

A Chicken or An Eagle May 2025

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 placed it in the nest of one of his backyard chickens, along with the other eggs already being brooded.

After a time, the eaglet hatched. Along with the other chicks from the nest, he began to roam the backyard, doing what the others did. He scratched at the earth for worms and insects. He pecked at the corn the man scattered across the yard. He clucked and cackled as best he could, and as he grew, he would flap his wings and fly a few feet into the air—just like the other chickens.

Years passed, and the eagle grew old.

One day, he saw a magnificent bird high above him in the cloudless sky. It glided gracefully through the powerful wind currents, soaring and swooping, scarcely beating its long, golden wings.

The old eagle watched in awe and asked, “What is that?”

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

The old eagle believed it was true. And so, he lived and died as a chicken—because that’s what he thought he was.

Very often in life, our perspective determines our reality. By experiencing the transforming power of God’s love and grace, we begin to see the world, the ministry of the church as a whole, our shared ministry as United Methodists, and even our individual lives in a new and extraordinary way.

Instead of being held back by “what ifs,” fears of failure, or the challenges in front of us, we are able to soar—sustained and lifted by the same grace that has already transformed us.

~ Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

Donor-Centric Thank You’s

It’s important to thank the members of our congregations who make ministry possible through their generosity of time and talent. Expressing gratitude in a donor-centric way—one that emphasizes the impact of the donor rather than just the church’s needs—can greatly amplify the power of that thank-you. Below are some examples and templates you can use to express appreciation in a way that honors the giver’s role in God’s work through your ministry.

Impact-Focused Thank You Examples

- Because of your generosity, a single mom found community and support through our weekday meals program. Thank you for being part of that story.
- Thanks to your support, our church was able to keep the lights on and the doors open for AA groups that meet here every night. You’re part of their recovery journey.

Personalized, Heartfelt Thank You Examples

- Your giving isn’t just funding ministry — it *is* ministry. Thank you for being part of changing lives.
- You may not see every baptism or every prayer whispered in the sanctuary — but your generosity helps make them possible. Thank you.
- You’re not just giving to a church budget. You’re giving to hope, healing, and transformation in real lives. Thank you for that.

Community-Oriented Thank You Examples

- You help make our church a place of belonging, worship, and healing. Thank you for creating sacred space.
- Every meal served, every child cared for, every neighbor welcomed — you had a part in it. Thank you.

Tips for Writing Donor Letters or Notes

- Start with ‘you’ language — focus on the giver, not the institution.
- Tie their giving directly to real-life impact — specific stories are better than statistics.
- Say thank you early and sincerely — don’t bury the gratitude.
- Avoid phrases like ‘help us meet our budget’ and emphasize mission and transformation instead.
- Make it personal and pastoral — sign with a real name, include a short handwritten note if possible.

It's An Experience
April 2025

I love the way Pastor Rick Calhoun has talks about Easter and the resurrection. He writes:

"The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was never meant to be proved but experienced. As a matter of fact it cannot be proved, as no one of us was there. We have to take the word of others who were. Those early witnesses were very passionate about their testimonies. Many were to be martyred in defense of their convictions. But ultimately the resurrection is to be experienced not proved. The most convincing evidence of the Resurrection of Christ is the transformation of the people who know Jesus and believe in Him. I decided long ago, the only proof of Easter I will ever need is memory. I remember what my life was like before I met the living Christ and I know what my life is now, as I share it with Him. I would not stand here and tell you I am always the man I should be. But thanks to the living Christ, I am not the man I used to be either. The risen Jesus Christ has made all the difference."

Christ living within us does make all the difference. And so we come this Easter Sunday to celebrate the love and grace we have experienced all because Jesus Christ is alive!

~ Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Save the Date
Foundation Stewardship Conference at Pine Lake
August 8 - 9, 2025

Help for the Stewardship Team

Alternative Ways of Giving

How much do you feel called to return to God to say "thank you" for the blessings you've received? In reviewing your finances and taxes for the year ahead, we invite you to consider the following creative options for meeting your charitable giving goals.

Your Gift	How to Make that Gift	Your Benefits
Appreciated stock, securities, or other assets	Donate stock, securities, or mutual fund shares through the Foundation at no fee.	An income tax deduction and avoidance of capital gains tax. This allows you to make a larger gift than if you made it with cash.
Direct gift of up to \$108,000 from Traditional or Roth IRA	If you're 70-1/2 or older, ask your IRA administrator to make a gift directly to the church or another charity from your Traditional or Roth IRA.	You can make a generous gift that is tax-free and can count for the mandatory minimum withdrawal from your IRA. It is a direct gift to charity, which means you do not pay income tax on the withdrawal. Nor does it affect your Social Security income.
Deferred Gift from an IRA or other Retirement Plan	Name the church or another charity as a beneficiary of the remaining assets after your lifetime.	You'll be able to leave your less heavily taxed assets to family, and others that you love.
Real Estate	Donate property to the church through the Foundation.	Avoid capital gains taxes, receive an immediate charitable deduction, and possibly establish a life income trust.

For ideas on how to maximize the impact of your giving contact:

Questions? Contact Rev. Krystal Goodger, President, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at 608-837-9582 or email kgoodger@wumf.org.

Love that Moves Us
March 2025

One of the things I love most about the Good News is its message that God loves us just as we are, right where we are. That is the most fundamental message of grace — that “God loved us while we were yet sinners” (Romans 5:8). God sent His Son into the midst of a world that would ultimately put Him to death. And God continues to reach out to those who are the least, the last, and the lost. Without that message of Good News, it wouldn’t be the Gospel.

But there is another part. Yes, God loves us just as we are, but He also loves us too much to let us stay where we are. God’s desire for us is to grow in all ways to become more like Jesus.

So, how do we become more like Jesus? By growing as disciples —through devotion, prayer, generosity, following Jesus’ teachings, and being open to where God might lead us. Grace is free, but holiness and godliness require discipline — the spiritual work to which we are called as disciples. In fact, the word “disciple” shares its root with “discipline.” Those who seek to grow in faith and spiritual maturity respond to the Good News of God’s love by committing to prayer, study, worship, and service.

This Lenten season, let’s renew our commitment to make room in our lives for God through all the means at our disposal.

~ Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Ash Wednesday: March 5

Easter Sunday: April 20

Help for the Stewardship Team

The Importance of Being Donor Centric

The number one reason people give to the church or any other nonprofit is that they believe in its mission and vision. Digging a little deeper, they give because they want to make a positive difference in people’s lives and believe their gift will enable them to do so. They want to be partners in that mission, not just sources of funding.

This means our stewardship teams and church leaders must be donor-centric when considering and relating to those who support the church’s ministries. What does this mean?

- **Understand your donors.** Learn their motivations, interests, and communication preferences.
- **Personalized communication.** Tailor messages to individual donors based on their interests, giving history, and demographics.
- **Donor segmentation.** Categorize donors based on their giving levels and engagement to personalize communication. For example, do not send the same message to a first-time giver that you would to a major donor.
- **Stewardship.** Go beyond asking for gifts by actively nurturing relationships with donors through regular updates, recognition (when appropriate), and meaningful engagement opportunities.
- **Demonstrating impact.** Clearly communicate the positive outcomes of donor contributions, helping them see the real difference their giving makes. In your messaging, center the donor rather than the church. Instead of saying, “Your gift allows us (the church) to feed our neighbors,” say, “Your gift feeds our neighbors.”
- **Feedback loop.** Listen to donors’ feedback, concerns, and ideas. This may require adjusting not only your stewardship strategy but also your church’s ministry goals. Demonstrating that you value their opinions and are willing to make changes reinforces their importance to the church and may reveal new opportunities for impact and engagement.

Stewardship Ideas for February
February 2025

Valentine’s Day is just around the corner — a time to celebrate love. We often think of lines like “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways,” or picture roses, cupids, and hearts filling store shelves. But amidst the romance, have we lost sight of love’s deeper meaning?

Romantic love is everywhere, yet even that is often reduced to fleeting infatuation. More significantly, many have forgotten the love that Jesus calls us to live out: “*Love your enemies*” (Luke 6:27), “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:39), and “*The one who loves another has fulfilled the law*” (Romans 13:8).

This love isn’t about warm, fuzzy feelings. Christian love is about action. It’s choosing to act kindly, even when our feelings fall short. When someone cuts us off in traffic, we can respond with patience rather than anger. When dealing with a difficult coworker, we can show genuine interest in their life rather than just tolerating their presence.

Often, loving actions lead to loving feelings, not the other way around. Romantic love, for instance, grows deeper through small gestures like holding hands. Similarly, in other relationships, choosing to act with love can foster understanding and compassion over time.

This Valentine’s Day, cherish romantic love but also take every opportunity to practice Christian love — through your actions toward neighbors, enemies, and everyone you encounter. It’s in these moments that we reflect God’s greatest commandment: “*Let all that you do be done in love*” (1 Corinthians 16:14).

~ Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Help for the Stewardship Team

2025 Virtual Tax Seminars for Clergy and Church Finance Leaders

This year’s tax seminar will be virtual, hosted by the **Texas United Methodist Foundation**.

Church Finance & Legal Update Session

Tuesday, February 4, 2025
12-4 p.m. CST

Credit: Four Continuing Professional Education (CPE) credit hours

Speaker: Elaine Sommerville, CPA (Sommerville & Associates)

Cost: \$60 Objectives: This session will help you gain specific knowledge about relevant changes to current tax laws and learn more about the basics of general church finance, including how to handle unique issues related to church employees and contractors, reimbursement plans, charitable gifts, tax-deductible contributions, expense reimbursement, financial records, and reporting.


Clergy Tax Session

Tuesday, February 11, 2025
9:00am – 11:00am CST

Credit: Two Continuing Professional Education (CPE) credit hours

Speaker: Sandra Fowler, CPA, CPP (Sommerville & Associates)

Cost: \$30 Objectives: This session will help you gain specific knowledge about relevant changes to current tax laws and learn about payroll issues related to ministers, such as employment status, housing allowances, reimbursable expenses, tax-free benefits, and retirement plans.



Deadline to Register:

2/9/2025 at midnight; [Click here to register.](#)

Register for both sessions to receive a \$10 savings!

REGISTER HERE! Reaching Out, Welcoming In: Strategies for a Connected Church in the Digital Age

When: Saturday, February 15: 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m.
Where: Christ United Methodist Church, 4509 Highcrest Rd, Rockford, IL or virtual via Zoom
Cost: \$20 per person, in-person (includes lunch); \$10 per person virtual via Zoom

According to one [2018 report](#), millennials spend **8.5 hours** per day consuming digital content and Gen Z **10.6 hours** per day. Respectively, they spend **5.2** and **5.9 of those hours on their phones**.

For your church, this is **a massive opportunity to connect with your community**.

Workshops to look forward to:

- **Strategies for a Connected Church in the Digital Age - [Lauren V. Davis](#) and Rev. Christian Coon**
 - Lauren, a seasoned expert in digital strategy and community engagement, will guide you through practical, real-world strategies to enhance your church's online presence, offering tips that go beyond the buzzwords to actionable insights you can implement immediately.
 - **What You'll Learn:**
 - Understanding the shifting dynamics of community engagement in the digital age
 - Techniques for leveraging social media, email campaigns, and websites to deepen community ties
 - Crafting content that resonates and inspires action among your churchgoers and broader community
 - Tools and platforms that can make your organization more visible and approachable
- **Making Good First Impressions: Your Church’s Website - Rev. Chris Walters**
 - Learn how your church’s website can make good first impressions and create engagement for visitors.
- **It’s About Them: Guest-Centered Invitation to Ministry and Community - Rev. Scott Carlson**
 - Explore how to craft guest-centered invitations that foster meaningful connections and encourage ministry involvement.
- **Value-Based Ministry: Making Ministry Decisions Based on Ministry Values, Not Just the Financial Bottomline - Rev. Jason Mahnke**
 - Delve into strategies for aligning ministry decisions with core values to ensure impactful and mission-driven outcomes.

REGISTER HERE! Mark your calendars, and get ready to join us for a transformative day of learning and fellowship!

Questions?
Reach out to Jason Mahnke at jason@wumf.org

Hosted and sponsored by [Midwest Methodist Foundation](#), [Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation](#), and the UMC Conferences of [Northern Illinois](#) and [Wisconsin](#).