

A CONVERSATION ON *stewardship* & *generosity*



Holston Foundation: Partners in Stewardship

Our hope: To provide encouragement and practical support to churches and clergy leaders in areas of faith, money & stewardship. Believing that good stewardship leads to greater generosity.

The Power of Generous Lives

Who are the generous people who have uniquely touched your life?

How have they shaped you and changed you?

We are the beneficiaries of generously lived lives.

How do you seek to live a generous life as a Christ follower, disciple and servant leader?

Generously lived lives motivate and influence others. We need to share their stories. In a time and culture of great division, we need to share stories of generosity--purposefully and with regularity. It needs to be at the heart of our preaching, teaching and witness.

Which Word Should We Use Today: Stewardship or Generosity?

What's the difference between "stewardship" and "generosity"? What comes to mind when you use these words? How do people respond to them today?

A steward is someone who manages the owner's property. Well-practiced stewardship is good management of our time, talents, service, environment and relationships. Some say the word "stewardship" has lost its impact in today's culture.

Others argue that stewardship is still a good word, biblically and historically, among the Bible's greatest and most significant themes. Stewardship can be viewed from the biblical sense as the use of God-given gifts and resources for the accomplishment of God-given goals and objectives.

Generosity is an aspect of character. Generosity finds many biblical sources, and is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). There are generous spirits, generous souls, people who are generous with their time, with their teaching, with their love. The opposite of generosity is selfishness, self-centeredness, greed and self-absorption. Generosity extends beyond just the use of money although it definitely includes that. Generosity sounds more organic, less legalistic and less formal than stewardship.

To put it candidly, “You may have to explain to your teenage kids or grandkids what stewardship means. They know generosity when they see it.”

Bishop Robert Schnase (author of *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*) provides a helpful perspective:

One of these terms is not superior to the other. Perhaps there are shades of difference in how they are perceived by young and old, those new to the faith from those long-established in our own churches. Maybe using both wisely helps us reach people at different places on the journey of faith. Whatever term you use, the bottom line is that churches must emphasize the Christians' need to give more than the church's need to for money.

You are encouraged to use both terms: stewardship and generosity. If you teach, preach and witness good stewardship, greater generosity will result. Helping people become better money managers (stewards) gives them the opportunity to practice the joy of generosity. The practice of faithful stewardship is at the generous giving.

Your Role as a Leader in Encouraging Faithful Stewardship & Generosity It takes:

- **Time**

Be patient. Growth in giving for most happens incrementally. The best preacher ever, Jesus, was not able to change everyone's giving habits. Be patient and realistic, but still have hopeful expectations. Call your people to be their best for Christ and his causes. Over time, some will respond and grow in their giving.

** The Church of the Resurrection estimates about 10% of church members will be open to significant growth in giving over time, as they respond to God's call.*

- **Intentional Focus**

Commit to making stewardship and generosity ministries one of your top priorities. It affects everything else. Generosity and stewardship is strongly tied to our faith and growth as Christian disciples. Work toward offering year round stewardship initiatives in your church. Seek to preach on stewardship and generosity themes 7-8 times a year, at strategically important moments throughout the Church year.

- **Courage**

Leadership trusts God for the vision to transform lives. Leadership also has the courage to define current realities. And it courageously lifts up needs that are vital to the future of the church.

- **A Team**

The pastor and key leaders must work together to recruit a strong Stewardship & Generosity Team. This group can help maximize generosity in your church and bring energy and support to its entire ministry and mission.

** If your church cannot sustain both a Finance Committee and a separate Stewardship & Generosity Team, try to incorporate some people into your Finance Committee who have a heart for stewardship and a commitment to helping others grow in their generosity.*

Who are we looking to bring on board our Stewardship & Generosity Team?

- Mature Christian disciples
- Creative people who bring innovative ideas
- “Nuts and bolts” people who are great at executing a plan
- Most importantly, people who are faithful in giving and tithes, or who are working toward tithing and want to encourage and tangibly support others on that journey

Have a dedicated leader for your team, and task them with creating a better future, not “managing the present”

Essential Tasks for the Team:

- **Teach ways that members can practice better financial stewardship of their own resources**

How can we better manage our money? How can we save more? How can we eliminate personal debt? Why is it important to know and practice budgeting? What is tithing and proportional giving to God? How can I be more generous? What are some of the key biblical teachings about giving?

- **Develop strategic ways to encourage giving**

Offer financial management classes, celebrate the generosity of people in worship, ask people to pray for discernment before they give, give thanks to donors in a timely way

- **Teach the spiritual and biblical ministry values that help members grow in their giving**

Build a Stewardship & Generosity Team that can teach and equip others in the gift and practice of generosity, that people see as trustworthy leaders, that lead by example in their giving, that are committed to Christ and the church and regularly attend worship and that are committed to growth and spiritual transformation for all congregants.

Your personal, authentic witness that God calls us to be faithful stewards & to live generous lives

When you visit Wesley's Chapel in London you see two beautiful gold plaques centered on the chancel wall: *You shall love your God with all your heart, mind and soul* and *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. John Wesley taught us how God's love compels each of us to be our very best.

No part of a pastor's role in leading stewardship ministries is more important than his/her personal authentic witness that God calls us to lives of generous living and generous giving. If your congregants can see that commitment in your life and spirit, it will go a long way in encouraging and inspiring them toward greater generosity. People give to ministry and mission, and not to a budget. But they also give, in part, because they trust the person who is leading the mission. A pastor's authentic witness and ability to form relationships with those he/she serves is a crucial component in growing generosity in a church.

As a pastor, have the courage to reveal your heart. Trust the power of your leadership and speak with clarity and conviction to meet the challenges of our world and communities in such need. Invite others to know and experience the joy of generosity.

How are People Motivated to Give?

What do you sense are the greatest motivations in your congregation for giving?

When have you experienced the greatest joy in giving in your life?

Here are some frequently expressed motivations for giving to the church and its ministries:

- Changing lives for Christ
- Making a difference through mission
- Brings donors joy and personal satisfaction
- Donors see excellence in the church's ministry and mission that they want to sustain
- Donors have trust and confidence in the leadership of the church
- Donors are loyal to their church and its causes
- Donors desire financial stability for their church

Church leader Tom Bandy says this:

The choices postmodern people make to invest their charitable dollars will be determined by the potential to shape their lifestyle around a worthy cause. They will many times ask: "Is it big enough, bold enough and biblical enough?"

Whether it is gratitude, compassion, trust, generosity, obedience, commitment or some combination of these motivating factors, know that your congregants are touched and moved in many ways. Listen, pray, and seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in knowing their hearts.

The Power of Saying Thanks: It Cannot be Overstated

What does it mean to you when someone genuinely thanks you for something you have done? Or, more deeply, they express their gratitude for the difference you have made in their life? In a world that can be tough and uncaring, stopping to say "thanks" along the way can make a real difference in people's lives.

As pastors and lay servants, we need to be intentional about thanking people for their acts and expressions of generosity. We need to cultivate a culture of gratitude in our churches and our mission fields. Before we do any asking for contributions or tangible support for our church's ministries, we need to be deliberate about thanking contributors and telling the story of how their giving is changing lives and making the world a better place. When we create a climate where thanking people is anticipated and celebrated, we lift the spirit and the potential of that part of Christ's body.

What are some ways we can thank people?

- **Thank Your Congregation in Worship**

Every week, or every other week, pick one ministry that your church supports (either directly or indirectly, for example, through the use of your building), and say, "thank you" to the people in the pews who make it possible for those ministries to happen. People will begin to actually believe that they are the generous people that they already are.

- **Thank People Through Personal Notes**

The phrase "have an attitude of gratitude" is truly helpful. Pick a day, once a week, and take a few moments and write 5 thank you cards to people in your congregation. Both pastors and lay servants can practice this. (And while I appreciate an e-mail or text message that expresses thanks, there is something special about receiving an actual card. So go "old school" and write that card!) Week after week, thank some folks for their faithfulness. Let people know that generosity matters.

Many pastors know they should regularly send notes of thanks and want to do it, but it just gets lost in the shuffle of all the responsibilities. You are encouraged to find a way to do it because the impact is great!

- **Thank People Through Impact Reports in Quarterly Giving Statements**

Rather than just sending out a quarterly report that details the individual's giving for that period (ie; raw numbers) add a small card that celebrates 5 things the church has done in those recent months. For example: we baptized two people, we received four new members, we helped feed 20 families through our food pantry.

If possible, have a few color pictures showing those celebrations (you may need to get approval before using their pictures).

The main thing is to thank your people and celebrate with them the ministry they are making possible through their gifts.

Thank them!

Keep them informed!

Treat them as special donors!

Tell them something they don't know!

- **Other Ways to Thank Your Worshiping Community**

Before the end of the year, have your Church Council divide up names and call every family that made a contribution to your church in the last year. Ask them to make all their calls within one week. They should be short, positive, encouraging and sincerely grateful.

Final Thought

Before we do any "asking" we need to be "thanking." Pastor should be thanking way more than they ask. And by thanking people, they do double duty: Tells them how much the church through its faith in Jesus, is changing lives and making the world a better place. Thanking and telling good news: that's definitely worth putting on your calendar.

The Grace of Giving: Our Methodist Legacy

If you are requesting donations, it is vital to know what you believe. Take time to think deeply and develop your own theological framework that fits your values and leadership style.

As United Methodists, we are the beneficiaries of a great heritage. John Wesley, our movement's founder, left us a legacy of strong teachings and practices related to giving. Many are still relevant today.

Here are several Wesley essentials about giving:

- Wesley taught that giving was a significant part of the very nature of God. God is the source of all good gifts. Life itself is grace. It is free and unearned. As Christ gave of himself sacrificially, we, too, are to give in his example.
- Giving is an indispensable witness of our Christian discipleship. Giving is a part of our holy living and becomes a spiritual discipline. Our growth in discipleship results in our growth in generosity.
- Giving involves sharing what we have with the poor. Wesley's regular visits and care for the poor is an example for us today. Also, giving includes offering a voice on behalf of the voiceless. It involves justice and social outreach to support community.
- In Wesley's sermon *The Use of Money* (1744) he said, "Gain all you can, save all you can and give all you can." Generosity is a spiritual gift for some. These gifted Christians do well when it comes to earning, saving and giving all they can. They are blessed with the spiritual motivation and personal ability to lead the way in generosity.
- Above all, we give because God gives. We follow a giving and loving God.

John Wesley had a powerful experience of grace. It led to the generous vision of Christianity he had--where he stayed connected with the poor and focused on healing (starting 3 of the first clinics in England), education for children (through Sunday schools, which originally started as an educational time for poor children), creating lending groups to loan to the poor and founding a pension fund to benefit "tired, worn-out preachers." To Wesley, justice in the Bible was measured by how we respond to and care for the least and the vulnerable.

Look to Wesley as you seek to grow in your understanding and practice of generosity.

Trends in Tithing, Giving & Stewardship: The Ways People Give in Today's Culture

Should we still encourage our congregants to tithe in a time when many people do not make it a practice of their faith journey (giving God at least 10% of they earn)? **Yes!**

Far less than 10% of church members in America tithe. The most extensive research says between 5-7% of Americans tithe. In mainline denominations, the number of tithers is closer to 2%.

Remember Matthew 23:23 where Jesus said, to paraphrase, "you tithe, but . . ." Jesus was not saying that giving the tithe was bad. Not at all. He was saying that only giving the tithe and not loving God or loving our neighbor was to miss the point. It is not our money that Jesus seeks, but a relationship. Jesus was saying that God wants us to be in a loving relationship more than anything else. Tithing is and should be one part of the expression of love. We should want to tithe because we love God and are grateful for all God has done for us.

In a time when most church members don't tithe we can create new conversations around giving (discipleship, generosity, growing in giving proportionally). And, we can be aware of certain trends in giving:

- There is a shift away from donating to organizations, and a shift toward donating to causes. It's what the New York Times dubs "The Millennial Way of Charity."

When you speak about giving in your church, you have to vividly show your congregants how their donations support the work of God in your community and mission field. People desire to participate in the compassionate and life-giving work of God.

- Communicate and celebrate generosity widely and regularly in your church and community. Celebrate the lives are being changed and people are being helped, week after week. You can do it with passion, purpose and joy balanced with a sense of humility and gratitude that all of this is possible because of God. Use multiple forums to do this: celebrate generosity in worship through offering moments, testimonies and telling great stories. Celebrate generosity through newsletters, e-mails, bulletins, social media and text alerts. Celebrate generosity, thank God and your donors and create momentum in your church.

- The Peer-to-Peer Fundraising Effect
You may have received more than one Facebook notification encouraging you to donate toward a cause for one of your friends' birthdays. As popularity for this feature continues to climb, expect more people to donate money through Facebook or Go Fund Me pages. While this may not directly affect your church, it does highlight some interesting trends: the rise in peer-to-peer fundraising, an increase in the personalization of giving and the popularity of caused-based giving.

Think about how Facebook has tapped into the desires of people to give, makes it personal, makes it easy with technology and empowers users to raise money for causes they believe in. Implementing these 4 trends could potentially increase giving and engagement with your church.

- **The Amazon Effect**

Amazon provides easy one-click ordering. That phenomenon is beginning to shape charitable donors' expectations. As consumers grow accustomed to purchasing online with a click, they will expect to have a similar experience donating money. Even though most giving in churches still is accomplished through writing checks, the percentage given online is increasing significantly (particularly with younger donors).

It is important that churches make it easy for people to donate online or with their mobile devices. 95% of Americans own a cell phone. 77% own a smart phone. The time will come when a majority of your church's members will want to donate with their mobile devices. Be proactive--open the pathway to this type of giving in your church.

- Increasingly, congregants appreciate a personalized expression of thanks for their donations. Find the right way to do that in your church.

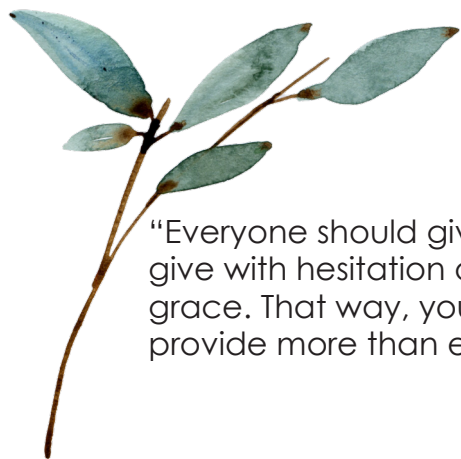
Non-Profit Charities:

Their challenge to us and what we can learn from them

In the United States today, there is a broadening of philanthropy. There are twice as many non-profit 501(c)3 organizations than there were a few decades ago competing for charitable dollars. In the 1980's, 52% of charitable dollars went to religion. By 2013, that percentage had dropped to 31%. The church must ask boldly if we are to sustain our future ministry and mission outreach. We must ask boldly for the gifts necessary for our church's future.

One thing we can learn and seek to emulate from non-profits is the excellent job most do in thanking donors. They thank them quickly after a donation is made and the thank yous are normally well-worded and, many times, quite moving. You are encouraged to check out non-profit communications from colleges, hospitals, environmental groups, etc. Look at their mailings and online presence and adapt some of the things they do to your church and community culture.

Remember that as churches, we have a "home field advantage." Churches have potential to connect with members and visitors 52 Sundays a year. Even though people attend church services less regularly today than in the past, the church still sees its people face to face more than any other entity in the non-profit world. Churches can reach donors in ways that other non-profits cannot. Congregations can maximize this "home field advantage" by building trust with donors, casting and recasting vision and working with to shape their culture in ways that enhance generosity. Leverage the weekly worship experience by building trust in all you do. Build relationships with a broad spectrum of people in your church in order to invite them to get involved. And constantly remind people of the ministry vision of the church because vision leaks.



“While they were being tested by many problems, their extra amount of happiness and their extreme poverty resulted in a surplus of rich generosity.”

2 Corinthians 8:2

“Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. God has of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every good work.”

2 Corinthians 9:7-8

The Holston Foundation Is Here to Partner in Stewardship

Ways the Holston Foundation can help:

- Speak at local churches & clergy gatherings
- Consult with your church stewardship/generosity team
- Share articles, best practices & information through *The Circuit Rider Dispatch* e-newsletter
- Share planned giving information or provide a seminar
- Alert you to stewardship events in our region & beyond
- Coming soon: additional stewardship resources on the Holston Foundation website



Contact the Holston Foundation:

- Paul Bowman, Executive Director, paulbowman@holston.org
- Rev. Richard Edwards, Director of Stewardship
richardedwards@holston.org 865.661.8373 (cell)
- LeRae Collins, Director of Communications, lcollins@holston.org

Holston Foundation 865.690.8124