



Stewardship

Raise Up Generous Disciples



G U I D E L I N E S

Stewardship

Raise Up Generous Disciples

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Discipleship Ministries

STEWARDSHIP

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Contents

- “A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”4**
- Intentional Discipleship Systems5**
- Online & Virtual Engagement6**
- Part One: What’s It All About.9**
 - Introduction
 - Foundations
 - Five Key Elements
 - Conclusion
- Part Two: A Strategic Plan for Stewardship20**
 - Set Directions
 - Shift the Focus
 - Shift the “Connectional Conversation” from Them to Us
 - Giving beyond the Budget
- Part Three: Explore Your Role26**
 - Stewardship Ministry Team Leader
 - Spiritual Gifts and Qualities for This Team
 - What Does Our Team Do?
 - Prepare for This Role
- Resources.....28**
 - Where Can I Find Help?
 - Books
 - UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

“A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”

Thank you for assuming the important and awesome work of providing spiritual leadership to your congregation. The work of church leadership is shared and synergistic. Pastoral and laity leadership combine to provide the widest possible set of gifts, knowledge, abilities, skills, experience, and passions to fulfill our United Methodist mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶120). What you do as a gifted, spiritual leader is of vital importance.

Spiritual leadership differs from other forms of leadership in the foundational ways it allows us to live out the vows and promises we make when joining the church: to uphold The United Methodist Church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.

The first work of all church leaders is to pray for the ministry of the church: local, denominational, and global. Our work is always worshipful work. Our ministry of presence strengthens our church’s ministry and mission. By combining our gifts, knowledge, experience, and passion we can achieve wonderful things together through the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Together, we strengthen our congregation for service to those within the community of faith and beyond. Accepting the mantle of leadership provides a powerful witness to the world of what it means to be a faithful disciple.

Together, we fulfill our mission of making disciples and transforming the world by reaching out and receiving people in the name of Jesus the Christ, relating people to God in covenant community, nurturing and strengthening people in their faith, and equipping and supporting people to live their faith in the world.

The *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation* draw upon a wealth of experience and expertise to provide you with the basic resources you need to do effective, impactful ministry. Each Guideline focuses on a key area of ministry and church leadership, providing information and processes to help your working group—committee, council, board, or other configuration—excel and support all other working groups. See the accompanying Guide to the Guidelines for useful information on how the *Guidelines* and ministry areas work together.

We recommend that each group member read this Guideline and noted paragraphs from the *Discipline*. Take time at meetings to discuss ways to implement identified tasks and responsibilities, plan for the future, and assess and evaluate your work.

The apocryphal book of Sirach reminds leaders to be humble servant leaders, make sure the needs of others are cared for, and then receive “a wreath for your excellent leadership” (Sirach 32:2 NRSVue). We invite you to lead with humility, compassion, patience, and grace, that The United Methodist Church might be a witness to the light and love of Christ for all the world

Intentional Discipleship Systems

As we look out across our churches, the problem is not a lack of people, the problem is the church's inability to see and reach them. As leaders in the church our role is to find clarity in the who & what of discipleship, the how of discipleship formation, but most importantly, the why for being disciples and making disciples. This describes the work of intentional discipleship systems or pathways.

John Welsey said it best in *The Scripture Way of Salvation*: "There is a real, as well as relative, change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel 'the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us' producing love to all humankind."

This love for all humankind is what drives discipleship. A basic desire to love God, love neighbor, love self, and repeat. To go deeper and deeper into the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and to offer what we have found to those that we meet.

How do we get back to a movement of a deep love for people that drives everything we do? How do we get back to seeing all the people that God calls us to reach?

The world, now more than ever, needs disciples of Jesus, growing in faith, growing closer to Christ, with a clear vision of the world and people as God sees them. Disciples who seek to use their God-given gifts to transform their communities and the world.

Early Methodists started a movement that was focused on growing as disciples, inviting others into a life following Jesus, and helping those in their communities that were hurting the most. At Discipleship Ministries, we believe that we need to get back to these basic understandings of church and discipleship, and back to a concern for improving systems that work for all God's children moving us toward what God intends for all.

We invite you to explore the SeeAllThePeople suite of resources (www.seeallthepeople.org) designed to equip you and your church for intentional discipleship and community engagement. Although the forms and strategies change, the main goal of the church remains: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It will always be about discipleship!

Online & Virtual Engagement

Access to data services, portable devices, and applications that allow for communication, media sharing, and interaction continues to expand at a rapid pace. Worldwide in 2022, people spent on average 6 hours and 58 minutes per day on internet-connected screens (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report>). Young people often beat those averages, with today's teenagers averaging upwards of 9 hours per day (<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/07/28/childrens-engagement-with-digital-devices-screen-time>), and children now grow up in more settings with digital devices and artificial intelligence woven into their daily lives. Ministry leaders, whether it comes naturally to them or not, have the responsibility to be aware of and engage in the opportunities that online communication allows.

Community can be built and decisions made using online platforms. Consider setting policies and procedures for leadership teams to set agendas, schedule meetings, and hold votes online. If your church has struggled with multigenerational leadership, the opportunity to host meeting online using video conferencing services can increase the possibility of creating meeting times that allow young professionals, parents of younger children, college students, and youth to more easily attend and engage. Shared drives and files allow secure access to agendas and other items for decision-making. Voting mechanisms using tools like Google Forms or even email replies can allow for debate and equitable access to finalizing plans.

Most importantly for financial leaders in the church, the transitions that have happened in recent decades around the adoption of digital currency and the steep decline in the use of cash or checks (which are predicted by many to disappear by the end of this decade) will change the way your church receives support from your donors.

There are economic and cultural limitations in terms of data and device access, so be aware of those factors in your ministry context. If device or high-speed data access are issues facing your community, consider how your church might help to meet those needs in the community and provide greater access to the ministries that you organize. Perhaps your facility could even be set up as an "internet café." If your building has reliable and fast internet access, create a guest network and consider setting open hours and creating hospitality hours for students who need access to complete their schoolwork or even receive tutoring or mentoring as a method of community outreach and relationship building.

If your church is only using social media to push out announcements, your leadership is not harnessing the full capabilities of online community building. In fact, there are faith communities that are purely online. Larger and larger percentages of young people prefer making connections and having conversations online that then translate into in-person

connections and relationships. Conversations and relationships begin online and are integrated into the real life of individuals and churches alike. In many ways, the dynamics of a beloved community can be replicated online as easily as they are in person. That said, it does still take intentionality by leadership to ensure that the culture of discipleship so important to the vitality of a church stays consistent whether interactions are online or in person. Small groups can flourish because of the ease of communication between in-person sit downs. Worship and other church events can be livestreamed and engaged live with commentary. Church records can be digitized and organized and more easily shared than ever before. AI and translation software allow your church to connect to an ever more diverse community, and this is a good thing.

Online and virtual connection opportunities will continue to increase, as will the diversity of applications, platforms, and devices used to engage. As a leader, build up your skills and willingness to engage online. Ministry, with young people especially, will require intentionality virtually and in person. If you do not feel naturally gifted or skilled in virtual arenas, invite other leaders who enjoy those settings to bear responsibilities for how your beloved community interacts together online. Attend trainings and use services from Discipleship Ministries or United Methodist Communications to improve your church's online capabilities.

As online and virtual access and platforms evolve quickly, it is difficult to create guidelines that will last for the span of four years. Therefore, we encourage ministry leaders to use a combination of the following questions so that approaches to online communication and engagement can evolve along with technology and popular apps:

- How do these technologies align with our church's mission and values?
- How do these tools help us to build genuine community through engagement, in addition to growth and outreach? Likewise, how do these tools reinforce connections and relationships so that virtual interactions complement rather than replace in-person community?
- How can we ensure that the online technologies we use are accessible for all members of our congregation, including those with limited technical skills or access? Do we provide any training or support?
- How do we account for privacy and security needs in the tools we use? How do we include guidelines for transparency that are consistent with abuse prevention policies?
- How do we maintain standards related to our culture of discipleship and theological integrity between in-person and virtual platforms?
- How do we determine what is appropriate in terms of decision-making, vote-taking, and so on, when leadership teams meet online?
- How will we measure engagement and define success in virtual spaces?
- How do we envision the role of technology in our long-term strategy? How do we prepare to adapt as our congregation's needs and digital tools and environments evolve?

- How do different age-ranges in our church use technology different? What expectations do they have? How and where are those connected with our church engaging online in addition to through what we offer?

For deeper reading, see <https://store.umcdiscipleship.org/product/online-discipleship/>.

Disciple Dashboard is a congregational data dashboard that provides an opportunity to set goals, collect essential data, and reflect on ministry: <http://umcdiscipleship.org/disciple-dashboard>.

Part One: What's It All About?

Introduction

We United Methodists are a people who believe in making disciples. I am continually amazed as I travel across our global church how our members can recite to me the UMC mission: “To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” While we believe in it, it seems in many places that we have drifted away from the actual practice of making disciples. From the opening pages of this booklet you know that we need to be intentional about our disciple-making systems. Intentionality is what takes our belief in disciple-making and gives it legs, makes it happen, transforms lives.

If you're reading this book, I'm going to guess that you have been asked to take some kind of leadership role in stewardship in your local church. I would further guess that for the vast majority, you have been given the explicit or implied direction that success in your new role will be to help reduce the church's budget deficit. Let me suggest a different measure: being successful in your role is going to mean that your church is intentional in growing disciples who understand that mature disciples are growing in generosity, in generous hearts – not just in their offerings, but in the whole of their lives. Take my word: it will be evident, not just at the bottom of a spreadsheet but in every aspect of the church's mission and ministry.

Charles (Chick) Lane, in his wonderful, very readable book on stewardship, *Ask, Thank, Tell*, begins the introduction with my favorite opening sentence from all the books I've read on the subject: “Stewardship has been kidnapped and is being held hostage by a sinister villain named ‘Paying the Bills’” (*Ask, Thank, Tell: Improving Stewardship Ministry in Your Congregation* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006], 7).

In that sentence, Lane points our attention to the burden of any person who feels called to do the work of stewardship in the church. There will be those whose total expectation of you and your team will begin and end with getting the church bills paid. Unless we are able to move past that perception, stewardship will remain a hostage indefinitely!

Please don't misunderstand me: the funding of the ministry of your church is important! (Notice I didn't say paying the bills is important.) Many people depend on your church and its ministry; and if your church were forced to close, people in your community (beyond your members) would notice and would miss it.

In my work as director of stewardship at Discipleship Ministries, I am constantly reminding myself that part of my time needs to be focused on helping stewardship and finance leaders find the tools that will help them fund the ministry and mission of their local church. However, it is just a part of the work that I do, and that you will do. I hope your

main focus will be the work of growing generous disciples of Jesus Christ, so that the world might be transformed.

“What is the secret to creating a culture of generosity in the local church?” “Why does stewardship come so easy to some congregations but so hard in mine?” “If you just tell me which program to use, which kit to buy, I will order it today!”

There is no program, no kit to buy that will cause a magical transformation in your church. This Guideline will explore some ideas, perceptions, observations, and best practices. What I can give you is one little vision, a sneak peek at what lies down the road: generosity brings joy. It is a glimpse of God’s kingdom here on Earth.

Foundations

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn’t because of the crowd. He ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When Jesus came to that spot, he looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today.” So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus.

Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much.”

Jesus said to him, “Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. The Human One came to seek and save the lost.” (Luke 19:1-10)

I worshiped for a period of time in a church that had signs posted everywhere—doors coming in, doors leaving, entering the fellowship hall, even in the men’s and women’s rooms: “It’s all about relationships.” It wasn’t the church’s mission statement; but it was a core value, and you couldn’t be in that church facility for more than a minute without realizing it. It was a reference to the relationship with God, with Jesus Christ, with other people in the church family, with neighbors and community, and with the global community. This church lived it out. They really were all about relationships.

Stewardship Is about Relationships

The story of Jesus encountering Zacchaeus as Jesus entered Jericho is a powerful stewardship text—not just because Zacchaeus responds to Jesus with an explosion of generosity, but because his generosity comes as a result of the desire of Jesus to be in relationship with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus might have more money than anyone in Jericho, but he is living estranged and alienated from the community of faith. That Jesus would reach across that chasm and seek to restore Zacchaeus’s relationship to the community of God’s children brings forth a wellspring of gratitude that can’t be contained!

Stewardship is not about what the finance committee does in August or September in preparation for the pledge campaign in November. It is not about the little box in the

Sunday bulletin that tells us how much less last Sunday's offering was than what we needed to make the budget. *Stewardship is all about relationships.*

Don't be mistaken: raising money for the operation of the church is important, and the money people give or don't give will either empower or cripple ministry that your church must be about and that the world desperately needs. Creating revenue for the church is important, but it is not the foundational purpose of stewardship. In fact, because the word *stewardship* is so strongly identified throughout the church with the fall fundraising event, many have started using the word *generosity* as a way to embrace a focus that is not so limited.

To view this from a biblical perspective, the dominant theme in the Old Testament is the understanding of the covenant that God established with our Hebrew ancestors: "You will be my people and I will be your God." More than an agreement or a contract, the covenant defines a relationship. We can't understand or teach stewardship until we understand the blessings and obligations that undergird this covenantal relationship. For the Hebrew people, their part of the covenant was to keep the law as given by God through Moses. As the New Testament unfolds, we are freed from bondage to the law (see Romans 7:6), but we are not without our side of the covenant. Our responsibility is still rooted in relationship: acceptance of the good news of redemption offered through a relationship with Jesus who accepted the cross for us.

How does our teaching about stewardship connect and call people into relationships?

- Stewardship is about our relationship with God, who, in love, has sought to enter into covenant with us.
- Stewardship is about our relationship with Jesus Christ, the embodiment of that love, who called us to a discipleship role, the scope of which extends "to the ends of the earth."
- Stewardship is about our relationships in and beyond the church, Christ's body in the world, and the mission to which it has been called.

A Matter of Trust

Dr. Carol Johnston, associate professor of theology and culture at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, has done extensive research on generosity in a variety of congregational settings and has interviewed church members across a wide range of income levels. She observed that, regardless of the economic strata, when asked about money, interviewees expressed consistent anxiety about whether they "had enough" to really feel secure. Those interviewed were unable to see that money really couldn't guarantee security in this life. Johnston's reflections on this are powerful:

From a Christian perspective, security comes from healthy relationships—with family, community, and ultimately with God. But we live in a society in which relationships of all kinds have been unraveling for decades. In order for people to change the way they think about and use money, the focus needs to shift from money as the measure of wealth and security to the only true security there is: placing your life in God's hands, and learning to build healthy relationships in this life—healthy families, healthy communities, and a

healthier world. (*Thinking Theologically About Wealth, Including Money*, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/thinking-theologically-about-wealth-including-money>)

Jesus: “It Is All about You”

We’ve often heard it said that Jesus talks more about money and possessions in the Gospels than he does about any other subject: heaven, salvation, or evangelism. What we miss sometimes is the most obvious: He doesn’t talk about money and the church; Jesus talks about money and us. He talks about our possessions, what we own and what owns us; he talks about how what we have helps or hinders our walk with God. Jesus talks about how we invest money and resources, and what that says about where we put our trust and what it says about where we think we will find happiness, security, and contentment.

From church-centered, budget-driven to donor-centered, mission-driven

Too often, we begin the stewardship conversation with what the church needs: more money, more tithers, a new roof on the Sunday school wing, and so on. All of these may be true, but if the conversation remains locked on the church’s needs, eventually we’ll find ourselves “begging” our people for money so often that they will walk by on the other side of the street to avoid us.

How different might stewardship in your local church be if you put the focus on the giver—on what kind of mission work gets him excited, or on her desire to grow in her discipleship, instead of on the church’s need to pay the bills?

What Is Enough?

Adam Hamilton and the staff of the Church of the Resurrection United Methodist Church in Leawood, Kansas, were preparing for their annual giving campaign. In the midst of their planning, they came to a shared realization that Adam describes this way:

One thing became painfully obvious. There were many people in our congregation who were struggling financially. They were struggling, not because they were not making enough money. They were struggling because they were living beyond their means and were saving nothing. (*Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity, Stewardship Program Guide* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018])

Adam and his team realized that the traditional pledge campaign was not what was needed. Instead, he and his team needed “to help people *redefine their relationship* with money and begin to think carefully and biblically about where we find real joy and what our lives are really about” (1, emphasis added). The result was a sermon series called “Simplicity, Generosity and Joy,” which became the basis for the book and video study *Enough*.

In 2008 (the year following the preaching series), the members of the church gave more than they ever had before, but for Adam and the church staff that was not the real payoff: “As exciting as that was, the emphasis was not about increasing our budget. It was about helping people to experience the life God wanted them to live and to have the kind of

relationship with their money that God wanted them to have. And as they did, they simplified their lives and found greater joy” (8).

What a great lesson! When we move the focus of our efforts from preserving and supporting the institution (the focus of so much of our stewardship efforts in the church) to the making of genuine, joyful, generous disciples, our work is fruitful, and the church is blessed! This is why we make a distinction between creating a culture of generous disciples of Jesus Christ and conducting a successful pledge campaign.

In too many cases, the pledge campaign focuses almost exclusively on the needs of the church, or specifically the budget for the coming year. Often this time of the year is referred to in an apologetic tone, as an “uncomfortable process” we have to go through for four weeks each year, so we can “put it behind us.”

Even if this were no more than a simple fund-raising effort (like United Way or the PBS pledge break), this would be a questionable attitude and tactic. For disciples of Jesus Christ, who taught us so clearly and emphatically the importance of people being rightly related to God in regard to our money and possessions, anything less than a comprehensive, year-round focus on growing generous disciples seems less than worthy of our calling.

Five Key Elements

Churches that have been successful in shifting the stewardship focus have found that nurturing members to become generous givers has made the process less “seasonal” and more of an ever-present value. Attendees rarely perceive the congregation as one that is “only interested in money.” They are not embarrassed to talk about money and possessions because they understand that as part of being true to the gospel.

Here are five characteristics often found in congregations that are leading people to be generous givers:

1. **Self-Examination.** Guided self-examination of personal values and practices around money and priorities, for the purpose of finding joy and abundant life. Stewardship is not solely about what we give, but also about how well we live with the money and possessions we keep.
2. **First Fruits Teaching.** Unapologetic “first fruits” teaching in regard to giving to God.
3. **Personal Witness & Stories of Impact.** Opportunities for leaders to give personal testimony of the joy found through generous giving and for the church to remind their donors of the impact of their giving,
4. **Clear Vision for Mission.** Going beyond numbers on a budget and being able to state clearly how lives will be changed because of the gifts of time, talent, and treasure offered by members.
5. **Expectation of Members to Continue on the Journey of a Maturing Disciple.** Holding membership as something of value, but as just one step on the Discipleship Pathway. This requires commitment, with church leaders able and willing to articulate that Discipleship Pathway with conviction.

As stewardship leaders, we should be moving our churches from the perspective that “a few weeks in November can take care of all the church’s stewardship needs” to a long-term strategy that keeps faithful generosity before people year-round. And yes, that strategy can include a program that is intentional in asking people to make a commitment for the year about their goals for giving to support the mission of the local (and worldwide) church. It is, however, just one component (albeit an important one) in a larger strategy.

No one book, model, program, or package has a monopoly on the right formula for every church setting. As a congregation looks to embrace a model for shaping vital, generous disciples (or to create their own) these five elements can be used to build a comprehensive strategy. Let’s examine each one further.

Self-Examination

The challenging economic times in which we live provide fertile ground for a call to self-examination. Not only are many people struggling to find ways to navigate the uncertainty, most of us are ready to acknowledge that much of the current crisis finds its roots in very internal struggles.

We are part of a culture that has, in many ways, lost its vision of the difference between wants and needs. We have tasted the sweetness of immediate gratification, and it has become the staple that we want on our table all the time. We haven’t wanted to save for something when we could charge it and enjoy it immediately. Author and nationally syndicated talk show host Dave Ramsey has built not only a career but also a publishing empire by pointing out to people the trap of credit card debt. The basic message couldn’t be simpler: If you don’t have the money for it, don’t buy it.

Every day, we are bombarded with millions (yes, millions) of messages telling us what will make us prettier, what will make us smarter, what will make us more loved by those around us, what will make us more successful, what will make us happier, and what will make our lives more fulfilling. Not surprisingly, most of these messages seek to move us to buy something that will make all these things a reality. We might say we are not influenced, but if we are honest with ourselves, we admit that we retain more of these messages than we like. These modern-day evangelists (more accurately called marketers) will continue to offer these solutions that are contradictory to the teachings of Jesus. For the most part, they go unchallenged by the church. People buy, consume, overspend, go in debt—all in search of something to satisfy their longings.

The people in our congregations are ready to acknowledge there are spiritual issues along with financial ones that challenge us. Many are willing to admit that the ways we have sought contentment and fulfillment, joy, and purpose do not resemble the abundant life Christ has promised his followers.

In the example of Church of the Resurrection (mentioned earlier), Adam Hamilton admits that, normally at his church, a commitment campaign would mean an attendance drop of about 15 percent. But when he preached his series on “Simplicity, Generosity and Joy,” the attendance swelled. “It had clearly struck a chord with people,” he says.

Isn't it the goal of every church, of every pastor, of every disciple to help people find the joy and contentment of the abundant life that Christ has promised? Not abundance defined by things, but by purpose and meaning? And if the church won't help people find this, who will?

Your church can offer a class on basic money management, using one of the great resources available (two suggestions: *Saving Grace: A Guide to Financial Well-Being* and *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity* are listed in the "Resources" section). As you recruit someone to lead one of these studies, make sure that person is not just knowledgeable about finance, but understands the spiritual impact as well, sees generosity as a key ingredient in a faithful disciple and is already a generous giver.

First Fruits Teaching

Michael Reeves, minister of financial discipleship at University United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas, has written several excellent books on stewardship and generosity. He recently shared an essay on "The Attributes of a Biblically Generous Church." He writes:

It will be surprising to some that tithing is not one of the attributes considered. While tithing is generally stated as the goal or standard of giving by many churches and denominations, tithing is seldom confused with generosity. Tithing has been the exception and not the rule since the time of the early church. (<https://www.christianstewardshipnetwork.com/blog/2019/7/23/the-attributes-of-a-generous-church>)

Too often I have heard a pastor or financial leader say, "Well, if everyone tithed, the church would have plenty of money." The phrase is problematic on a number of levels. It implies that there is somehow a scarcity of resources available to do God's work that would magically disappear if everyone tithed. It implies that there is some kind of cap on what God expects us to do in ministries of nurture, outreach, and witness.

In the Gospels, Jesus cautions against the legalism that was prevalent among the scribes and Pharisees of his day, when the practice of tithing was often seen as a badge of righteousness, even when not accompanied by a heart of compassion and gratitude.

A tithing church is a wonderful thing; and if you are a leader of one, you are no doubt the envy of many across the church. The tithe can be a wonderful benchmark for Christians on the journey of discipleship, but many churches struggle with how to get people started on that journey.

Many churches continue to teach the concept of tithing (or some form of percentage giving), but emphasize even more the concept that is found in the Bible side-by-side with tithing: giving to God the "first fruits" of our labors year after year (see Neh 10:35; Lev 23:10-14). The concept in Hebrew culture focused those who were in covenant with God to give to God the first of the crop, just as in our present culture we honor guests at our dinner table by passing the food to them first, so they might have the best selection. This focus has helped many contemporary families move to more generous living by bringing the giving of time, talent, and treasure to God to the top of the list.

Talking about “first fruits” giving also gives us a doorway to talk about where God’s place is in our lives, among so many things that are constantly demanding our attention, our time, and our money. Giving to God through the church first, rather than when everything else is paid and we see what we have left over, puts God in our life above material needs. Even more acutely for those of us who have been blessed with so much, it puts God before all our “wants” that are not needs at all. It begs us to look at what we give to God in relation to time and talent as well, since these are also first fruits.

A careful reading of the Gospels might open our eyes to the idea that Jesus was just as concerned about what we do with the part of our resources we keep as with the part we give to God.

Use preaching/teaching opportunities to start dialogue around the priority decisions we make all the time. Use questions such as:

- If your house were on fire, and you had just a few minutes to fill just one box, what would you take?
- Imagine looking into that box: “What does this say about what is important in your life?”
- Imagine looking at a list of what you have spent money on in the past six months: “What does this say about what is important in your life?”

Personal Witness and Stories of Impact

When Bishop Robert Schnase was crafting his book, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018) he chose to describe the practice of extravagant generosity in the context of the personal witness of Matt and Kerri, two young people raised in the church who were asked to give their testimony at their church’s Consecration Sunday celebration. This couple grew into extravagantly generous disciples of Jesus Christ through the nurture of the saints of their church. Schnase did not choose the testimony of bishops, or the treatises of theologians, but the personal witness of two Christian parents who managed to make their way from fearful, restrained giving to a bold offering of themselves and their resources.

Kerri would describe how, for she and Matt, tithing had broken the sense of panic, worry, desperation, and fear that had driven many of their financial decisions in the past. The knowledge that they could give away 10 percent of their income relieved their feeling of being trapped, paralyzed, or hopeless about their financial situation. By giving more, they worried less. (106)

There are so many fine, inspiring sermons out there about stewardship and generosity, but can any of them be as powerful for this congregation as to hear from fellow travelers on the journey? In years past, these testimonies might have been shared around the kitchen table of our parents and grandparents; and in some places, they still are. It is crucial that where those kinds of conversations are not taking place, we abandon classrooms and pulpits to re-create, as best as we can, those kitchen tables so this conversation—this personal witness—can happen.

Finding leaders in your congregation who have found their way to the joy of generous giving is a wonderful goal; finding those people who are able and willing to articulate that transition through their personal testimony is a double blessing. Some people will have the gift to do this publicly, sharing testimony with the whole congregation at once. There will be others, though, who will not be able to do that, but who will be able to share their witness in a more personal, intimate way.

One of the most powerful examples of this in my ministry was at the first church I served as pastor in New Jersey. A young couple, who had been coming to that church, all of a sudden made a large jump in their weekly giving. When the husband, Gary, had to go to the hospital to have gall bladder surgery, we spent an afternoon at the hospital visiting. He shared with me about the growing relationship he and his wife had with Charley and Lillian, a much older, retired couple in the congregation. I knew only that they sat near each other on Sunday, but Gary shared with me that as their relationship grew, Charley and Lillian had told him that their tithing had shaped their lives. They said that some of their blessings were from their relationship with God in Jesus Christ. When Gary left his job with a plumbing contractor to start his own business, he and his wife had decided that they wanted the blessing that tithing would bring to them.

From then on, I made it a point to provide opportunities for the faithful and generous in my congregations to share their personal witness, in public and in private ways. There is no more powerful tool.

You might discuss with your pastor and worship committee the idea of setting aside time in worship for people to share personal testimonies once or twice a month. You don't have to direct the testimonies to giving or money, but more general topics like "When I felt closest to God" or "My hero in the faith." Some will touch on their giving, and you will identify those who might be approached in the future to witness to their giving. When it is the appropriate time to ask people to talk about their giving, make sure that you give them the right question: the "why" question and not the "what" question.

If your church has the capability, capture these testimonies on video. You can control the length. You may get more than one testimony out of a single recording, but you also build up an archive. Saints of the church can share a powerful testimony, even when they have joined the "church triumphant"!

Clear Vision for Mission

Churches that are known for the generosity of their people are consistently ones that have a clear sense of their mission in their community and the world; that mission is not known by only a few leaders but throughout the church family.

Many of the vital, growing churches I have visited over the year were congregations who were intimately familiar with their church's mission. One pastor I remember would challenge people who came to their leadership conferences to ask anyone they met at the church—from the staff to the parking lot traffic guys to the volunteers who empty the trash cans at the end of the Sunday school hour—"What is the mission of this church?" Completely confident that people would get the correct answer, he was rarely disappointed.

How about in your congregation? Is the mission of your local church well known by the members? More important, is it more than just words on the bulletin? Is it something to which your church focuses its energy and passion? Do you fulfill it well enough that people are willing to give generously to support that mission?

Clif Christopher, in his book *Not Your Parents' Offering Plate, A New Vision for Financial Stewardship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), tells the story of a young lawyer he met who had donated a large amount of money to a youth center in his community. Christopher visited him to learn more about his generosity. The lawyer shared with excitement the story he had heard of how, through the work of the youth center, the life of a young boy had been completely transformed. The lawyer told how he asked the director of the youth center what he would need to produce more wonderful stories like this, and the director replied that a new center was needed, at a cost of \$1.5 million. The lawyer had the money to give, and this seemed a great way to use it. Talking further, Clif learned that the lawyer was an active member of his local church, and this part of the conversation became quite revealing:

I asked him if he gave to the church and his answer was revealing. "I give as good as most," he replied. Then I asked him if he would ever consider giving a gift like he gave to the center, to his church. He stared right at me and said, "Lord, no, they wouldn't know what to do with it." (xiv)

The landscape for charitable giving is much broader now than ever before, and many realize the church is not the only organization worthy of their generosity. The reality is that people give where they see a clear mission that is carried out by capable, empowered leadership and bearing tangible fruit.

Lovett Weems and Tom Berlin in their book, *Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), have a chapter titled "The Two Most Powerful Words for Fruitful Leadership: So That." They suggest that local churches might want to examine their mission statement to see if it contains a "so that" phrase (literally or implied) that points people to the fruit they will see when the church is faithful in pursuing its mission. The "so that" phrase directs people to the outcomes of fruitful ministry.

As we invite people to grow in faithfulness and in support of our local church's mission through their gifts, how much easier would it be if we are able to show them the outcomes of our work, the places where our church is showing real fruitfulness?

How clear is your church's mission statement? If you haven't done so recently, you might ask the chairperson of the church council to set aside some time to review it. Ask these key questions: (1) Is it relevant to who we are and who we strive to be? (2) Is it clear and concise so that everyone in the church could be expected to know it and be able to repeat it? (3) Does it point toward fruit that others will see when we are faithfully achieving our missional objectives? (4) Would it satisfy Jesus, since it is not our church but his?

Check out this article on reviewing your church's mission statement: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/10-questions-to-ask-about-your-churchs-mission>.

Expectation of Members to Continue Maturing as Disciples.

In August 2010, political comedian/TV Host Jon Stewart commented that Chelsea Clinton's wedding was co-officiated by a rabbi and a United Methodist pastor. "Being a Methodist is easy," Stewart said on his show. "It's like the University of Phoenix of religions: you just send them 50 bucks and click 'I agree' and you are saved" (*The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, August 2, 2010, <https://www.cc.com/video/mjj09s/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-wedding-of-the-decade-of-the-century-of-the-millennium>). Some United Methodists didn't see the humor in the remark, but many saw it as an opportunity for introspection on how much we do ask from people who want to join a local congregation of The United Methodist Church.

Visit any of the most vital United Methodist churches in the U.S., and you will find that they did not get there by offering people an easy, "come when you want, give what you want" invitation to church membership. They want members who will give themselves fully to the discipleship journey, growing in their maturity (and generosity) and making disciples to transform the world.

If your congregation doesn't have in place an intentional discipleship system that moves persons who are seeking to a membership commitment and then continues moving them on to a deeper commitment in their discipleship, Discipleship Ministries has a wealth of resources that can help you build an intentional discipleship system that fits the context of your church. Visit SeeAllthePeople.org for downloadable resources, videos, courses in which you and your leaders can participate.

Conclusion

There is an enormous potential for generosity in every congregation. It begins with a focus on disciple making, not fundraising, where the giver's need to give is central. It is found where congregations teach "first fruits" giving, encourage the sharing of personal testimony, and articulate a clear vision, which they expect their members to embrace and live out in the world.

Part Two: A Strategic Plan for Stewardship

Set Directions

So now that we have explored some of the foundational understandings about stewardship and generosity, we can begin to examine your local church and explore what strategy your committee might use to expand the culture of generosity among the disciples in your congregation. We have many generous people in our churches. We already have a culture of generosity. We need to invite more people to be a part of it!

A group of key, well-respected leaders in the congregation can help a church shift its focus from stewardship as solely fundraising to stewardship as disciple making. After all, that is the mission of The United Methodist Church. Let's look at ¶120 of the *Discipline*: "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs."

The second sentence in that all-important paragraph is often overlooked. "Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs." Not conference offices or general agencies, but local church ministries are where the mission of The United Methodist Church will succeed or fail. Fully formed disciples of Jesus Christ understand the teaching of Jesus about money and possessions and their potential to be an obstacle in our relationship with God, and they embrace the joy of generous giving.

In the previous section, we talked about the tendency in many churches to view stewardship as "paying the bills." The main focus of your committee is going to be broadening that view so that people will see both the responsibilities of "funding mission and ministry," but more clearly "growing generous disciples." As you succeed at the latter, your church will have to work hard at growing the ministry of your church to keep pace with your people's desire to give generously!

It's not an easy task to shift the focus from paying the bills to growing generous disciples. If there is a switch you can flip, I haven't found it! There are many external factors at work here that we can't ignore. Our denomination in the U.S. is experiencing a decline in membership. In many ways, that is affected by cultural changes that are not within our control. Recent periods of economic recession have confronted church leaders with the loss or reduction of income sources that were previously reliable. Negative stories about church leaders involved in inappropriate handling of church funds have sometimes produced trust

issues. We certainly need to move carefully, compassionately, and transparently as we lead people to greater generosity.

Shift the Focus

From Seasonal to Continual

Sometimes it's hard to see which is the cause and which is the effect. Is it because we see stewardship only as the effort to fund the budget that we talk about it for a few weeks in the fall and then put it back on the shelf until next year? Or is it because we are so hesitant to talk about money that we address the topic as little as possible—holding our noses as we swallow some bad-tasting medicine?

There's a story I love to share: For a while I attended a large-membership church. In October (in my first week as director of stewardship for Discipleship Ministries), I received a letter in the mail from the church—the only communication we had received from them. It was lovely, four-color printing on ivory linen stationery, and the opening paragraph said: "No one likes to talk about money, but we have to do this once a year." If that isn't the classic example of the "bad-tasting-medicine-approach," I don't know what is!

That's not how it is supposed to be. We create that climate when we designate a "season" for stewardship (whether two weeks, or four, or six), and we never talk about it any other time. How would it feel if your church decided that there were only four weeks when prayer would be discussed, or only two weeks when you were allowed to talk about the atonement or repentance, because talking about it more might make people feel uncomfortable?

Vital churches incorporate stewardship teaching and the joy of generous living into a year-round strategy for helping lead people in their growth in discipleship. This doesn't mean talking about money every week in church; it does mean building a year-round strategy for keeping stewardship and generosity before your church family.

Former Director of Stewardship Herb Mather (now retired) wrote a piece called "A Twelve-Month Plan for Stewardship," which is available in both English and Spanish (see the "Resources" section). Herb also makes suggestions for monthly lay testimony on giving and generosity. If your church has a smaller membership that would make that difficult, find a pattern that works for you. Herb's plan can serve as a guideline, but it should be tailored to your church and its ministry. If your stewardship team wanted to focus, for example, on stewardship of creation, illustrate it with something near you and close by and dear to people's hearts: a national or state park, a river or a lake that people know.

In the first section of this Guideline, we highlighted the importance of inviting people to examine how they control the money in their lives and how sometimes money controls them. Offering people the chance to talk about how money was handled in their homes as they were growing up often produces great insights. Dan Dick has written a great piece on writing your "money autobiography," which is available for your reading and reflection. It's posted on his blog, and the link is in the Resources section. When people share their insights about money, it is important that confidentiality is maintained by the group and that the group strive to listen without judgment. My spending habits may seem foolish to

you, and yours may seem foolish to me. However, when someone admits he is not happy with how he manages money, the offer to hold him accountable in love can be a wonderful demonstration of support.

Another area worthy of further study is consumerism. The teaching of Christ on what brings joy in life—a teaching he has entrusted to his disciples—is virtually a whisper compared with the relentless bombardment of messages from marketers, encouraging us to buy! William Cavanaugh, in *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), brings economics and theology to the same conversation. While some people may see consumerism and greed as being very similar, he argues the opposite:

Although consumerism is often equated with greed, which is an inordinate attachment to material things, I show that consumerism is, in fact, a detachment from production, producers and products. Consumerism is a restless spirit that is never content with any particular material thing. (xi)

Personal testimony from people in your congregation can be one of your greatest tools for stewardship education. Key components of this are (1) the people you select, (2) the questions you ask them to address, (3) the attention and practice these people devote to their message—a flat reading can be deadly, and finally (4) adherence to a particular time constraint. Video recording these messages and playing them back in worship (if your church has that capability) often can ensure that these quality standards are taken into account. Recording also has the benefit of being able to share the testimonies even after people have “graduated” to the church triumphant!

Be creative in your stewardship strategy. Keep the message of growing in generosity before people through a variety of media: newsletters, bulletins, worship banners, skits, bulletin boards, the church website, and social media. Make sure your team has a good diversity of age ranges and perspectives as you develop your year-round strategy.

From Scarcity to Abundance

When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he began to teach them many things.

Late in the day, his disciples came to him and said, “This is an isolated place, and it’s already late in the day. Send them away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy something to eat for themselves.”

He replied, “You give them something to eat.”

But they said to him, “Should we go off and buy bread worth almost eight months’ pay and give it to them to eat?”

He said to them, “How much bread do you have? Take a look.”

After checking, they said, “Five loaves of bread and two fish.”

He directed the disciples to seat all the people in groups as though they were having a banquet on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, broke the loaves into pieces, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two

fish among them all. Everyone ate until they were full. They filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. (Mark 6:34-43)

This passage often makes me wonder if there was a finance committee among Jesus' disciples. While Jesus is teaching the crowds by the Sea of Galilee, somebody is worrying about the budget. So someone (Scripture doesn't tell us which disciple) goes and interrupts Jesus to tell him that he needs to wrap things up and send these folks away so they can buy themselves some dinner. Jesus' response is "You give them something to eat," which is obviously unacceptable, as that cost would break the budget for sure. This disciple is seeing the problem from a perspective of scarcity (it would cost too much, where would we find the money, etc.). Jesus understands the situation from a perspective of abundance. "How much bread do you have: Take a look." Getting past their scarcity perspective, Jesus shows them that whatever they have, when placed in Jesus' hands, is an abundance. The only problem is what to do with all the leftovers.

As a stewardship leader, one of the roles you may need to fill is to remind people that we serve a God of abundance, not scarcity. Your church may not have the financial resources to do everything, but you have all the resources God needs to do what God would do with your church. As Christians living in a country with as much wealth as we enjoy, we need to be very careful when using words like "we can't afford to." We have to prioritize—not doing this so we can do that—but if our hearts and minds are set on something, we usually find a way to afford to do it.

As a child, I remember attending a church gathering when my pastor, the Rev. Dr. Clayton Z. Miller, stood in front of the congregation and said something like this: "I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is we need more money if our church is going to do what God is leading us to do. The good news is, it's in your pockets."

Try this: Start every stewardship team meeting by asking your members to talk about one way they have been made aware of God's abundance in their lives or the life of the church, and challenge your finance committee and your church council to do the same. See if that doesn't change the tone of your meetings and empower people to reach farther in mission and ministry instead of drawing back in fear that the money will run out. See if it doesn't excite people to begin to think that growth in the church's ministry is possible.

From Numbers to Narratives

The advent of personal computers and sophisticated number-crunching software has enabled churches to produce amazing tools for measuring where the church is financially, as well as projecting potential strengths or weaknesses into the future. Spreadsheets are great tools for building and balancing a budget. While I know some folks for whom the sight of a spreadsheet with lots of columns and tabs on the bottom makes their heart beat fast, for the rest of us . . . well, they don't. For some of us, numbers can't do what narratives can do. Stories ignite the fire that makes us excited about supporting the work of the church. I'm not suggesting we get rid of spreadsheets and reports, just recommending they be accompanied

by stories of how those dollars spent are reaching, touching, and changing lives—how the transformation of the world is occurring.

The storytelling function is an important role for the stewardship team. What are the stories in your local church that will excite people about your church's mission and ministry and will encourage growing generosity? Some of the stories that will move people are local stories:

- children whose faith and values are shaped through Sunday school and other ministries;
- adults who grow in the understanding of Christ and the kingdom of God through small-group studies or serving on mission teams;
- young people who make a deeper commitment to Christ through participation in a service project, youth event, or through the close connection with a youth leader;
- people from the community who experience the love of Jesus through the church's food pantry, or through volunteers from the church who serve the local school in some way.

If the stewardship team isn't telling the stories of how people's lives are being touched locally, it will be hard to generate the enthusiasm that your church is a disciple-making church, one that lifts its sails to be filled and moved forward by the wind of the Holy Spirit.

There are, however, more stories we need to tell. Your church has a wide reach.

Shift the “Connectional Conversation” from Them to Us

As a connectional church, our congregations participate in ministries that reach beyond our walls and beyond the boundary lines of our communities. Through that portion of our offering that we send to the annual conference, ministry happens on the district and conference level, and on a global level as well. Unfortunately, these stories have not always made it to the people sitting in our pews; and so apportionments or mission/ministry shares have been perceived by far too many as a tax, a franchise fee, as a burden placed on local churches that takes away funds that could be used for ministry. It's hard to imagine what could be further from the truth.

That understanding of how we United Methodists do ministry is colored by “them and us” thinking. “Them” would usually be, from the local church point of view, the annual conference. Even if we understand some of the ministries the conference supports, it's *their* ministries, not ours. What's missing is the understanding that the annual conference is simply a collection of local churches, of which our church is one. When the conference meets each spring, our church is represented and votes on a ministry plan and a budget to support it. What it does is our ministry, how our local church partners with other churches to make an impact outside our community.

Stewardship leaders need to be storytellers and interpreters to the generous disciples in their local church, relating how our connectional giving is not going to support “their ministry,” but “our ministry” in places across the conference and around the world as well as down the street and in our buildings.

Sometimes you will hear people in your church talk enviously of “independent” churches that don’t have to contribute to mission/ministry shares. Remind them that your local church helped start and sustain Africa University, the brightest light for the future of education on the continent of Africa. With more than 11,000 graduates who are at work in more than 32 countries, Africa University is changing the face of Africa! Remind your congregation that they make “Imagine No Malaria” possible, where we United Methodists have raised over \$70 million, setting our sights on ending this disease that just fifteen years ago was killing one child every 30 seconds. We have already cut that number in half and then half again! These are not ministries an independent church can even dream of doing!

As you and your stewardship team help share the stories of the impact of your church members’ giving, locally and globally, you will build excitement and enthusiasm, and open the door to the joy that comes from generous giving that you know is making an impact, transforming lives, and bringing God’s kingdom just a little bit closer.

Giving beyond the Budget

Generous donors will give from one of three sources. Most of the giving that your local church receives will come from people’s income: for the most part, this will be the source your church will use for the day-to-day support of its mission and ministry. The second source of generosity is when people give from their assets. These might be cash gifts or gifts of securities (stock, bonds, etc.) or property. Often, people give from their assets for a specific, designated purpose: a building campaign, to endow a scholarship, and so on. The third source is legacy giving, when people provide for the church in their wills. These generous givers want to see that the mission and ministry of the church go on beyond their earthly lives.

We have not given much space in this Guideline to the second and third sources, asset giving and legacy giving—sometimes lumped together under the heading “Planned Giving.” In your church, you may be involved with these types of gifts, but often these are directed through the church trustees or the committee on finance. If you do find yourself involved, look to these sources for help:

- There is a United Methodist Foundation that serves churches in your annual conference. This link will help you locate contact information for your foundation, <http://naumf.org/locations/>. Their mission is to help local churches promote and manage these kinds of gifts.
- There are wonderful resources on the stewardship area of the Discipleship Ministries website. See especially the pdf titled “Achieving Dreams Beyond the Budget” <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/achieving-dreams-beyond-the-budget>.

Part Three: Explore Your Role

Stewardship Ministry Team Leader

Your role as stewardship ministry team leader is to guide the congregation in its understanding of how Christian stewardship fulfills the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Generous stewardship is one of the marks of a disciple of Jesus Christ and we, as followers of Christ, are called to be faithful stewards at all ages and in all stages of faith. (For the full team leader description, please see *Job Descriptions and Leadership Training in The United Methodist Church 2017–2020*, Discipleship Resources, 2016.)

Spiritual Gifts and Qualities for This Team

Work with the committee on nominations and leadership development to recruit people who have one or more of the following spiritual gifts and personal qualities and skills:

Spiritual Gifts

- Teaching
- Giving
- Exhortation (encouragement)
- Leadership
- Compassion
- Faith
- Helping

Find resources for discerning Spiritual Gifts at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/spiritual-gifts>.

Qualities

- exemplifies generous living, devoted to lifelong learning, passionate about helping others learn and grow in knowledge and faith;
- strong understanding of biblical stewardship and management of all that God gives and provides;
- ability to listen to and communicate with people of all ages;
- interest in a wide range of stewardship experiences;
- ability to work with others involved in all aspects of Christian stewardship;
- aptitude for researching issues;
- ability to develop, organize, and implement stewardship programs and events.

What Does Our Team Do?

- Coordinate with others about the planning and implementation of a comprehensive, year-round plan for Christian stewardship that includes education, inspiration, and action for your congregation.
- Provide a witness for generous living; engage in spiritual practices to fulfill the mission and vision of the church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- Encourage the congregation to live daily stewardship of their lives through their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Work closely with finance leaders to grow a culture of generosity among the church family and challenge the congregation to be generous in funding the ministry of the church. Help the congregation develop a wider view of stewardship of all the resources God has given, collaborate with others, such as the camping coordinator, earth advocacy leader, health and welfare leader, and age-level ministry coordinators. If there is an annual pledge campaign, explore the materials and options available, and make proposals to the committee on finance.
- Be familiar with United Methodist and other stewardship resources and facilitate their use by all age levels and faith stages. Search for *stewardship* on Cokesbury.com.
- Lead the celebration of Christian stewardship in worship and fellowship opportunities throughout the year. Topics might include mission and connectional giving, living more frugally, personal financial planning, and care of the planet.

Prepare for This Role

- Talk with your pastor and other leaders to share ideas about how congregational stewardship can help fulfill the mission of the church.
- If your position is not a brand new one, talk with your predecessor.
- Talk with the chairperson of the committee on finance, church treasurer, and financial secretary for their thoughts on how the congregation understands stewardship and generous living as a part of growing faithful disciples.
- Assess how well your church is thanking your donors and brainstorm new ways to make your givers feel appreciated.
- Meet with a group of interested people who have a passion for stewardship and storytelling to assist you in stewardship planning.
- Meet regularly with the congregation's finance committee and other ministry committees to advocate missional and connectional giving, encourage faithful stewardship of church resources, and promote generous living throughout the whole year.
- Learn about the educational and volunteer opportunities available in your community for people of all ages to learn about financial management, care of the earth's resources, and other stewardship-related topics. Discover gaps in opportunities where your congregation can lead the way in making a positive difference in your congregation and surrounding community.

Resources

Where Can I Find Help?

- your pastor;
- your annual conference contact related to stewardship ministry (this might be the United Methodist Foundation that serves your conference, <http://naumf.org/locations>);
- staff at the Discipleship Ministries Stewardship office:
ksloane@umcdiscipleship.org;
website: www.umcdiscipleship.org/stewardship;
facebook: www.facebook.com/UMCstewardship;
call toll free 1-877-2780, x7165;
- people in your congregation, your community, your office, and other congregations who are interested in stewardship;
- InfoServ, www.infoserv.umc.org, which answers questions and provides current information about United Methodist resources, programs, and staff services;
- Ecumenical Stewardship Center, <https://stewardshipresources.org>.

Books

Defying Gravity: Break Free from the Culture of More by Tom Berlin (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016). ISBN: 9781501813405.

Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity, Adam Hamilton (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018 [updated]). ISBN: 9781501857881.

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations by Robert Schnase (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007). ISBN 9780687645404.

Five Practices of Fruitful Living by Robert Schnase (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018). ISBN: 9781501858871.

The Generous Church: A Guide for Pastors by Tom Berlin (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016). ISBN: 9781501813498.

The Generosity Challenge: 28 Days of Gratitude, Prayer, and Faith by Scott McKenzie & Kristine Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019). ISBN: 9781501882753.

Generosity, Stewardship, and Abundance: A Transformational Guide to Church Finance by Lovett H. Weems Jr and Ann A. Michel (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021). ISBN: 9781528135334.

The Gratitude Path by Kent Millard (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015). ISBN: 9781630883195.

Growing Generous Souls: Becoming Grace-Filled Stewards by Betsy Schwartztraub (Garden Valley, CA: Generous Stewards Communications, 2019). ISBN: 9781532388682.

Imagining Abundance: Fundraising, Philanthropy, and a Spiritual Call to Service by Kerry Alys Robinson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014). ISBN: 9780814637661.

Job Descriptions and Leadership Training in The United Methodist Church 2017-20 by Jodi Cataldo (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2012). ISBN: 978-0881775983.

Let the Children Give: Time, Talents, Love, and Money by Delia Halverson (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007). ISBN 9780881775013.

Not Your Parent's Offering Plate by J. Clif Christopher (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008). ISBN: 9780687648535.

Propel: Good Stewardship, Greater Generosity by Clayton L. Smith (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015). ISBN: 9781630883683.

Rich Church, Poor Church: Keys to Effective Financial Ministry, by J. Clif Christopher (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012). ISBN: 9781426743368.

Saving Grace: A Guide to Financial Well-Being by Abingdon and Wespath (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), ISBN: 9781791008376.

Stewardship in African American Churches: A New Paradigm by Melvin Amerson (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2015, 2006). ISBN: 9780881777710.

Your New Money Mindset: Create a Healthy Relationship with Money by Brad Hewitt and James Moline (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2015). ISBN: 9781496407801.

UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

The United Methodist Church, www.umc.org

General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcuh.org, Madison, NJ, 973-408-3189

General Board of Church and Society, www.umcjustice.org, Washington, DC, 202-488-5600

United Methodist Communications, www.resourceumc.org/communications, www.umns.org, Nashville, TN, 615-742-5400; InfoServ 1-800-251-8140

General Board of Discipleship, www.umcdiscipleship.org, Nashville, TN, 877-899-2780

General Board of Finance and Administration, www.gcfa.org, Nashville, TN

General Board of Global Ministries, www.umcmmission.org, Atlanta, GA, 800-862-4246

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, www.gbhem.org, Nashville, TN, 615-340-7413

General Commission on Religion and Race, www.gcorr.org, Washington, DC, 202-495-2949

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, www.gcsrw.org, Chicago, IL, 1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, www.gcumm.org, Nashville, TN, 615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, www.umph.org, www.abingdonpress.com, www.cokesbury.com, www.ministrymatters, Nashville, TN, 615-749-6000

United Women in Faith, www.uwfaith.org, New York, NY, 212-682-3633

Wespath (retirement/benefits), www.wespath.org, Glenview, IL, 800-851-2201

For additional resources, contact your annual conference office.