response.

"Once there was a wealthy businessman who decided to donate a significant portion of his fortune to charity. He gave to several causes, including education, healthcare, and the arts. His donations enabled many people to access opportunities they would not have had otherwise.

One of the students who benefited from the businessman's donation was a young woman who had grown up in poverty. She was able to attend college and pursue her dream of becoming a doctor. After graduating, she went on to work in a rural clinic, where she helped many people who had limited access to healthcare. The young woman's work inspired others to follow in her footsteps, and soon the clinic became a hub for community development.

The businessman's generosity had a ripple effect that touched countless lives and transformed a whole community."

I (Jason not the AI) thought that was a pretty good story. I will say, however, it is nowhere near as meaningful as stories I've heard people tell about how they were personally touched by someone's generosity or how being generous changed them. It's not just the story that's inspiring, but the personal, human element that is inspiring.

With that in mind, I'd encourage you to share stories of how your church's ministry either made a difference in your life or you have been impacted by the practice of generosity. It is through the telling and hearing real life stories that generosity spreads and lives are changed.

*Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation*

## Help for the Stewardship Team

### Working In or Working On

Do you and your team spend time working "on" your church or do you spend much of your time working "in" your church? What is the difference?

**Working in** your church is what we are probably most familiar with, purposefully making the church run: planning worship, classes, events, and then providing management and administration. It's the "what" and "how" of our work. Unfortunately, the day-to-day pattern of addressing the urgent things that pop up can come at the expense of the strategic priorities and planning that is needed.

**Working on** your church involves seeking and implementing strategies that impact the health and overall success of your church: valuable innovation, planning, assessing the real life spiritual, physical, and mental needs of your congregation and community, and analyzing and evaluating which ministries are having the desired impact and results and which ones need to be transitioned out for something new, to name a few. This is the why and the how we can improve our work.

Be sure to schedule time on your team's calendar to work on your church. Then, take advantage of the time to review and update your programs and processes, to evaluate their effectiveness, and ensure the long-term success of your team and your mission.

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## Save the Date: August 11 - August 12 2023 Stewardship Conference at Pine Lake: Stewardship from the Ground Up

### New This Year!

- Friday evening **“Pre-Conference Workshops”** designed to give leaders a jump on their Stewardship planning.
- **New schedule** to accommodate lay leaders with a traditional work schedule, part-time and licensed local pastors with weekday commitments, and Elders who want to partner with more lay people in their Stewardship ministries.
- **More participation options**, including in-person Friday only, Saturday only, or both days, and virtual via Zoom.

### Full schedule and more details at:

<https://www.wumf.org/upcoming-events/>

Registration opens in early May.

### A Chicken or an Eagle? May 2023

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

Once upon a time, a man found the egg of an eagle. It had been abandoned for some reason by its mother, but as it was still warm, the man took it and put it in the nest of one of his backyard chickens along with the other eggs that were there being brooded upon.

After a period of time, the eaglet was hatched, and along with the other chicks from his nest began to go about the backyard doing what the other chicks did. He scratched the earth for worms and insects. He looked for the corn that the man would throw into the yard. He clucked and cackled as best as he could, and as he grew, he would, like other chickens, thrash his wings and fly a few feet in the air.

Years passed in this way, and the eagle grew very old. One day he saw a magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. It glided majestically among the powerful wind currents, soaring and swooping, scarcely beating its long golden wings.

The old eagle looked at it in awe and asked, “What is that?”

“That is the eagle, the king of birds,” said one of his neighbors. “He belongs to the sky and to the high places. We belong to the earth, we are chickens.”

The old eagle knew this was true, and so it was he lived and died as a chicken, for that is what he believed he was.

Very often, in life, our perspective determines our reality. By experiencing the transforming power of God’s love and grace, we can see the world, the ministry of the church and our individual lives in a unique way. Instead of being held down by “what ifs,” fears of failure, or the challenges the task at hand, we can soar as a people sustained and lifted by the same grace that transformed us.

It is my prayer that you will be able to discover how God is calling you to live out the love of Christ in this world. It is my prayer that you will have the courage to live into that call with your entire being, trusting God’s grace to sustain you through even the most difficult times. It is through following God’s call that we can soar like the eagles we were created to be.

### Help for the Stewardship Team

#### Stewardship Principles from One Leader to Another

Rev. Dr. William Willimon, retired Bishop and Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at the Divinity School at Duke University, once shared some of his wisdom about giving that he found to be true.

- “It is important to be a giver before asking other people to give. I really believe that we pastors have a responsibility to be examples of giving in Christ’s name.”
- “The leaders of the church must set the tone for giving in their own lives. In fact, I don’t think someone ought to be a leader within the church who is not also a generous giver.”
- “The main reason why people do not give is that they have never been asked. In the church, we have often done a poor job of connecting discipleship and stewardship. As we see in today’s scripture, money is a big concern of Jesus, something that Jesus puts at the center of the kingdom.”
- “God has enabled every single person to give at a level that is appropriate to what each has been given by God. We must never protect people from the ability to enjoy giving. We pastors have a

pastoral responsibility to ask people to give, to help them to discover and to enjoy the God-given gift of being givers.”

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## Stewardship of Creation April 2023

Often, when the word “stewardship” is uttered in the church, we think of money, giving, and budgets. With the celebration of Earth Day, April is one of many occasions when we can remind ourselves that Christian stewardship is broader than just money. Here are just a few teachings on creation that have been passed on through the ages.

“The initial step for a soul to come to knowledge of God is contemplation of nature.” – Irenaeus (120-202)

“Nature is schoolmistress, the soul the pupil; and whatever one has taught or the other has learned has come from God – the Teacher of the teacher.” – Tertullian (160-230)

“Christ wears ‘two shoes’ in the world: Scripture and nature. Both are necessary to understand the Lord, and at no stage can creation be seen as a separation of things from God.” – John Scotus Eriugena (810-877)

“If I spend enough time with the tiniest of creature – even a caterpillar – I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.” – Meister Eckhart (1260-1327)

“God writes the Gospel not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars.” – Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“Let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.” – John Calvin (1509-1564)

“I believe in my heart that faith in Jesus Christ can and will lead us beyond an exclusive concern for the well-being of other human beings to the broader concern for the well-being of the birds in our backyards, the fish in our rivers, and every living creature on the face of the earth.” – John Wesley (1701-1791)

“The harvested fields bathed in the autumn mists speak of God and his goodness far more vividly than any human lips.” – Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)

“To drive to extinction something He has created is wrong. He has a purpose for everything . . . We Christians have a responsibility to take the lead in caring for the earth.” – Billy Graham (1918-2018)

“God intends...our care of creation to reflect our love for the Creator.” – John R.W. Stott (1921-2011)

“The first law of our being is that we are set in a delicate network of interdependence with our fellow human beings and with the rest of God’s creation.” – Desmond Tutu (1931-2021)

“We cannot be all that God wants us to be without caring about the earth.” – Rick Warren (1954 -)

### Help for the Stewardship Team

#### Saving Grace Grant Offers Seed Money for Your Church’s Stewardship Ministry

Looking to reach more people in your community? Imagine if your church was known as the place to go for some of people’s top concerns in life\*? Imagine if you were able to help folks with these concerns from a faith perspective that is both practical and spiritual?

Take advantage of the Foundation’s **Saving Grace Grant** to receive seed money and learn best practices to launch *Saving Grace’s Financial Well-Being Program* in both your church and community. Grant applicants are asked to have potential *Saving Grace* small group leaders participate in three 75-minute Zoom sessions. The goal of these sessions to give potential small group leaders an overview of the class material and a forum to discuss best practices for advertising and leading *Saving Grace* small groups in their local church and community.

Upon completion of the three Zoom sessions, church’s will be eligible for up to \$765.99 in funding for their new *Saving Grace* classes. For more information, including session dates, times, details about the financial incentives, and to sign-up, click [here](#). Questions? Email Rev. Jason Mahnke, Director of Programming and Campaigns. Space is limited. Sign-up today!

\*An American Psychiatric Association poll found that the top source for anxiety in Americans’ lives is personal finances.

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#### If you have questions or want to learn more, contact:

Jason Mahnke, Director of Programming & Campaigns, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at 608-837-9582 or [jmahnke@wumf.org](mailto:jmahnke@wumf.org).

## What Do You Really Want? March 2023

“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money . . .”  
Ecclesiastes 5:10

Many people will say that they want more money. But, the truth is that’s not what people really want. As far as I know, we still cannot eat money, make clothes from it, or build a house with it. If we were stranded on a deserted island, it would be practically useless to us.

No one really wants money. Instead, they want what they think it will provide for them. For some people, more, nicer, newer stuff; others want the sense of security or power they think it provides.

I would argue that, until we understand what motivates our desire for money, we won’t be at peace in our relationship with it.

This Lenten season, I would encourage you to take time to figure out your money motivation by taking this [Money Motivation Quiz](#). As it notes, none of the motivations are inherently good or bad, but each does have a “dark side”. More than just allowing us to lean into the positive parts of our motivation and avoid the dark side, knowing that people may have different motivations regarding money than we do, will help us when we deal with money in our relationships.

Ultimately, we believe that loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves is our greatest priority. It is always easier to do so when we know ourselves well.

*Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation*

## Help for the Stewardship Team

### Stewardship Challenge Grant 3.0

We are excited to announce the release of the **Wells Stewardship Grant 3.0!** The Stewardship Challenge Grant is designed to help congregations develop an intentional stewardship plan for their congregation. By providing a cash incentive, the Stewardship Challenge Grant is intended as encouragement for churches to develop a comprehensive stewardship program to help achieve the goals of the congregation in stewardship. Then, after specific goals have been met, congregations may use the money as a reward to be used toward the congregation’s ministries.

Upon completion and approval of the grant application, churches receive \$200 (the encouragement part). Once the final report has been received and approved, the remainder of the money – anywhere from \$300-\$500 – will be sent (the reward part). Churches that apply for the Stewardship Challenge Grant for the very first time are also eligible to receive an additional **Growth Mindset Award** of \$100.

New to the Stewardship Challenge Grant: the opportunity for churches who have previously participated in the grant to receive awards for being a **Stewardship Challenge Grant Ambassador**. If a church applies for the Stewardship Challenge Grant for the first time because of your church’s recommendation, your church will receive \$75. If your church helps that church throughout the year with coaching, your church will receive an additional \$150.

For more information and an application, visit:  
<https://www.wumf.org/grants-program/>

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## Sasha's Generosity February 2023

Scott tells a story about when a story about when his church group visited Russia and he met a ten-year-old Russian orphan named Sasha who, for some reason, latched on to him. Sasha took Scott by the arm and led him through the orphanage, showing off his room and the place he ate meals. All the while Sasha's eyes were filled with joy and laughter. In spite of the fact that Scott spoke little Russian, and Sasha spoke no English, they connected. As the church group prepared to depart, Sasha sat beside Scott, pulled a silver ring from his finger, and held it out for Scott to take. His eyes filled with tears and Scott spoke the only Russian word I knew — "Nyet, nyet." (No, no.) This child, who had nothing in the world to call his own except this ring,

desperately wanted to give this ring to him. When asked why Sasha wanted to give his only possession away, Sasha responded through an interpreter, "Because I am so thankful

Scott came." For Sasha, abundant joy, extreme poverty, and a heart filled with gratitude overflowed in a wealth of generosity.

For many of us who have so much, we want more. We are not thankful for what we have and always look for the "something more." And truth be told, it's never enough. What would happen if, by God's grace, our desire to gain more and have more could be transformed by gratitude into a heartfelt desire to give more? What would happen if in a spirit of gratitude, we spent as much time figuring out ways to give as we spend figuring out how to earn, have, and keep?

**Save the Dates:**  
**Clergy Tax Seminar**  
Sun Prairie UMC & Virtual  
January 23, 2023

**How to Reach New People (and How  
Foundation Grants Can Help!)**  
Oak Creek Community UMC & Virtual  
February 4, 2023  
More Information and register at  
[www.wumf.org/upcoming-events](http://www.wumf.org/upcoming-events)

Can you recall a time when you were truly thankful despite negative circumstances? Can you recall a time when someone who could least afford it gave you a generous gift? What was it like? How did you respond?

*Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation*

### Help for the Stewardship Team

#### Year-Round Stewardship Resources

The Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation has written a booklet entitled "Ideas for Year-Round Financial Stewardship" (<https://www.wumf.org/year-round-ideas/>). The ideas in this booklet are tools your team can use to develop a year-round comprehensive stewardship strategy, focusing on nurturing Christian disciples, rather than balancing the budget. When a church replaces its goal of "increasing the budget" with "helping persons make a faithful response," miracles will happen!

We suggest you use this booklet with your stewardship team to make a concrete plan for the coming year that specifies annual, quarterly, monthly, and weekly stewardship activities.

1. Mark the items in the booklet your congregation is already doing.
2. Then, have each person circle 5-6 ideas they think might work well in your congregation at this time. Tabulate these results.
3. Implement one new idea per quarter, evaluating as you go. Avoid trying too many new things at once.
4. Schedule them into the existing church calendar, avoid conflicts, and work in harmony with the current mission and ministry of the church.

Be sure to enlist other people in the church to do these chosen activities. Involve as many different people as possible.

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## I Like Floormats January 2023

This story is from "I Like Giving" by Brad Formsma. His book and corresponding website, [www.ilikegiving.com](http://www.ilikegiving.com), are full of stories and videos about the power of generosity.

It is hard to characterize my brother-in-law, James. He's not a guy who draws a lot of attention to himself, and he's not a guy with great wealth. In fact, James is, well, quite average, but when it comes to generosity, James is one of the most above-average people I've ever met.

For instance, if James needed to borrow your car, he would likely return it with a full tank of fuel or maybe a new set of tires. Or maybe it would have been detailed. And unless you happened to notice, he wouldn't draw any attention to it.

Which is exactly what happened with the floor mats in our Honda Accord. They were worn-out. I mean, they're floor mats. They are one of those things you think about replacing when you vacuum the car and say to yourself, "Wow, these look terrible. I need to replace them." You finish vacuuming, put the mats back, and never give them another thought until the next time you clean your car.

However, this particular time I did notice them. They were new. I immediately asked my wife if she'd bought the new car mats. She said she thought I had. Immediately we knew it was James. I could not think of when he might have done it. I went back in the house, called him, and asked if he was responsible. As I suspected, he was.

"When did you put new mats in the car?" I asked since we hadn't seen him in weeks. "About three months ago," he sheepishly replied.

I couldn't believe I'd been so unobservant, but I wasn't the least bit surprised by James thoughtful act of generosity. It's a lifestyle with him. I truly can't think of anything he enjoys doing more than giving, and I can't think of anyone who has more fun finding unique ways to give. I mean, who would ever think of replacing someone's floor mats?

*Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation*

## Help for the Stewardship Team

### Save the Dates (or Better Yet, Register Now!)

- **Clergy Tax Seminar** – January 24 at Sun Prairie United Methodist Church or virtually
  - 1- 2:30 p.m. Tax information for clergy, church treasurers, and retirees
  - 2:30-3:30 p.m. Important tax information specific for new retirees
  - No registration cost as the workshop is made possible through a grant from a bequest from Rev. Carl Berry.
  - Registration deadline is **January 16**.
- **How to Reach & Welcome New People (and how Foundation Grants can help!)** – February 4 from 9:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m. at Oak Creek Community United Methodist Church or virtually
  - Learn an effective way (Triads) for your church to connect with people in your community and increase the probability of engaging, reaching, and retaining new people.
  - Find out about the *First Friends Program* which can help new people build relationships that will last and help them stay connected to the church.
  - Hear about the New Ministry Grants and how they can help fund your Triads.
  - Registration is \$40 for virtual (per church); \$25 per person in-person (maximum of \$60 per church no matter how many people from the same church come).
  - Receive a free copy of Kay Kotan's book, [\*Being the Church in a Post-Pandemic World\*](#) by registering before January 16 (one copy per church).
  - Registration deadline is **January 30**.

For more information and to register, visit: [www.wumf.org/upcoming-events/](http://www.wumf.org/upcoming-events/). **If you have questions or want to learn more, contact:** Jason Mahnke, Director of Programming & Campaigns, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at 608-837-9582 or [jason@wumf.org](mailto:jason@wumf.org).