

**New Year, New Opportunities:
Practicing Faithful Stewardship in 2025
January 2025**

As we turn the page on the calendar and step into a new year, January offers us a wonderful opportunity to reflect, reset, and recommit ourselves to living as faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us. Stewardship is about more than finances—it encompasses every aspect of our lives: our time, talents, treasures, and the care we show for God's creation.

The Biblical Basis for Stewardship

Scripture reminds us that everything we have belongs to God. Genesis 2:15 shows us that even from the beginning, humanity was called to care for creation: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Similarly, 1 Peter 4:10 encourages us to use our gifts to serve others: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." This year, let us take these words to heart and seek to be intentional in how we manage the resources, relationships, and responsibilities entrusted to us.

Personal Goal-Setting for Stewardship

The start of a new year is a natural time to set goals. Consider these questions as you prayerfully plan your year:

- **Time:** How can you dedicate more time to prayer, worship, and service this year? Can you set aside a regular time for volunteering or participating in church activities?
- **Talents:** What gifts and skills has God given you? Are there ways you can use them to bless your church, your community, or those in need?
- **Treasures:** Reflect on your financial stewardship. Is this the year to begin tithing, increase your giving, or support a specific ministry or mission project?

Financial Stewardship and Budgeting

January is also an ideal time to review your budget and ensure it aligns with your values. Here are a few tips for financial stewardship:

1. **Create a Giving Plan:** Start by determining what percentage of your income you can give back to God's work. Even small, consistent contributions can make a big impact over time.
2. **Build an Emergency Fund:** Responsible stewardship includes planning for unexpected expenses.
3. **Reduce Debt:** If you're carrying debt, consider making a plan to reduce it this year. Financial freedom allows for more generous giving.

Help for the Stewardship Team

Stewardship in the New Year

January is a fantastic time to start fresh with your congregation regarding Stewardship. Here are some tips:

Renew Focus on Vision and Goals

As the new year begins, remind the congregation of the church's mission and vision for the year ahead and how they can be a part of it. Include a Discipleship Moment in your worship service and/or newsletter that reads:

As a congregation, we have exciting opportunities ahead of us. This year, we're focusing on [insert specific goals, such as expanding outreach programs, enhancing worship experiences, or improving facilities]. Your support and participation are vital in making these goals a reality. Together, we can be the hands and feet of Christ in our community.

Stewardship is about more than Giving

When we talk about stewardship in the church, we often focus solely on giving. Take time to emphasize other areas of stewardship as well. This includes financial stewardship (earning, spending, saving, getting out of debt, etc.) and areas such as environmental stewardship. Consider including a note like this in your bulletin or newsletter:

Caring for God's creation is an essential part of faithful stewardship. Consider adopting small, sustainable practices in your daily life, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, or participating in local clean-up efforts. As a church, we're exploring [insert any environmental initiatives your church is planning, such as recycling programs or community gardens].

Stewardship is a Key Part of Our Discipleship

Faithful stewardship is a spiritual practice. It's not just a tactical effort but one that should be nurtured through other spiritual disciplines, like prayer.

Loving God, thank You for the blessings You have poured into our lives. Help us to be faithful stewards of all You have entrusted to us. Guide us to use our time, talents, and treasures in ways that honor You and serve others. May we grow in generosity, wisdom, and love as we seek to build Your Kingdom here on earth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

And Now We Call Him Santa Claus December 2024

Here is the story behind Santa Claus, as told by a story from the St. Nicholas Center. It's a great story for both kids and adults. Merry Christmas!

~ Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation



Help for the Stewardship Team

Five Ways to Boost Year-End Donations*

It probably doesn't surprise you that the biggest giving month in the church is December. You may not have known that the three biggest giving days of the year for all nonprofits are December 29, 30, and 31, when giving literally quintuples. How can you get the most out of the end of the year?

Step 1: Show your donors the impact of their last gift!

According to author Penelope Burk, over-solicitation is the number one reason donors give for not making a repeat donation. This doesn't mean you're asking too often—it means asking again **before showing their first gift had impact.**

Step 2: Map out, write, test, and schedule your end-of-year fundraising emails.

A critical part of your success will be segmented and personalized emails. Why? You're not just emailing some "Dear friend." You're reaching out to the individual behind the generosity. So use their first name.

Segmentation enables you to tailor your donor communication so your donors feel seen and appreciated. For example, your segment of monthly donors should receive an email appeal that thanks them for being a loyal monthly donor and invites them to consider making an additional end-of-year gift that will make twice the impact.

Step 3: Test, test, then test again.

Don't just test your appeal — test every link and every step of the donation processed from your homepage and donation form to your thank-you email autoresponder and donation landing page. Enlist multiple people to mystery shop your church with an online gift to ensure a stellar and frictionless donor experience.

Step 4: Send more year-end emails than you are now!

You think your donors read every email you send. It's why you stress over sending more emails. Here's the reality. Your donors do not read the vast majority of your email. Don't believe me? Open up your email program. Look at the open rate for the last email you sent. If your church is like most nonprofits, your open rate is around 35%.

Rather than thinking about the 35% of people who read your email, focus on the 65% who never open it. Consider sending at least three email appeals on the final days of the year.

Step 5: Simplify your year-end email strategy by reusing the same email.

Follow this seven-part outline for a simple email and send three times — removing a section in each subsequent send to shorten it.

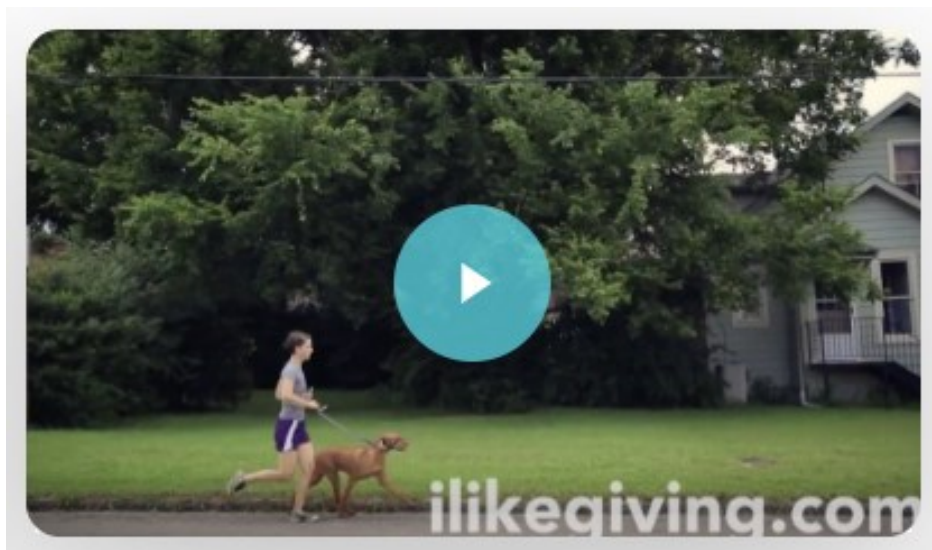
- 1) **Get personal:** "Dear Jason"
- 2) **Start with a deadline:** "I'm writing you today in hopes that you'll make a special holiday gift before midnight on December 31."
- 3) **Share the outcome of the gift:** This is what will happen in the world as a result of your gift. Note that this is not a description of your program. *Remove this portion in the 3rd appeal.*
- 4) **Provide reasons to give now:** It could be a match deadline or "this is the last day to get a tax deduction."
- 5) **Demonstrate shared value:** "Jason, I know from your previous gifts that you care about . . ." *Remove this part in the third appeal.*
- 6) **One more time:** Another ask with a deadline.
- 7) **Show you're real:** Signature.
- 8) **Last opportunity:** P.S. with another ask with a deadline.

*Source: bloomerang.co

I Like Listening November 2024

The joy of a simple act of generosity changes the way a couple lives.
Click on the picture to hear the story.

~ Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation



Help for the Stewardship Team

Using A.I. Tools in the Church and Hybrid Hospitality

First United Methodist Church in Madison, along with the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation and First Foundation, invite you to a workshop on how to use A.I. Tools in the Church.

When: November 15 & 16 from 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Where: First United Methodist Church

203 Wisconsin Ave.

Madison, WI 53703

Cost: \$100

Register by clicking here.

In this day long training, Jason will walk you through what A.I. is, why we should be using it in the church (with theological underpinnings to back it up), and how to use it (and how not to use it), and even where the ethical lines are that we should not be crossing.

During the day, Jason will expose you to the tools, help you know which are best for which scenario, talk about copyright, ethics, and do several real-time demos. We'll also cover 10 distinct ways to use A.I. in ministry.

If you'd like a broad primer on A.I. to see how it could benefit your ministry, this is for you. And don't worry, it's not highly technical. You also won't have to go broke with A.I. because many of the tools are free or inexpensive. Bring your computer and follow along, or just sit back, watch, and observe.

About the Presenter: Jason Moore

Jason has been a long time proponent for the use of technology in the church. For decades he's been leading trainings on the use of media, screens, visuals, and more. And now he's helping the church embrace Artificial Intelligence in ministry.

Just Hanging On

October 2024

Once upon a time, there was a man who saw that it was a beautiful day outside, so he decided to go for a walk. As he walked along through a local park, he looked at the leaves on the trees that were changing colors; he watched the children playing with glee; he looked at the beautiful blue sky that had a few clouds in it. As he was enjoying all of the lovely scenery, he forgot to look where he was walking and he fell off the edge of a cliff. While falling, he began to reach for anything that would stop his plummet towards demise, when his hands happened upon a tree root that was sticking out of the side of the cliff. He held on to that tree root with all of his might and yelled out to the top of the cliff, "Help me! Is anyone out there?" An anonymous voice from above replied, "Yes, I am here. I am the Lord. Do you believe me?" The man in desperation, called out, "Yes Lord, I believe you. Please help me!" The mysterious voice then instructed the man saying, "Okay, if you truly believe that I am the Lord, then let go of the root you're hanging from and I will save you." After a brief pause to think about his options, the man looked upward and yelled, "Is anyone else up there?"

Many times in life, we can feel like the man hanging on for dear life with nothing below us but destruction. Our lives are overflowing with commitments, our families demand our time, and any number of challenges can push us to the edge of our own personal cliffs. During times of heavy demands and personal crisis we may wonder where God comes in as we struggle. These are times that often challenge our faith.

In these times, it may be helpful to remember Jesus' parting words to his disciples, as he addresses our doubts as well. He says, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). We are promised that throughout our lives, in the hard and happy times, Christ will be with us. This doesn't mean that he will solve all of our problems with the wave of a magic wand. What it does mean is that God will always be with us, weathering life's storms with us, giving us strength to move forward in difficult times, and opening up opportunities for us when we need them. What is important for us to remember throughout our entire lives is that the Lord wants to be in relationship with us, and is always there waiting for us to turn to God in prayer.

~ Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

5 Ways Forward for Very Small Congregations

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership recently published an article by Lovett Weems, Jr. that details the history and growth in number of small membership churches. He concludes the article with five practical tips for very small congregations I think are helpful. If you would like to read the full article, you can [find it here](#).

1. Remember that there have always been small churches.

From biblical times until now and across the globe, small groups of people form congregations. They usually worship and serve effectively while never having large numbers of people. Protestant churches in the United States have typically been small because of the pattern of rapid church growth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the nation was predominantly rural. One difference and limitation for U.S. small churches today compared to the past — small churches are far less likely to be multi-generational than in the past.

2. Celebrate what small churches do very well.

Smaller churches normally have higher rates of attendance compared to their available constituents than larger churches. Likewise, per capita giving percentages tend to be higher among smaller churches. While this dedication does not tend to produce enough people or resources in most cases, it is an example of love and commitment for your church that should be celebrated by members and leaders beyond the congregation and is a foundation on which you can build.

3. Make changes necessary to stabilize finances.

A church's operating expenses should be covered by recurring and predictable income. Depending on nonrecurring income for basic operations is a danger sign. Examples of these nonrecurring funds are accumulated savings, bequests, or the sale of assets. Such funds are best used for capital needs to make the church stronger for the future. Congregations depending on nonrecurring funds for operations are merely delaying a crisis. Seeking information from similar-sized churches about both their income sources and expenses may result in ideas about how to rethink the scope of your spending and income.

5 Ways Forward for Very Small Congregations (continued)

4. Identify one pressing community need that matches a congregational strength.

Have conversations with those who may have more knowledge of your surrounding community. Talk with those who deal regularly with people in the community you do not know, including those that do not go to church. Identify some of the greatest needs in the community. Then select one for which your church has a passion and some relevant strengths. For example, some churches have well-kept facilities. Others have open spaces. Still others may have a history of mission, strong music, or a cadre of retired teachers. Find a concrete way to reconnect with your community to serve. Always keep in mind that revealing question, *“If your church closed today, who would miss it other than the members?”*

5. Connect with other churches of similar size.

The challenges you face are not unique to your congregation. Chances are that other churches in your area are facing similar questions. Establishing conversations to learn from one another will build relationships out of which shared ministries may emerge. For example, the community need you hope to address may be larger than your church alone can handle.

Helpful Resources for Stewardship Season

New Ministry Grants and the Stewardship Challenge Grant

- <https://www.wumf.org/grants-program/>

How to Write a Narrative Budget (video)

- <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/740145934>

Financial Stewardship Programs/Campaigns

- <https://www.wumf.org/assets/AnnualFinancialCampaignsBrochure.pdf>

The Church's Need to Receive or the Giver's Need to Give? September 2024

When I was first learning about stewardship early in my ministry, I heard someone say, "Good stewardship practices focus on the giver's need to give, rather than the church's need for money." At the time, I didn't buy it. To my cynical ears, it sounded like a line. Today (many years later), I can say that I was wrong.

We love our churches. We want them to thrive and succeed. They are near and dear to our hearts. So when the churches faces financial challenges, we want to plead with people how important it is to keep the ministries of our beloved church going. We need to pay the bills. Throw in the anxiety that surrounds any financial topic, we may want to push the point.

The truth is the church's mission isn't to keep existing. In fact, we love our churches because of the ways God has touched our lives through them —ceremonies and rituals, helping us grow in faith and connection. Likewise, a church's teaching about faithful stewardship should be centered on helping people learn about the place of money in a Christian's walk of faith. It's about discipleship and partnering with God to make a positive difference in the world — whether people do that by being generous with the church or other organizations. (Note: I do believe people who are generous as a part of their faith include the church in their generosity if the church is faithfully living out its mission.)

Tithing benefits the giver as much as it strengthens the mission and ministry of the church — especially in the midst of our materialistic and consumerist society. We are immersed in a culture that feeds the appetite for more and bigger and that fosters that self-worth is found in material wealth and happiness comes by possession. As one person once said, "We buy things we don't even need with money we don't even have to impress people we don't even know!"

At the root, these are spiritual problems, leading to continued discontent, discouragement, and unhappiness. We can never earn enough to be happy. In fact, studies have shown that people believe all they need is more money to be happy, when in reality, an academic study concluded that money can only boost happiness up to a certain point (at about \$75,000 in annual income).

Practices like embracing gratitude do lead to more contentment. For instance, consider making a list of the things in your life for which you are grateful. It doesn't have to be long or take much time. Taking time to focus on what you have rather than concentrating on what you don't can be transformative.

Beyond embracing gratitude, consider the following questions:

- How does living generously help you see the world through God's eyes?
- How is your own perspective shaped by materialism, acquisition, and the desire to possess? How is it shaped by the wisdom of God? How do you resolve tensions?

~ Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

Leading by Example

⁶Then the leaders of ancestral houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. (1 Chronicles 29:6)

One of the most prevalent themes in Scripture is the importance of leading by example. It is important for leaders to practice righteousness and for the congregation to know about it.

Therefore, it is important for the Pastor and Lay Leaders of the church to be proportional givers and to share that information (and yes, I know this goes against the grain of our traditional culture of midwestern humility). We don't have to share how many dollars we give, but we should share what percentage. Anonymity may do for some congregation members, but not for leaders. Sharing the story of our financial stories, including our mis-steps, can not only be inspiring for others, but will also help them know that they aren't alone in their successes and struggles.

To get more ideas and tools to help people in their faith in regard to their relationship with money, come to this August's Stewardship Conference. For more information, visit: www.wumf.org/upcoming-events

“Empathy is on the Rise Among Young Americans” August 2024

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.”

~Romans 12:15

A study led by the Lily Family School of Philanthropy finds that empathy is increasing among young Americans since 2008, almost rising to levels similar to the highs of the 1970s. Late Millennials and emerging Gen Zs are showing increases in empathy, as compared with earlier generations, countering negative stereotypes about today's youth.

This study, which is an updating of a similar study conducted in 2011, underscores that empathy is not predetermined; it is a fluid trait that can grow or shrink, depending on one's experiences.

Here are some key findings from the study:

- **Changes in empathy over time in young Americans move in cycles and can go up and down.** Both taking (cognitive empathy) and empathic concern (emotional empathy) increased between 2008 and 2018.
- **Economic variables don't play a major role in empathy changes in U.S. youth—either to promote or impair empathy.**
- **Changing interpersonal dynamics might play a larger role in these empathy fluctuations.** Empathy was higher during times of loneliness. The studies author noted that when young people see loneliness and other difficulties around them, they may reach out with care and empathy. It's also possible that their own experiences of loneliness may increase their hunger for social connection.

~ Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

Linking Giving to Mission and Ministry

The top reason people give to any non-profit is because of a belief in its mission and vision. They want to be a part of making a difference in people's lives. The mission of the United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world (in other words, it's what we do and it's the same for every United Methodist Church that exists). How each church does that is explained in the church's vision and varies from congregation to congregation. However, no matter how it is done, we believe it makes a difference. Here are some ideas to link giving to the mission and ministry of the church.

- Once or twice each month, have someone give a 2-3 minute talk during worship on a stewardship topic of the month. See our booklet, [Year-Round Financial Stewardship](#), for topic ideas. (Underneath Our Services -Stewardship at wumf.org.)
- Once or twice each month, have someone give a 2-3 minute talk during worship about a ministry of your church through which lives are being changed *and* thank people for their gifts which make that ministry possible.
- Prepare bulletin boards or other displays to highlight the different missions and ministries the church supports.
- Send a letter to the congregation about the stewardship topic of the month. Use a different writer each month.
- Ask the Church Council chair to put the Treasurer's Report last at the meeting. Put exciting changes happening in people's lives at the beginning of the meeting. When new items are proposed – ask if it is a part of God's vision instead of who will pay for it.
- Prepare newsletter articles or bulletin inserts about the topic of the month or reporting, “Because of your gifts...this has happened...”

For more ways to ideas and tools to link giving to your church's mission and ministry, check-out this August's Stewardship Conference, including a detailed agenda, the cost for attending in-person or via Zoom, and to

“There’s a Song in the Air” July 2024

In his short book titled *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about how to sing as a community of faith. In his instructions, he lists out some of the “destroyers of unison singing . . . that must be rigorously eliminated.” In his list, he talks about people who try to be heard above everyone else and those who try not to be heard at all. In his thoughts, he then adds a third group. “There are the less dangerous foes of congregational singing, the ‘unmusical,’ who cannot sing, of whom there are far fewer than we are led to believe.”

After many years of attempting to sing, I have learned that I am a part of Bonhoeffer’s third group. Although I’ve tried different types of songs and different pitches, I just can’t seem to get it right. What finally convinced me of the fact that I cannot sing was a comment by one youth early in my ministry. He was a reader for a service one Sunday morning and sat next to me behind the lectern. After the service was over and we were standing in the Narthex, he turned to me and said, “Jason, you should never join the choir.” (If you need more evidence, check out the [Foundation’s video on Socially Responsible Investing](#). Both Foundation President Krystal Goodger and I have “singing” parts.)

In all reality, music is God’s gift to humanity. Even for those of us who are lacking in musical talent or expertise, we are able to listen to and enjoy wonderful music, contributing through our silence.

~ Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

Growth Mindset

How many times have you been in a church meeting and heard this response to someone’s idea? “We’ve tried that before. It didn’t work.”

I’m willing to bet the people who say something didn’t work is telling the truth. It may be that they were actually excited about that idea, put a lot of energy into to it, and were disappointed when it didn’t turn out as they had hoped.

But, I wonder if they took the time to sit down with their team afterwards to ask questions like:

- What went well?
- What didn’t go well?
- What did we learn?
- What could we change to improve next time?
- What results were we expecting? Did we see them?
- What results did we see that we weren’t expecting? Can we build on that?

The truth is, no one is successful at anything after one try. Think about teaching your children to ride a bike or play a sport. If they would try it once, fall down or strike out or miss the ball, we wouldn’t say to them, “Well, you tried it once. Better put that on the shelf because your just not getting the results you want.” No. Rather, we’d encourage them to keep at it, learning from mistakes and successes. This is what is called **A Growth Mindset**. It is based on the idea that we can all improve, get better, and learn.

The same is true with the ministry of Stewardship (or any ministry, for that matter). We need to open ourselves up to learning new things, trying them, struggling, and getting better. I would encourage you and your team to have a Growth Mindset. I’m excited about the learning opportunities that are available at this year’s Stewardship Conference, themed *Meaningful Ministry, Successful Stewardship*. Some of the workshops may be novel. Some may be something you’ve tried before. Either way, I believe that each participant will be challenged and have something they can take back to their church to use to help your church grow.

For more information about this August’s Stewardship Conference, including a detailed agenda, cost for attending in-person or via Zoom, and to register, visit:
www.wumf.org/upcoming-events.

**Paying It Forward
June 2024**

This is a wonderful Jewish parable of generosity. (click to play)

JEWISH GENEROSITY STORY OF TWO BROTHERS

Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

**Meaningful Ministry, Successful Stewardship
Stewardship Conference at Pine Lake this August**

If you've read this newsletter before, you probably already know that the number one reason people give to a non-profit, including the church, is because of a belief in its mission and vision. But, after reading that statement, have you ever wondered:

- How do we, as a church, generate a vision? Who is responsible for making that happen?
- Does a vision last forever or does it need to be reworked at some point?

- How do we communicate what we've done toward accomplishing that vision?
- What are younger generations looking for in a church? How should that affect our vision?

This year's Stewardship Conference at Pine Lake, on August 9 - 10 will focus on both the best practices for successful stewardship along with meaningful ministry practices that drive, not only generosity, but all vital ministry in the church. Workshops will include:

- Revisioning and Reimagining Your Church (don't just tweak your traditions)
- Beyond Nickels and Noses: Measuring What Matters
- Building Powerful Donor Relationships
- Finding Your Timothy: Discipling the Next Generation
- Hearing from Gen Z: What do they think about the church and what are they looking for?
- Storytelling as the Basis for Year-Round Stewardship
- The Art of the Ask
- And more . . .

You can come in-person, just for the day (either Friday or Saturday) for \$20, for the full retreat for \$80, if you're sharing a room or \$125 for your own room, or attend virtually via Zoom for \$40. (Meals and beautiful location included for in-person options.)

All participants will receive recordings of the workshops they can share with their congregations. For more information, a full list of workshops with descriptions, and registration information visit: www.wumf.org/upcoming-events. Questions? Contact Rev. Jason Mahnke, Director of Programming and Campaigns, at jason@wumf.org.

Paying It Forward May 2024

“Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow . . . So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.” Galatians 6: 7, 9

According to the Good News Network, 84% of adult Americans agree with the idea that “what goes around comes around.” Therefore, the same number also say that they will go out of their way to “pay it forward” whenever possible.

Respondents reported that they were doing so in a number of ways, including:

- Treating their loved ones to something special (50%)
- Giving generous tips (48%)
- Helping out a neighbor by carrying their groceries or shoveling snow (46%)
- Donating money to organizations or charities (40%)

In addition, almost four in ten said they volunteered their time to help friends or family or supported locally owned business. The average adult engages in five generous acts per week, which adds up to 260 random acts of kindness each year.

Whether it's to align their cosmic mojo or simply acting out of human nature, those who pay it forward believe these acts have real effects on more than those on the receiving end. Americans feel better about themselves (49%), their life overall (37%), and feel more confident (22%) when they extend kindness to others.

Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

Annual Stewardship Campaign Planning

As the calendar begins to turn toward summer, this is the perfect time to begin planning your Fall Annual Stewardship Campaign. Beginning planning now will not only give your team time to review the different options that are available, it will also give you time to customize any pre-packaged campaign, so it better fits your context.

Which campaign is best for your church? It depends. There are different types of campaigns. The campaigns [listed in this brochure](#) are organized into categories according to the style of approach used. Many of the campaigns are tricky to classify, so don't automatically rule out an option because it is in a certain category. Begin by thinking about which type of campaign might work most effectively in your church at this time. How would you answer these questions?

- What approach will people respond to best at this time?
- How will this help people be open to growing in their generosity?
- How does the congregation enjoy spending time together – in a large group or small group discussions or meetings? Do you prefer emails and/or mailings?
- What types of campaigns have you done lately?
- What is the budget and amount of time to be spent on a campaign?
- What spiritual needs does the congregation have in regards to giving? Has there been discussion about tithing?
- What are the educational goals for the program? What are the goals for interpreting the ministries of your congregation?

We suggest the Pastor and a member of the stewardship committee start by narrowing the initial selection to about two to six options [from this brochure](#). Then a committee could make the final decision. If you would like to preview the material, we have many of the campaigns available here at the Foundation. Simply reach out to Jason Mahnke at jason@wumf.org for more information.

Generous Words April 2024

Our world is becoming increasingly visual. That means it is important for our newsletters to adapt to help share the message of generosity effectively. Several times a year, rather than sharing a written story about generosity, I will share a video. I encourage you to do the same in your newsletters.



<https://vimeo.com/798817132>

Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

Celebrate Generosity

It's not uncommon for me to visit a church and hear a financial update from the pulpit stating the dire circumstances of the church's finances and then urging people to give more. While financial transparency is important, doom and gloom stewardship appeals do more harm than good. Even if there is a short-term financial boost from a few people, such messages usually lead people to stop giving.

For your next financial update, take some time to celebrate the ways people have been generous, both to the church and in their lives.

Consider, for instance, the points from this article from Forbes, 'Wired to Give – How to Make the Most of Your Innate Generosity':

We're wired to give. Neurologically, psychologically, socially, spiritually – everywhere we look, the evidence suggests that generosity is one of the hallmarks of humanity.

You're already a giver. You are likely more charitable than you even knew. Do you have any life insurance, for instance? It won't do you any good personally, but it sure is helpful to anyone who depends on you financially.

Praising behavior that you'd like to see more of goes a lot further than bemoaning what you don't see happening. It's a big part of having a mindset focused on abundance rather than scarcity.

There Never Seems to Be Enough

March 2024

Sometimes it flies, sometimes it crawls, but it always passes inexorably. We mark it, save it, waste it, bide it, race against it. We measure it incessantly with a passion for precision that borders on the obsessive. We are obsessed with it; we never seem to have enough of it; and yet scientists don't even know how to explain it. What is it? The answer is time.

We never seem to have enough time. A group of experts once got together to figure out how much time we should need to get everything done in one day. These experts got together and noted how much time was needed for exercise, hygiene, work, commuting, household chores, eating, entertainment, spiritual development, sleep, and family time. When these figures were all added together, the experts said that a human being needs 42 hours a day. That's not very encouraging.

Of course, those are the things we're supposed to be doing every day according to experts. In truth, we add to that list as well. Consider that every day in the United States:

- 74,000 of us move to a different home and 22,465 move to another state.
- 36 businesses go bankrupt while 13,700 new ones start up.
- Americans purchase 38,082 new automobiles and trucks and smash 16,438.
- 2,266 couples get divorced while 6,578 get married.
- Dogs bite 12,329 people including 15 mail carriers.
- We eat 75 acres of pizza, 53 million hotdogs, 167 million eggs, 3 million gallons of ice cream, and 3,000 tons of candy.

The Psalmist tells us that "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." In other words, every moment of every second, and every second of every minute, and every minute of every hour, and every hour of every day is literally a gift from God. Unfortunately, in all of the hustle and bustle of our lives, we forget this. Instead, we are more often stressed out by this gift than

thankful for it. Think about this: God gives to every one of us all the same amount of time in a day.

Sometimes it's just our perspective. What if we were to get up every morning and thank God and remember that "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." It wouldn't give us any more time, but maybe our perspective each day would change and we'd appreciate the gift of time a little more.

Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

Did you know?

Jesus talked about money and possessions twice as much as he did about heaven and hell, five times as much as he talked about prayer, and nearly half of Jesus' parables deal with how we manage money and possessions.

John Wesley's goal was not to raise money for the church, but to lead people into a healthier, more productive, more positive life by providing practical wisdom on the relationship between their faith and their finances. Wesley's rules are not about fundraising for the church. They are about becoming more like Christ. They are about practicing the spiritual discipline of generosity so that we become generous people whose lives are shaped in the likeness of an extravagantly generous God. How can your Stewardship team continue striving for Wesley's goal in your context?

A thick bankroll is no help when life falls apart, but a principled life can stand up to the worst. ~Proverbs 11:4 **The Message**

Whoever loves money never has money enough; Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. ~Ecclesiastes 5:10 **NIV**

Practice, Practice, Practice February 2024

Believe it or not, even though Christmas feels like it is just behind us, Lent is about to begin (Ash Wednesday is February 14 this year). In the church, Lent is a period of 40 days (not including Easter) during which we re-examine our lives and our faith practices as we prepare for the coming of Easter. The practice of re-examination and recommitment dates to the very beginning of the church as new members prepared to be baptized on Easter Sunday. We may ask ourselves, however, **why is the observation of Lent important to us today?**

The reality of the situation is, if we don't take the time to re-examine what's important to us and practice the basics of faith, we run the risk of forgetting who we are, where we've come from, and what God has done in our lives. Every professional sports team gathers before the season begins and focuses on many of the things the players have done since they were small children. In baseball, they field ground balls (and coincidentally, Spring Training also begins on February 14 for many teams this year). In football, they go over tackling and blocking. In basketball they dribble and pass. These are adults who are the best players in the world, and yet their coaches start them off at the very beginning every year. Only the teams who've mastered the basics have a chance of contending for a championship.

As Lent approaches let's be encouraged to get back to the basics of faith. Come to worship regularly. Take time to become a part of a study group to grow in your faith together. Pray daily. Give generously both your time and your money. The basics aren't just for the young or inexperienced in faith. They are for everyone — from the youngest child to the champions of faith who've been an inspiration to us.

Let's take time to refocus on the basics as we begin our journey to the cross with Jesus.

Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Don't forget to register for the **Clergy Tax Seminar** on Monday, January 22 and the **How to Reach New People Seminar** on Saturday, February 3. Both are available in-person and virtually. For more information and to register, visit: <https://www.wumf.org/upcoming-events/>

Help for the Stewardship Team

What's Your Church's Vision for 2024?

The top reason people give to any non-profit, including the church, is because they believe in its mission and vision. So here is a vital question for your church's leadership: What is your vision for 2024?

Wondering where to start to define your vision? Let's begin with some definitions.

Mission – the mission of a church is a broad statement that explains why the church exists and does not change often. The Book of Discipline states that the mission of the United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Vision – a vision is what a church wants to achieve, in a defined period, to contribute to its mission. It is aspirational. It points to where the congregation believes God is calling them to be in the future (usually within a few years). Consider the transformation in the community and world that will occur because of their work in that time.

A wise pastor once noted, "In order to raise money, you must have a bold vision. It must be dramatic and exciting." When we've been in the church long enough, we too often forget that people don't generally give because they want to keep the doors of the church open. They give to the church (and other non-profits) because they believe the ministries of the church are making a vital difference in people's lives. No church has a money problem – only a vision problem. If you have the right vision, you can raise the money required.

Resources for Creating Your Church's Vision

- [Marks of a Vital Congregation: Vision](#) from the Center of Faith and Giving
- [Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create a Movement](#) by Will Mancini
- [Visioning: What is the next step?](#) from ResourceUMC
- [Leading Topics: Leadership and Vision](#) from the Lewis Center for Church Leadership
- [Mission and Vision Statement Renewal Workbook for Churches](#) by Rev. Jessica Crane Munoz (note: this book reverses the definition of mission and vision as stated above).

Active Discipleship January 2024

A University chaplain had an interesting conversation with a student that came to see him one day. He writes:

“I was wondering what I ought to do about the exam,” she said, “then I looked at this bracelet” (here she gestured to the “What Would Jesus Do?” bracelet on her wrist), “and I said to myself, ‘I am going to just say a little prayer, relax, and look after myself.’”

And I thought to myself, “I can think of at least a couple of other things Jesus might tell you to do — like get over to the library and get busy studying for this exam.”

Devoid of specific content, insubstantial, vague “spirituality” may be our contemporary Christian undoing. We have rendered Jesus into someone so vague, amorphous, and flimsy that he makes little claim upon us. Jesus has become a fashion accessory, something tied to our wrist, a comfort, never a challenge. What would Jesus do? Whatever we do, it appears.

This short story reminds me of what a challenge Christian Discipleship. It is easy for us to become a member of a church, attend several times a year, give a little money, and to sit back and relax because we all know that God’s grace is free. And yet, we forget that while God’s love is given to us freely, if we allow it to grab ahold of us, it changes our lives. Our priorities are no longer our own, but God’s. We pray that “God’s will be done,” not only in a general sense, but particularly in and through our own lives. This means becoming an active part of our community of faith. Giving our energy to worship, instead of being a passive observer. Actively loving and serving our neighbor, instead of just praying for them and hoping for a miracle. Spending time with God in prayer and study. Letting generosity be the top priority in our finances, not just giving what’s left over after we’ve gotten ours.

Christian Discipleship is a difficult enterprise. Thank God we have grace to support us and strengthen us. And thank God we have a community of faith to help us along and to hold us accountable.

Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

Save the Dates (or better yet, register now!)

2024 Clergy Tax Seminar

The Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation’s **Clergy Tax Workshop** is designed to assist you in the preparation of your 2023 Federal and Wisconsin state income tax filings. This year’s tax workshop will be a hybrid event, in-person at the Conference Center in Sun Prairie and online via Zoom and YouTube. James Tarp, a tax consultant with Mennenga Tax & Financial Service, will facilitate. Feel free to bring your tax returns, which you can finish filling out during the workshop. If you are a **church treasurer** and have questions about clergy taxes or tax forms, this workshop could be informative to you as well.

Topics include:

- Parsonages, housing allowances, and taxes
- Preparing W-2’s for Clergy (helpful for church treasurers)
- Tax tips
- Time to ask your tax questions.

This workshop is made possible through a grant from the Rev. Carl Berry Endowment and is provided **at no charge** to the Wisconsin Conference or to apportionments.

When: January 22, 2024

1:00-2:30 p.m. Tax information for clergy, church treasurers, retirees
2:30-3:30 p.m. Important specific tax information for new retirees (please attend at least the first 90 minutes of this time block)

Where:

- **In-person:** Conference Center (750 Windsor St. Sun Prairie, WI)
- **Virtual:** Zoom Webinar or Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation YouTube Channel

Registration: Register [by clicking here](#).

How to Reach & Welcome New People Seminar Building, Communicating, and Funding Vision that Connects

A church that is successfully reaching and welcoming new people knows those connections don't occur by accident. Effectively connecting with new people and changing lives happens at the intersection of God's calling, the identified needs of the community, and the passions and gifts of the church.

The Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation and the Wisconsin Conference are excited to announce this year's How to Reach & Welcome New People Seminar. This seminar will give church leaders practical tools they can use to rediscover their community's needs, their church's passions and gifts, and discern God's call to effectively make connections with their community. Workshops include:

- **Reconnecting with Your Community** – Learn effective strategies for reconnecting with your church's community by utilizing demographic insights and engaging in purposeful conversations.
- **Funding Ministry: Mission, Storytelling, and the Art of the Ask** – The top reason people give to a non-profit is because they believe in its mission, which is making a difference in people's lives. This workshop will equip people to communicate the impact their church's ministry is making, with current and potential donors, to fund current and future ministry opportunities.
- **Helping Your Church Name and Claim Their Gifts, Passions and Call** – Learn how to facilitate a process that will help your church name its strengths, gifts, and passion for future ministry.
- **Creating a Culture of Hospitality in Your Church** - The #1 reason guests come back to a church for a second visit is because of the hospitality of the congregation. Gain insights into practical methods that will empower every member of your congregation to connect with guests in ways that are engaging, natural, and comfortable.

There will also be an opportunity for participants to meet with Rev. Krystal Goodger, the President of the Foundation, to discuss New Ministry Grant applications*, how to start or maintain endowments, or hosting a Planned Giving Seminar at your church.

Where: Cargill United Methodist Church or on Zoom
2000 Wesley Ave.
Janesville, WI 53545

When: February 3, 2024
9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Cost: \$25 per person (in-person), which includes lunch and materials.
\$60 maximum per church (in-person) no matter how many people attend

\$40 per church to attend virtually

Registration Deadline:

Register by January 29 to attend in-person at Cargill United Methodist Church. Late registrations for in-person are accepted, but we will not be able to provide lunch for in-person registrations after that date.

The virtual registration deadline is February 2 at 5 p.m. CST.

Visit www.wumf.org/upcoming-events to register and for the latest information.

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.