

***How can the Church create an atmosphere of gratitude and worship around stewardship to help members prioritize giving to the local Church? What are creative ways to address tithing, financial accountability and apportionments that help members understand that their giving is making a difference locally and throughout the world?***

***History and Background***

Methodism founder John Wesley (1703-91) didn't just talk about being generous; he put stewardship into practice. In his sermon on "The Use of Money," he encouraged his followers to gain, save and then give "all you can." In 1731, Wesley began to limit his expenses so he would have more money to give the poor. In his journal, Wesley recorded that one year his income was 30 pounds and his living expenses 28 pounds, so he gave away 2 pounds. The next year, his income doubled to 60 pounds, but he kept his living expenses to 28 pounds. Thus, he shared 32 pounds. Most Methodists are familiar with John Wesley's quote "Earn all you can, save all you can and most important give all you can"; but fewer realize that his understanding of giving was greater than the tithing. "Do you not know that God entrusted you with that money (all above what buys necessities for your family) to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless, and indeed, as far as it will go, to relieve the wants of all mankind? How can you, how dare you defraud the Lord, by applying it to any other purpose?" That quote may seem a bit long and a bit harsh, so here is a simpler quote to keep in mind "Not how much of my money will I give god, but how much of God's money will I keep for myself." The Old Testament, New Testament, and John Wesley all emphasize that ALL that we have is FROM GOD and we are ONLY stewards of it.

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***Stewardship and Tithing***

As Christians, who we are and what we have is not based on what we've done, but only by what we've been given through Jesus Christ. All that we are, all that we have, is because of Christ. We are not our own. In the Old and New Testament, God's people are called to give back to God what is God's, which means all that they own, all that they've been given, and they are to use their gifting to bring God glory. We are merely stewards of God's gifts.

Stewardship is a transformational journey of understanding that what we have received in this world is to be used to bring God glory as we make God's kingdom on Earth: it's releasing the idea of ownership and taking on the idea of being good managers of God's gifts for God's glory.

God calls Christ's followers to be good stewards of their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service and their witness. This includes finances, talents, time, relationships, knowledge, our bodies, our words, and every aspect of our lives. Stewardship isn't a onetime only sense of giving, but a lifestyle. When tithes and offerings are viewed as a lifestyle rather than a transaction, it reinforces the truth that we are managers of God's gifts, not owners, and that it's not about what you have been given but how we can give it away.

The minimum standard for giving in the Bible is the tithe. A tithe is a tenth of something. When God tells us to tithe, He means we are to give ten percent of what we have back to him.

The great thing about tithing is it is simple. A tithe is ten percent. We either tithe or not. Tithing is an act of worship because it is a way to say to God "I love You and worship You for your bountiful goodness to me."

A tithe is a starting point. You can decide to give less, and as you are blessed, increase your giving to express your gratitude to Him. You may decide to give more than the ten percent because you want to show God how grateful you are for all he has entrusted you with. Your giving is between you and God.

Ask God to grant you the wisdom needed to make a decision on how much to give. Always remember we are the trustees of all that with which God has blessed us. How we manage what he entrusts us with reflects our confidence in and love for God.

Most importantly whatever you decide to give (time, resources, or talents) give with a joyful heart, knowing that giving is one of the ways you can express your thanks to God. This is God's call to all Christians.

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## Why Give?

This is a question that many of ask ourselves during our life's journey.

When we become a member of the United Methodist Church, we promise faithfully to participate in its ministries through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. It is a covenant relationship with God and the church.

As United Methodists, we firmly believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God. So as Methodists, we strive to live a life of obedience to Christ. We give because God asks us to give; however, giving is a choice, which is why we sometimes question ourselves about giving.

Can we all agree that God does not need our gifts? Our giving helps us support not only the ministries of the UM local church but also the church worldwide through our system of (apportionments) connectional giving! Wow! What a way to act out our faith and love for others in need.

Why Give?

We give because God first gave to us. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him wouldn't perish but would have eternal life. -John 3:16

When we give....

We are being obedient to God's word.

Deuteronomy 15:10 "Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to."

Deuteronomy 16:17 "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which he has given you

Proverbs 21-26 The righteous gives and does not hold back

Why Give?

We give to help build new churches, prepare clergy and lay leaders to make disciples, assist missionaries and many other Christian mission and ministry opportunities.

When we give.....

"Giving is celebrating and showing how grateful you are for what God has given you or what God is doing in your life. It is out of that joy when you reflect on how God has graciously pulled you through, how God has been so faithful to you and how God has been there for you. So what do you give to God that God has not given you? The joy of showing gratefulness, showing thankfulness to God. That is the secret joy of giving" (Rev. Beverly Wilkes-Null) .

### Present Problem

Church members are poorly trained on the foundation of biblical stewardship. They don't know what they don't know.

Some are taught to believe that tithing was a command by the Jewish law (Numbers 18:28-29; Deut. 12:11), and was abolished when Jesus came on the scene. But Scripture confirms that Jesus came to earth to fulfill the law, not to dismiss it. (Matthew 5:17)

Some pastors don't talk too loudly or too often about biblical stewardship because they don't want to offend anyone or some because they are poor personal stewards.

Jesus was never afraid to talk about money. He talked a lot about money and possessions. In Matthew 6:21, He says, "**Where your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will be also**" (NTL).

## Cultivating an Atmosphere of Gratitude and Worship Around Stewardship

Are we still trying to put new wine in old wineskins?

In the past, 60% of giving in the United States was to the individual's religion. Today it is 31%. There are 1.1 million non-profit organizations. Our new members did not necessarily grow up in Church where as children they put that quarter in the offering plate to begin a habit of giving. Cash and maybe a check were the ways we gave our offering.

Today, we are still thinking like 1950 in our approach to giving to God through our Church.

I am suggesting 4 changes in thought. Changes that have been developed and applied. Changes that have made a positive impact in those Churches.

1. First, we need to rethink the term "Stewardship." This is a term from the Medieval ages. Kings and princes had a steward to oversee their land. And when the King James Bible was printed, stewardship was relatable. We need to consider ourselves as managers. *God is the owner. The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord. – Psalm 24:1*

And it is our need to acknowledge that we OWN nothing. It is all God's. God has placed us in a position to manage what he has given us. As a manager, we are not as prone to be as possessive but to develop. In the spirit of the parable of the talents, we need to make well-thought out risks. How else did this manager double the value? Most of us have been more like the third investor, overly conservative. Let's be God's Personal Manager

The next two changes begin to be on the verge of crossing a line that a lay member should not cross. But to cross, we must observe the following:

The second idea falls on the Spiritual Leader. Our pastors need to lead us with their generosity, and they need to make it visible. Not like the Pharisee that made a show of his giving. But, members need to see the example of a radical, generous giver. They need to see the joy in giving. They need to see how it permeates one's life. *1 Peter 5: 1 – 2 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock*

The next change, which might seem anti- Methodism, is the message of generous giving needs to be heard more than once a year. It needs to be voiced throughout the year. I mean there are over 2300 Bible passages about money. Jesus was never reluctant to ask where one's heart was. Why are we? *II Timothy 3: 16 – 4:2 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 4:1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction* The intention is NOT to have numerous sermons on giving but on a generous heart. A heart who knows where his/her treasure is stored. The message comes not just from the pulpit, and it does need to come from the

pulpit, but in Sunday School lessons, Vacation bible School, dinners; every opportunity to celebrate how the generosity of the congregation has allowed this Church's ministries to thrive.

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The final change offered today is to rethink the offering. Make the offering more a part of the worship experience. Lift up this opportunity in the service. Think out of the box. Don't have a fixed place in the service for offering. Think about who collects the offering. What is said or sung or performed before the offering?

People are more generous today than ever with Go Fund Me events, disaster relief, sad stories in the news, and 1.1 million non-profit organizations. And they ask, maybe not out loud, what is my money doing, whose life is being changed? Perhaps by applying these four changes and maybe some more, our congregations will see themselves as managers of God's riches and feel a radical generosity, a generosity directed to our Church and God's Kingdom

### Many Ways to Give

Many churches have created exciting and creative ways to give, all of which can be set up and designed by the convenience of everyone's pay schedule or pay period. For example, this can be set up as **Weekly, Bi-Weekly, Semi-Monthly, or Monthly**.

The way churches have created this giving option could include **Online Giving**; some have gone to **Text to Give**, and many have **IPads** and **Swipers** and even **Kiosks** in the lobby. Some churches have their very own personal designed **App** where they give on the app through **PayPal** and the many different other items mentioned already as a one stop shop. Some churches have **Legacy Giving** and many get great gifts of **Stocks, Bonds and IRA's**, but the best way of giving in the church is the passing of the **Offering Plate** or **Basket** with **Cash** or **Check**.

Also, we can't forget about **Commitment Cards** as that's part of many churches' way to set their yearly budgets with the addition of giving trends and attendance and of course much prayer. Plus it holds each of us accountable to one of those faithful vows when we join the United Methodist Church.

## Conclusion

We started this project with a goal to research cultivating an atmosphere of gratitude and worship around stewardship so that we can help members prioritize giving. During this time of research and reflection, we were reminded that as United Methodists our history is grounded in the concept of giving. As United Methodists, we have a covenant relationship with God and the Church to witness, serve, give, be present and pray. Our mission to "Make Disciples for the Transformation of the World" is only possible when we become better managers of all that God has entrusted to us. During this Leadership UMC journey, as a group, we have discovered the joy of giving and a better understanding of stewardship, financial accountability, why we don't give, why we should give and all the various ways we can encourage our members to give to the local church.

When we give, we give God the opportunity to do the miraculous. When we give to a missionary, we provide the opportunity for someone to hear the miraculous salvation message. When we give to the benevolence ministry, we help provide the miracle of food, shoes or electricity.

When we give, we also offer God the opportunity to do a miracle for us. Remember the widow who had almost no food, but gave to the prophet? God provided a miracle for her that no amount of money could buy.

But mostly, when we give, we receive the miracle of being able to decrease while God increases in our lives. We receive the miracle of putting our own needs and wants aside in favor of God's ways. We die to our own selfishness a little bit each time we write a tithe check. And the more we die to ourselves, the more we become like him.

So, do we ask ourselves: How tightly do I cling to the things that will soon pass away? Can God trust me with His resources?

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." *Malachi 3:10*

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." *2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9:7*

Video Dan Stevers-We Give

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