



# Gratefully generous!

CONNECTING THROUGH GIVING,  
UNITED METHODISTS CHANGE LIVES



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# Gratefully generous\*



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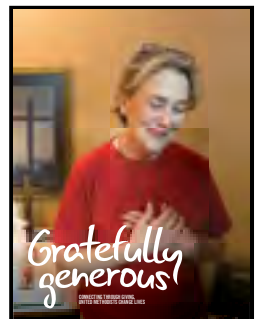


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**COVER:** Scarlett Kellerman becomes emotional with gratitude for the generous outreach ministry of Wellspring of Greenbrier in Rupert, W. Va. The ministry, which began with assistance from Lewisburg United Methodist Church, has been helping those affected by recent flooding in the area. (UMNS/MIKE DUBOSE)





UMCOM/MIKE DUBOSE

Dan Krause

## More blessed to give

**A**s the parent of four young children, I can attest that there is no shortage of children's books declaring the virtues of generosity. From a young age, award-winning books ranging from Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* to Marcus Pfister's *The Rainbow Fish* abound to share why, paraphrasing the familiar Bible verse in Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The message of generosity, the theme of this book, isn't only for children. It's a lifelong message. The Bible is filled with dozens of passages about generosity, nuggets of wisdom for all ages. "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38); "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord" (Proverbs 19:17a); "...for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7b); "You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way" (2 Corinthians 9:11a).

United. Together. Connected.

The essence of United Methodist

connectionalism is based on the idea that together we can do so much more than we can do alone. Every United Methodist congregation is connected throughout the denomination through a unique, interlocking chain of conferences. United Methodist churches share their resources, both financial and human, to support ministries beyond the local congregation. It is this common mission and shared governance that result in United Methodists' collective impact for the kingdom of God.

You'll read more about how United Methodists share the gospel and impact the world in this issue, stories about the many ways that the 12.4 million members of the denomination give generously to transform people through education, advocacy, ecumenical ministries, disaster relief and other outreach.

United Methodists, according to statistics from the General Council on Finance and Administration, gave more than \$135 million to support various

ministries of the church in 2014. More than \$373 million benefited benevolent causes, such as soup kitchens, clothing drives and non-United Methodist outreach and mission. When disaster hit, United Methodists contributed \$28 million for disaster response locally and internationally. (Source: "State of the Church Report," *Interpreter*, January-February 2016)

In a word, the people of The United Methodist Church are givers. The single generous action of giving, repeated over and over, by United Methodists in more than 135 countries enables The United Methodist Church to provide ministries and services that advance our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Because, together, we know that we are more blessed to give than to receive.

*Dan Krause is general secretary of United Methodist Communications in Nashville, Tennessee, USA, and publisher of Interpreter.*





# Live gratefully, live generously

BY EMILY SNELL

**I** N A VILLAGE IN MALAWI WHERE FAMILIES WERE STARVING, THE REV. SCOTT MCKENZIE EXPERIENCED SOME OF THE MOST GENUINE GENEROSITY HE'S EVER WITNESSED.

"It was at the height of famine in the early 2000s in Malawi, the height of AIDS. Villages were being devastated. The pastor had actually died of starvation," McKenzie explained.

As McKenzie's group prepared to leave, the people of the village came out "dancing and singing and bearing gifts for us. The only gift that they gave us was food. They're starving, their children are starving, their pastor died of starvation, and they gave us food!"

Though McKenzie and others in the group tried to refuse, their interpreter told them, "You have to take the food because they are so thankful that you came. Don't deny them the privilege of showing their gratitude."

"I don't think anybody in our delegation had a dry eye," McKenzie said. "It was amazing."

McKenzie, senior vice president at Horizons Stewardship Company, said he believes gratitude is what motivates true generosity.

## ***Respond with gratitude***

"Generosity is grounded in a real sense of gratitude," he said. "When I look at my entire life as a gift from the hand of a loving and generous God... the things that I have, they're not mine. I don't own them. So when I have a grateful heart and realize that's all a gift, then I'm much more inclined to share."

The Rev. Scott McKenzie



The Rev. Betsy Schwarzentraub, author and consultant on stewardship, agreed with McKenzie, adding that generosity is “both an attitude and a habit.”

“Generosity is our passion for giving out of who we are and what we have in gratitude for God’s generosity, God’s self-giving relationship with us in Jesus Christ and also through the Holy Spirit,” she said.

Schwarzentraub, former director of stewardship for Discipleship Ministries, said she considers generosity among John Wesley’s means of grace, “meaning how we experience God’s grace and how we get to respond to God’s grace in gratitude.”

“His primary statement about stewardship was earn all you can, save all you can, in order to give all you can,” Schwarzentraub said, adding that Wesley’s ideas about generosity also fall under the general rules of the Methodist societies — to do good and do no harm.

## Reflecting God’s image

Schwarzentraub and McKenzie both said they consider John 3:16 a fundamental biblical example of God’s generosity.

“The very nature of God is to be generous,” McKenzie said. “By definition, God is generous. If we believe we’re created in the image of God, then we’re created to be generous. I think that puts it in a different context for people. We were born to be generous and giving.”

In their book *World-Changing Generosity* (iUniverse), Jim and Nancy Cotterill write that the Bible mentions the word “give” 921 times, and 17 of the 38 parables told by Jesus are related to giving.

“Jesus said that his followers would be known by their love for him and for each other,” they write. “He instructed them to show their love by giving their time, talent and treasure to provide aid to the poor, widows, orphans and the downtrodden.”

Even something as simple as listening can be an example of generosity, according to Cathy Wilcox of South Gibson United Methodist Church in Pennsylvania. She



COURTESY PHOTO

The Rev. Betsy Schwarzentraub

was among those responding to this issue’s “We asked, you said” (WAYS) question.

“A generous lifestyle is one in which you make yourself and your resources available to those in need,” she said. “Sometimes this means money, sometimes talent or spiritual gifts.

Other times, the thing that’s needed is for you to let go of

yourself, open your mind and consider the person’s point of view, to hear them and see them without judging, to listen and not speak.”

Gordon Evans, who attends Erie United Methodist Church, also in Pennsylvania, said he believes God’s love can remove any hindrances to generosity.

“God’s love pushes out the fears — the fear of not having what we need, the fear of looking foolish in the eyes of our friends and family, the fear of making a mistake,” said Evans, another WAYS responder. “God’s perfect love gives us the courage to be bold, to speak boldly in love, to give boldly in love, to give of our time, love, money, expecting nothing in return.”

## Gratitude sparks generosity

To cultivate generosity, McKenzie encourages people to start by cultivating gratitude and then take small steps toward being more generous.

“If you really want somebody to begin practicing generosity, tell them to begin practicing gratitude,” he said.

Research has shown that a daily practice of writing down what you are thankful for can increase gratitude, and McKenzie said he believes gratitude practices combined with prayer and an open heart will lead to more generosity.

“I think people become generous in all areas of life when they are prayerful and open to what God might have them do,” he said.

Schwarzentraub agreed that an awareness of God’s presence can be transformational.

“I think that generosity or generous-hearted living does become a way of living. If we keep intentionally trying

to be open to God and grateful to God, it becomes a kind of outpouring of our gifts,” she said.

Schwarzentraub promotes what she calls “first fruits living,” which involves offering resources to God first “and then trying to manage all the rest of whatever we save and spend, according to God’s generosity the best we can.”

“Whatever the percentage is that people decide they can give, to do that first... that, in itself, fosters a sense of generosity,” she said. “That includes more than just money. The first day of the week in worship, the first part of the day in devotions, the first part of our relationships encouraging one another in our faith and walk with God.”

One easy way to be more giving, McKenzie suggested, is by offering generous tips to servers when you eat at a restaurant.

“There are small things you can begin to do in your life that would help you be more generous,” he said.

## Give every day

The book *29 Days* (Da Capo Press) by Cami Walker has been an inspiring resource for some United Methodists, Schwarzentraub said.

The author “started out in a very dark place,” she continued, but someone encouraged her to try giving something — even just a smile — to someone every day for 29 days. “She began to find all sorts of opportunities to help other people, to give in some way. Her whole approach to life changed.”

McKenzie said he has seen repeatedly how people can grow when they begin to view their resources with a grateful heart.

“Gratitude and generosity will change people’s lives,” he said. “One of the neatest things is to be with somebody, to see somebody begin this process and have this typical American mindset of ‘what’s mine is mine.’ You take them through the process of gratitude and prayer. They really open up, and it’s amazing to see the difference at the end. It’s so cool to see that transformation.”

*Emily Snell is a freelance writer based in Nashville, Tennessee.*

# JOHN WESLEY

## On giving

BY BISHOP KENNETH L. CARDER



This statue of John Wesley stands in the center of the campus of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky.

UMMS/MIKE DUBOSE

**STEWARDSHIP IS AT THE HEART** of the Wesleyan revival, and John Wesley considered it an integral component of Christian discipleship. It was a consistent theme of his preaching and personal practice. Giving of financial resources was a necessary spiritual discipline of every member of the Wesleyan classes and societies. For Wesley, no one was exempt from the commandment to love God and neighbor, and giving was an expression of that love.

### Wesley and money

Toward the end of his life, Wesley's sermons and writings began reflecting a growing concern for the future of "the people called Methodist." The movement was numerically strong with about 50,000 in England, and the new American church was growing rapidly. However, Wesley saw signs of demise. A tour of Methodist work across Britain left him somewhat discouraged and pessimistic.

On Aug. 4, 1786, he wrote: "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out."

To Wesley, the most evident threat was the growing wealth of the Methodists. He

believed that Christianity has within it the seeds of its own demise. Discipleship makes us more diligent and frugal, and as we become more diligent and frugal, wealth increases.

Wesley considered wealth and the failure to give the most serious threats to the Methodist movement in particular and Christianity in general. In 1789, Wesley noted that the Methodists had all but ignored the third point of his sermon

### Why I Give

**I GIVE AS A RESPONSE** to a love affair that I have with God. I love my wife and children. I give them all that I have and all that I am. I should give God no less than my all, inclusive of my gifts.

*The Rev. Frank Alegria, First UMC, Duncanville, Texas*

**I GIVE IN ACTION AND MONEY** to support both our local and extended church's needs but, more importantly, to help bring the gospel to those who haven't heard about or haven't experienced the love that only Jesus can give.

*Edwin Bybee, Wesley UMC, Jefferson City, Missouri*

**WHY DO I GIVE?** I guess, more than anything, it is out of a sense of obligation for the needs of the church. I was raised with the responsibility to

return to those who serve me. My church serves my family and me very much.

*Patrick L. Gallo, Fishburn UMC, Hershey, Pennsylvania*

**WE GIVE BECAUSE** our parents taught us to give and we know that The United Methodist Church will use the money wisely, plus it will change the lives of people that I will never be able to help personally.

*Suzanne Hartley, Cross in the Desert UMC, Phoenix, Arizona*

**I LOVE MY CHURCH,** I love God and Jesus, and I am grateful for all my blessings. I just have to give; it is just what we should do.

*Joyce Morris, Tallulah Falls (Georgia) UMC*

**GOD IS PLEASED** when I give. Giving helps reduce the powerful grip money holds over us. Giving benefits the people and the causes I most care about. Giving can bring great joy to the giver. Giving serves as an investment in that which will last. Giving enables us to be most Christlike.

*Ken Wilson, Harmony-Zelienople (Pennsylvania) UMC*

**I GIVE BECAUSE** God says so in his word. Since my heart was born again, I want to give. I also give when I want to share in someone's life or ministry. Sometimes God speaks to my heart to give.

*The Rev. Ekaterina "Katya" Zubkova, Tyumen UMC, Salvation, Russia*



on “The Use of Money,” which had been printed some 30 years earlier. He wrote:

“Of the three rules which are laid down ... you may find many that observe the first rule, namely, ‘Gain all you can.’ You may find a few that observe the second, ‘Save all you can.’ But, how many have you found that observe the third rule, ‘Give all you can’? Have you reason to believe that

500 of these are to be found among 50,000 Methodists? And yet nothing can be more plain than that all who observe the first rules without the third will be twofold more the children of hell than ever they were before.”

Wesley’s own commitment to giving was consistent throughout his life. As a student at Oxford, he lived on 28 pounds a year. As his earnings increased to 30 and eventually to 120 pounds annually, he continued to live on the same 28 pounds. He told people that if at his death he had more than 10 pounds in his possession, they could call him a robber.

### Wesley’s rules regarding wealth

Wesley wrote in 1786 in “Thoughts upon Methodism”:

*“... the Methodists in every place grow diligent and frugal; consequently they increase in goods. Hence, they proportionately increase in pride, in anger, in the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life. So, although the form of religion remains, the spirit is swiftly vanishing away.*

*“... What way, then, (I ask again) can we take, that our money may not sink us to the nethermost hell? There is one way, and there is no other under heaven. If those who ‘gain all they can,’ and ‘save all they can,’ will likewise ‘give all they can,’ then, the more they gain, the more they will grow in grace, and the more treasure they will lay up in heaven.”*

Wesley’s sermon “The Use of Money” is a helpful starting point. The rules outlined are integral to his theological, ethical and missional agenda.

“Earn all you can.” Do we need any admonition to earn all we can? However,

COUNCIL OF BISHOPS



Bishop Kenneth L. Carder

Wesley was not giving a theological rationale for an aggressive acquisitiveness. Rather, he emphasized earning all you can through participating in God’s healing and creative work in the world. His sermon is a polemic against destructive ways of earning money by hurting oneself or others or the creation. He emphasizes restrictions on exploiting others or

gaining from the pain and suffering of others or of oneself. Giving in the Wesleyan tradition considers how we earn the wealth, not just how we use the wealth earned.

“Save all you can.” Wesley challenges, rather than endorses, accumulating and hoarding. He was not calling the Methodists to invest wisely and build large savings accounts; he compared such practices to “throwing your money into the sea.”

The maxim “save all you can” is a call to a simplified lifestyle, a warning against extravagance, opulence and self-gratification. Wesley considered anything we have that is unnecessary as having been extracted from the blood of the poor. Forgoing acquisitiveness in order for the poor to live is a form of giving.

Are we willing to simplify our living so that others may simply live? Stewardship has to do with what we are willing to do without as surely as it has to do with what we are willing to acquire.

“Give all you can.” Wesley’s third rule of stewardship gives meaning to the first two. We are to gain all we can and save all we can so that we can give all we can. In Wesley’s own words: “Save all you can, by cutting off every expense which serves only to indulge foolish desire, to gratify either the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life. Waste nothing ... on sin or folly, whether for yourself or your children. And then, give all you can, or in other words give all you have to God.” Earning, saving, giving are all means of giving oneself to God!

Giving, for Wesley, is rooted in the very nature and activity of God, whose nature is love, which is the emptying of oneself

on behalf of others, the giving of life, abundant and full life. Grace, God’s unmerited love poured out to humanity supremely in Jesus Christ, is who God is. Love for God, therefore, inevitably involves giving of oneself to God and the neighbor. One cannot love and fail to give!

Wesley observed that wealth changes our priorities and our relationships. We begin to assume an unrealistic independence and self-reliance. We forget how to receive and how to give. Wesley believed that true religion never goes from the powerful to the weak, but from the weak to the powerful. He found the poor more responsive to the gospel than the wealthy.

His understanding of God as one who is especially present with the poor and his own relationships with the poor shaped Wesley’s rules for giving. His concern for the poor was holistic. Yes, he preached the gospel to them, called them to conversion and nurtured them in class meetings. He also developed a free health clinic and started a school, a sewing cooperative and a lending agency for the poor. They were his friends and special friends of Jesus, so giving to them and for them as a means of serving Christ was his lifelong passion.

Affluence, according to Wesley, tends to separate us from the poor — and from God and the motivation for giving. Giving to alleviate the suffering of the poor is a joyful passion and a glad participation in Christ’s ministry.

### Giving in the Wesleyan tradition

Giving must be more than a response to an appeal to general humanitarianism. It must be rooted and grounded theologically and missionally.

» **Giving is rooted in God’s very being.**

The ability to give itself is a gift from God. All life is grace, a free, unearned gift from a giving God who invites us to share in the divine life and mission of giving. We are stewards and a steward is one who insures that all have a place at the table of God’s provisions. God has graciously invited us to share in God’s own life and activity by calling us to make sure the human family has all things necessary in order to flourish.

- » **Giving is indispensable to Christian discipleship.** Giving is part of holy living. While the class meetings originated as a means of collecting money for the poor, they became communities of grace in which people were held in love and held accountable for holy living. Growth in discipleship inevitably includes growth in giving.
- » **Giving includes more than the products of our labor.** Disciplined living in response to the needs of the world is a form of giving. We give by refusing to take from others what is necessary for their abundant life. Giving in the Wesleyan tradition includes joyfully sharing the fruits of our labor and management with others, especially the poor.
- » **Giving involves friendship with the poor.** Wesley considered regular visitation of the poor as indispensable for Christian discipleship and spiritual formation as daily prayer and regular celebration of Holy Communion. He admonished the Methodists to deliver their aid to the poor, instead of sending it. Renewal will not come to United Methodism or any other church apart from welcoming the poor into the center of the church's life. Giving will not substantially increase unless and until we who have resources see the world's impoverished as members of our own family, as Jesus said they are.
- » **Giving moves beyond individual**

charity to building communities of shalom — communities of interconnectedness, justice and compassion. Charity itself can be a paternalistic means of control. Justice, however, is what God requires. Wesley, though sometimes exhibiting a paternalistic attitude toward the poor, attempted to deal with their plight holistically. He made no distinction between delivering them medical care and proclaiming the gospel. One was not social service and the other evangelism. Both were good news.

His outspoken resistance to the slave trade, alcohol traffic, excessive interest charged to the poor and other staples of British economic life in the 18th century expressed his stewardship. The Wesleyan tradition includes giving our voices on behalf of the voiceless, giving our insights and influence to build communities that reflect God's reign of justice, generosity and joy.



John Wesley, 1703-1791

## Conclusion

Giving for Wesley was a means of expressing generosity rooted in gratitude for God's generosity and a means of fulfilling the great commandment to love God and neighbor. He was convinced that if the Methodists would give all they can, then all would have enough. Stewardship is gift-full living so that all God's children have a place at the table of abundance.

Wesley's own words are a fitting conclusion:

*"(Money) is an excellent gift of God, answering the noblest ends. In the hands of his children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked. It gives to the traveler and the stranger where to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of a husband to the widow, and of a father for the fatherless; we may be a defense for the oppressed, a*

*means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain. It may be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yea, a lifter up from the gates of death."*

*This article is adapted from addresses that **Bishop Kenneth L. Carder** (retired) delivered to the Giving and the Gospel Symposium in 1997 and the United Methodist Summit on Christian Stewardship in 2003. As bishop, he served the Nashville and Mississippi areas and now lives in Chaplin, South Carolina, where he serves as chaplain in a memory care unit.*

## Why I Give

**I GIVE TO HELP** provide a place of worship for our community and to support and promote the outreach of our church to show the hands of Christ working in today's world.

**Bill Campbell**, Juniata UMC, Altoona, Pennsylvania

**MY WIFE AND I** give together. We give because we believe that we have a responsibility to respond to the grace that God has shown in our lives. We give because we believe that the church, the United Methodist connection and other organizations accomplish greater good in the lives of people, animals and the environment than we could on our own. We give because we believe that giving is a spiritual gift.

**Frank S. Dunnewind**, Aldersgate UMC, Montgomery, Alabama

**WE GIVE BECAUSE** all that we have is a gift from God to be used for his kingdom. Our gifts to our church, missions and missionaries support local and global ministries that connect people with Christ, making disciples. Our giving began with the tithe and grew as we were blessed. Giving helps us to remember that everything comes from God and has helped us learn to trust God for all our needs.

**John W. and Ranelle Hockert**, Rio Rancho (New Mexico) UMC

**I GIVE BECAUSE** my Bible tells me so. For me to be blessed, I must give.

**The Rev. James Odhiambo Lwande**, Oyugs UMC, Homa Bay, Kenya

**I GIVE BECAUSE** it is scriptural, but it also is an expression of having our Lord first in our lives. Everything we have is his. It's all on loan. It's important we make our love (loan) payments.

**Rich Musgrave**, Parker (Florida) UMC

**WHY DO I GIVE?** Because I can. Money, time, goods — none of those compares to the blessing of life ever after, the greatest gift of all.

**Julie Schumann**, Sheridan (Oregon) UMC

**I GIVE OUT OF** my love and faith. When I am faithful in my giving, God has always been faithful in return. I do not base my giving on the prosperity gospel, but out of faithfulness. I give so that the work of the church may continue through my gifts.

**Cathy Webb**, Union Park UMC, Des Moines, Iowa



# Preaching, teaching GENEROSITY

**PASTORS SHARE THOUGHTS, ADVISORS OFFER TIPS**

BY POLLY HOUSE

## PASTORS DON'T LIKE TO PREACH ON MONEY.

Sermons that ask, encourage and, dare we say, beg are hard, very hard. Whether you call it giving, generosity, tithing or any other term, contemporary culture says money is not a topic of conversation for polite people.

But, talking money at church is necessary, and pastors do their congregations a disservice if they don't teach about the importance of sharing God-given gifts with the giver. Jesus talked about giving a lot. If he considered it important, it is.

So what is a reluctant pastor to do?

### *Pastors surveyed*

Last spring, the connectional giving team at United Methodist Communications asked almost 400 United Methodist pastors and staff leaders questions about giving. Four related to teaching and preaching:

1. How do I best educate my congregation about giving that helps express our unique UMC approach to generosity?
2. How often should I talk to my congregation about giving and generosity? Should I do it throughout the year or save it for a year-end push?
3. How can I make a positive connection between giving/discipleship rather than approaching it as an obligation?
4. How can a pastor shepherd individuals and families with capacity to follow a path toward deeper generosity?

### *Education/reminders*

As they educated their churches about the United Methodist approach to giving, pastors reminded their congregations how far their offerings go and that they are a part of something bigger than themselves.

The Rev. Dedric Cowser emphasizes

to the people of Sweet Home United Methodist Church in Gadsden, Alabama, how their giving is part of a gift that goes beyond their church.

"Each Sunday from the pulpit, I express how a percentage of each dollar a person gives to our local church goes to benefit the work of mission and ministry around the world. Simply put, I express that our connectional giving helps to make a global impact for the kingdom of God."

The Rev. Matt Lipan, pastor of Gateway Community Church in Indianapolis, keeps it simple. "I simply remind them, on a regular basis, that their practice of generosity as a result of their relationship with Christ is what enables us to be present, available and accessible for our community and beyond."

The Rev. Dayne Zachrison leads Epworth United Methodist Church in Valley City, North Dakota. He reminds church members of the expectation and responsibility of being a member of The United Methodist Church. "I stress that

our vows include our work to build up the kingdom of Christ. Our money is a symbol of our time and energies and a part of the way we can answer that call and that vow of service to the world. John Wesley called those of us who would claim the name Methodist to commit acts of mercy, not simply sit in the pews.”

## ***A topic year-round***

How often to talk about giving is another conundrum. Most seemed to agree that it is best as an ongoing conversation, rather than just a once or twice a year emphasis.

The Rev. Suzanne Calhoun, pastor of Ely United Methodist Church in Nevada, said, “It is not a season of the church year. Generosity should be a part of daily Christian life; therefore it should be something I talk about all the time.”

“Stewardship is part of the heartbeat of the Christ follower, not a tattoo or an add-on,” said the Rev. Jeff Sterling, pastor of St. Paul’s United Methodist Church in Alison Park, Pennsylvania. Stewardship education is best woven into all phases of ministry, including worship, Sterling said.

The Rev. Sarah Lawton, pastor of Northeast United Methodist Church in Minneapolis, makes it a point to talk about money at least four times a year. “We consider giving money to be a spiritual practice (we talk about spiritual practices a lot). Giving is good for our souls and good for the world.”

## ***Giving as discipleship***

Connecting giving and generosity to discipleship is important for many pastors as well.

“It is important to connect giving and generosity as central to the call of discipleship and service,” said the Rev. Piula Alailima, pastor of Wesley United Methodist Church in Honolulu. He organically brings up generosity and giving throughout the year.

The Rev. John Garvis, pastor of Fountain City United Methodist Church

in Knoxville, Tennessee, sees giving and generosity as obedience to Christ. “Jesus said, ‘Those that love me obey me.’ I believe that love is the focus and obedience follows.”

“I talk about giving as ‘evidence of our trust in God,’” said the Rev. Jean Schwein, pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Salt Lake City, Utah. “Having faith is about trusting God. The opposite of this kind of faith is anxiety. Giving is our daily, weekly, monthly reminder that we trust God to provide for our future — whatever it may be.”

## ***Be an example***

Many pastors agree leading by example is important to help congregations learn how to walk a path toward greater generosity.

The Rev. Joel Scheller, pastor of Stoney United Methodist Church in Ponder, Texas, is adamant that it is vital to lead by example when talking about giving. “Sheep don’t follow any old shepherd. It is the one that cares for them at the cost of personal sacrifice that earns their trust. Isn’t that the very reason we follow Christ?”

The Rev. Dan Corretore, pastor of North Rose United Methodist Church in New York, agreed. “First off, it’s important for a pastor to lead by example. Then, inspire givers through sharing stories of the life-changing impact for Christ of their gifts. Ideally, engage them in hands-on ministry. And, always, express appreciation for their gifts.”

The Rev. Tom Peterson, pastor of Centralia United Methodist Church in Washington, believes being upfront about his own family’s giving is important. “I let the church know that my wife and I

tithe to the church. We don’t tell them an amount, just that we tithe.”

## ***Now some advice ...***

Help is available for pastors and other leaders who struggle with how to preach and teach on giving.

The Rev. Tom Berlin, pastor of Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, Virginia, is author of *Defying Gravity: Break Free from the Culture of More*

(Abingdon Press). In the new four-week small group study and stewardship campaign, Berlin explores what is required to sustain a vibrant life, needs versus wants and ways to avoid being pulled into the orbit of materialism. In video segments, Berlin introduces friends who tell how generosity has changed their lives. These “Generosity Moments” provide



The Rev. Tom Berlin

FLORIS UMC

a tone and context for group discussion about giving as an expression of discipleship.

Berlin offered several ideas to help pastors preach more confidently when they are encouraging their congregations to give.

“Identify your top five donors,” he said. “Make an appointment with them and ask them what motivates them to give. Then ask if they might give a testimony on video or in person in church. Their comments will greatly assist your preaching.

“Read books or take courses on generosity, giving and personal financial planning. Your confidence will increase with your training. When you help people order their financial lives and become generous, you are doing them a huge favor.”



## "THE PASTOR MUST BE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT WHAT HE OR SHE IS ASKING ... IS SOMETHING HE OR SHE PRACTICES."



TEXAS METHODIST FOUNDATION

The Rev. Melvin Amerson

His paramount suggestion to help a pastor be successful when asking the congregation to give: "The pastor must be absolutely certain that what he or she is asking from the congregation is something he or she practices and is a blessing to his or her personal life. You cannot lead people to a place where you have not been."

Author of *Stewardship in African-American Churches* (Upper Room Books), the Rev. Melvin Amerson is an elder in the Texas Conference and a stewardship consultant for the Texas Methodist Foundation.

Amerson believes it is entirely possible to create a culture of generosity in a church. To do so, he said, "Pastors must boldly commit to teach giving as an act of worship, while casting a compelling vision for transformative ministry that changes lives and communities."

"Use the time prior to receiving the offering as an intentional invitation to worship the Lord through our giving," he suggested. "The offering is an ideal time to inform, inspire, educate and celebrate God's grace and generosity. We have 52 weeks — or opportunities — annually to creatively nurture giving as an integral part of discipleship through the use of scripture, litanies, ministry moments, sermonettes, video clips, testimonies

and skits. Together pastors and church leadership must be instrumental in changing the current attitudes and giving trends in our denomination."

### *Is tithing outdated?*

Tithing is the tradition of giving 10 percent of your income to the church. But, is tithing still a realistic goal for pastors to teach?

Michael Reeves is director of educational services for Horizons Stewardship. The company assists faith-based institutions to make strategic decisions and grow in faith, while securing the necessary capital to accomplish their vision for ministry.

"In our culture, tithing has come to mean anything we give," Reeves said. "But tithing is a term associated with the temple tax in the Old Testament."



HORIZONS STEWARDSHIP

Michael Reeves

Considering that so few mainline members tithe, a better perspective might be from 2 Corinthians 9:7: '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' (CEB). Giving is a matter of the heart. If tithing is the

standard that (pastors) want to embrace, it must be accompanied with regular preaching, teaching and testimonies."

Even so, Reeves said he has often heard pastors share three things that present difficulties as they lead their congregants to give to the church.

First, pastors do not feel equipped to address the connection of faith and money. They generally have not been trained in their theological studies or through continuing education. This is an area where seminaries need to offer training, Reeves said.

Second, many of their congregants poorly manage their personal resources, including consumer debt and out of control spending, lack of saving and a lack of understanding of the connection of faith and money. While it is not due to poor management, many pastors and their church members carry near crippling student debt that can create a huge obstacle to being a generous giver to the church.

Third, the traditional ways of teaching or encouraging giving in most mainline denominations have been ineffective for years, relying on approaches that are 50 or more years old.

A significant cultural change that would help moves talking about giving from a seasonal fund-raising event that is an adjunct to core spiritual values to embracing generosity as a core value of discipleship.

*Polly House is a freelance editor and writer living in Nashville, Tennessee.*

For more ideas and resources for teaching and preaching on giving, check out "Together We Do More" ([umcsgiving.org/togetherwedomore](http://umcsgiving.org/togetherwedomore)), a new section of the United Methodist Giving website, [www.umcsgiving.org](http://www.umcsgiving.org). Also consider using United Methodist Communications' online course on connectional giving, [www.umcom.org/learn/connectional-giving](http://www.umcom.org/learn/connectional-giving).



# 'Together We Do More'

## ENCOURAGING GENEROUS LIVING

**UNITED METHODISTS GIVE MUCH. IN 2014 ALONE, CHURCH MEMBERS GAVE WELL OVER \$500 MILLION TO DENOMINATIONAL AND CHURCH-RELATED CAUSES AND IN DISASTER RELIEF AND OTHER DESIGNATED GIVING.**

The fact remains, however, that average church members in the United States give about two percent of their income to the church

"Together we do more" is what actually happens when United Methodists pool their gifts of money, time and talent to do mission and ministry.

"Together We Do More" is now also an online collection of resources from the Connectional Giving team at United Methodist Communications. Check out [umcgiving.org/togetherwedomore](http://umcgiving.org/togetherwedomore) for ideas and information that pastors and other church leaders can use to encourage generous living among their congregations.

"We have created these resources because we wanted to provide a comprehensive/holistic approach that pastors can use to encourage generosity," says Elsie Cunningham, director of connectional giving. "Pastors can use the generosity resources during their worship services or in small group settings."

New materials will be added on an ongoing basis.

### YEAR-END GIVING VITAL

The "UMC Year-End Giving Playbook" is among the new resources created for the online kit. Many pastors and leaders agree generosity and giving should be year-round topics. However, there are reasons to make a push for contributions in November and December. Among them are:

- » Without an emphasis, opportunities to give to the church can get lost among many other appeals.
- » The end of the tax year means contributions to your church can improve a taxable-income situation for givers. For many, this is a major giving incentive.
- » Year-end bonuses or checks may be the bulk of one's income for the year.
- » Many givers wait until the end of the year to tithe when final acknowledgments and accolades come from clients and employers.
- » December is the largest giving month for most churches.

The Rev. Phyllis M. Bowers, executive director of The United Methodist Stewardship Foundation since 2005, wrote the forward to the playbook. She describes it as "a year-end giving blueprint to help you enter that crowded 'marketplace' (of year-end appeals) and communicate to your members in a way that is encouraging, exciting and a life-changing, life-giving experience for all involved."

She says year-end campaigns provide opportunities:

1. "to influence the consumerist impulses with a biblical, grace-based generosity message;
2. "to communicate your vision for the year and to build momentum going into the new year;
3. "to focus ministry efforts on felt needs" in the congregation, the local community and in connectional ministry.

The Social Media section features inspirational quotes to help engage congregants in generous living.

Downloadable bulletin inserts, mini-posters, podcasts and videos are for use in worship, with small groups and in other settings.

Worship resources include offering talk illustrations, slides and sermon illustrations. These resources will help you share the good news of generosity.

There are also ideas and illustrations for children's sermons.

Among the downloadable e-books are the *Apportioned Fund Resource Book* with a large question-and-answer section, *Five Most FAQ about Generosity* and *A Theology of UM Giving Apportionments*.

"Simple Rules for Money" and "Generosity Series" are included in the list of generosity curricula. There are small-group studies and options for home study in conjunction with a sermon series.

Individuals or small groups can use podcasts and videos of sermons on generosity.

*Compiled by the Rev. Kathy Noble, editor, Interpreter and Interpreter OnLine.*

### LEARN LOTS MORE ...

**"Together We Do More:"**  
[umcgiving.org/togetherwedomore](http://umcgiving.org/togetherwedomore)

**UMC GIVING:** The main connectional giving website, [www.umcgiving.org](http://www.umcgiving.org), features information, stories, downloadable worship resources and other materials to promote each of the apportioned funds and the six Special Sundays with offerings.

**Connectional Giving Online Course:** "Missional Storytelling: Creating a Culture of Generosity" gives church leaders a holistic and biblical view of generosity. Access the free online course at any time at [www.umcom.org/learn/connectional-giving](http://www.umcom.org/learn/connectional-giving).



# Connecting THROUGH GIVING, UNITED METHODISTS CHANGE LIVES

BY CINDY SOLOMON

## UNITED METHODISTS ARE A GENEROUS PEOPLE.

For three years, **Hilary Taylor** served as a commissioned Mission Intern (now Global Mission Fellows) with the General Board of Global Ministries. Of her intern experiences, she said, “Global Ministries has shaped me in ways I never would have imagined, allowing me to wrestle with the church, Christian mission and, most importantly, myself.”

Before Banyam Theological Seminary in Nigeria received funds for solar electricity, seminarian **Wala Zubairu** could only study a few hours at night. A new power system lets him “read as long as I wish. My semester grade was ‘B’ but after the installation of the solar system, my grade has been up. ... I became an ‘A’ grader.”

Epworth United Methodist Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland, is “an intentionally multicultural, multilingual community,” says the Rev. **Jennifer Fenner**, pastor, with weekly services in English and Spanish. Aiding the transition from being a predominantly white church was a CORR Action Fund grant.

**Carson Jones** attends summer conferences of Native Americans at the United Methodist Center at Lake Junaluska,

North Carolina. In recent years, his daughter has joined her dad, a member of the Lumbee tribe. Jones likes “being with the different people and my daughter meeting other children like us. I believe it helps her self-esteem to sing and play and do crafts with other children.”

United Methodists are generous people, a very generous people. In 2014, they gave more than \$135 million to support denominational ministries. Another \$373 million went to church-related and other benevolent causes, such as soup kitchens and clothing drives. Church members responded to national and international disasters with \$28 million.

The next time you place your gifts in your church’s offering plate — or approve an online donation — consider the far-reaching effects of this simple but generous act.

The lion’s share of the offerings — 85 cents of every dollar — provides local church ministry and mission. The other 15 cents supports connectional giving, illustrating the power and positive effects of people connecting with their offerings — accomplishing what no single church, district or annual conference could do alone.

Of those 15 cents, 2 cents supports denominational apportionments. Taylor, Zubairu and Fenner represent the millions who experience the programs, staff and other resources provided through United Methodism’s seven apportioned funds. That’s what the \$135 million supported, says the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA).

Another 7 cents supports mission and ministry through districts, annual conferences and jurisdictions. Six cents goes toward Special Sunday offerings, World Service Special Gifts and The Advance.



GENERAL BOARD OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Young people engage in Bible study during the United Methodist Seminar Program on National/International Affairs sponsored by the General Board of Church and Society.

## General Conference adopts apportionment totals

Every four years, General Conference approves a churchwide budget for the coming quadrennium — and the total of each apportioned fund. GCFA and the Connectional Table propose a general church budget. The lay and clergy delegates elected from the annual conferences in all parts of the world discuss, tweak and ultimately set the budget for the quadrennium.

Meeting in May, General Conference 2016 approved a \$604 million budget for the 2017-2020 quadrennium, a slight increase over the 2013-2016 budget.

Once approved, GCFA staff divide the total among the annual conferences using a formula based on the operating expenses of the churches there. Conference staff then apportion their region's share to the individual churches using various formulas.

Today's apportionment system is nearly 100 years old. It developed in the first three decades of the 20th century as Methodists were becoming more prosperous and increasing their giving to the church. The 1924 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church — a predecessor to The United Methodist Church — created the World Service Commission (WSC) that served in much the same way as today's GCFA.

Apportionments cover seven general funds that enable United Methodist ministry and programming worldwide. According to *The Book of Discipline 2012*, "Payment of all of these apportionments by local churches is the first benevolent responsibility of the church" (Para. 247.14).

**World Service Fund:** Among other things, the World Service Fund helps:

- » develop new congregations reaching new people,
- » protect vulnerable people,
- » pay missionaries' salaries,
- » support efforts consistent with the Social Principles,
- » provide leadership for ministry with young people,
- » pay for denomination-sponsored advertising.

The list goes on.

World Service supports a long list of missions and ministries as well as most of the church's general agencies: Church and Society, Global Ministries, Higher Education and Ministry, Discipleship Ministries, Religion and Race, Status and Role of Women, United Methodist Men and United Methodist Communications.

As a mission intern, *Taylor* worked first as the field education and ministry coordinator for Seth Mokitmi Methodist Seminary in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. She helped seminarians experience ministry with marginalized people in the local community and then was a financial coach for the United Way Center for Financial Stability in Miami. In both settings, she learned "how churches can function as centers for community development, where relationship and imagination create abundance in environments of scarcity. Without a doubt, I can say these last few years have been the most meaningful years of my life."

Through Generation Transformation, Global Ministries is providing a number of short-term mission experiences for young adults.

The Central Conference Theological Education Fund — included in World Service — supports pastoral training in Africa, Asia and Europe.

A grant from the fund to his seminary makes it possible for *Zubairu* to study well into the night. Perhaps best known for providing e-readers with theological texts to seminary students and pastors in areas where printed materials are scarce, the fund is supporting theological education in areas of the world where the church is growing rapidly — and more pastors are needed.

General Conference increased funding for the Central Conference Theological Education Fund for 2017-2020 from \$5 million to \$10 million — the only change to the proposed budget approved. They also directed that any funds central conferences provide above \$750,000 for the General Administration Fund go directly toward theological education.

Awarding CORR Action Fund grants is one way the General Commission on Religion and Race works to develop intercultural competency, affirm diversity and combat racism.

The agency, *Fenner* says, "has been instrumental in allowing (Epworth Church) to be creative in how we reach youth and the communities surrounding the church, and has always been at the forefront of intentionality in multicultural and intercultural ministry and understanding its challenges."



During Lumad Solidarity Day in the Philippines, Datu Dulphing Ogan (standing with microphone) expresses his gratitude for the support of United Methodists in the island nation. The Rev. Joey Umali (third from the left) is seated with other United Methodist leaders and the Lumad people. The Lumads are the indigenous people of the southern Philippines who are often subjected to discrimination and violence.



“The U.S. church is 95 percent white, according to the General Council on Finance and Administration,” says the Rev. **Amy Stapleton**, Religion and Race’s leader for organizational accountability. “We are trying to change the narrative so that every person and congregation is equipped and prepared and ready to embrace a cross-cultural ministry experience.”

**Africa University Fund:** The Africa University Fund transforms Africa by educating and empowering students from across the continent through Africa University, a United Methodist-related educational institution on the continent. The Africa University Fund supports the general operating expenses of Africa University including faculty and staff salaries and vital infrastructure.

**Ministerial Education Fund:** Supporting future clergy and lay people serving in professional ministry as they prepare for ordination, licensing and certification, some funds help provide local-pastor courses of study offered by annual conferences. Most of the fund helps defray the costs of a seminary education and provides continuing education.

When the Rev. **Dennis Miller** responded to God’s call to full-time pastoral ministry – after a brief career as an attorney – he was married and had a child with a serious medical condition. Attending seminary full-time was not an option.

Miller became a licensed local pastor and began the **Course of Study**. He moved from youth ministry to an associate pastorate and in 2006 to the pulpit of Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Nixa, Missouri. The church has since grown from 250 to more than 600 in average worship attendance.

**Black College Fund:** “If black colleges did not exist, they would have to be invented,” said Johnnetta Betsch Cole, the 15th president of Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. It is one of 11 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) related to The United

Methodist Church. Many of the students at the schools are the first in their families to attend college. A study by Virginia Tech researchers showed black men earn more over their lifetimes when they attend a historically black four-year college or university instead of a majority white institution.

**Episcopal Fund:** Elected and consecrated to speak to the church and from the church, U.S. and central conference bishops receive their salary, office and travel expenses, pension and health-benefit coverage from this fund. United Methodists in the central conferences in Africa, Asia and Europe as well as the United States support it.

**Interdenominational Cooperation Fund:** The Interdenominational Cooperation Fund enables United Methodists to share a presence and a voice in the activities of several national and worldwide ecumenical organizations. It provides the United Methodist share of the basic budgets of these organizations and pays the travel expenses of United Methodist representatives to meetings to advocate for unity among Christians throughout the world.

**United Methodists** are now in full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church in Norway, the Uniting Church in Sweden, and the Pan-Methodist churches: African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, African Union Methodist Protestant and Union American Methodist Episcopal.

OCUIR staff are in dialogue with the Episcopal Church and conversation with Roman Catholic Church.

This fund also lets United Methodists participate in ecumenical and interreligious organizations advocating for Christian unity throughout the world.

**General Administration Fund:** From financing the administrative activities of the church to underwriting the basic costs of General Conference to maintaining official United Methodist

UNCOM/DJANE DEGNAN



Members of the Wiley College a cappella choir provide music during the International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities meeting in Hiroshima, Japan, in 2013. Wiley, located in Marshall, Texas, is one of The United Methodist Church’s historically black colleges.

documents and historical artifacts, this fund ensures trustworthy systems of oversight and financial accountability. It supports the work of GCFA and the General Commission on Archives and History.

## Going the ‘second mile’

**The Advance** — a channel of designated giving for United Methodists — covers more than 800 ministries and over 300 missionaries worldwide. Global Ministries staff review and approve each project eligible for funds. One hundred percent of gifts made through The Advance go to the project the donor designates.

Giving through The Advance supports a wealth of diverse programs as well as individual missionaries and mission initiatives.

In Belize, secondary education often suffers from a lack of government support. Construction of the **Behnoman Methodist High School** changed the lives of approximately 380 children, 20 teachers and even community vendors who market their food items near the school.



The **Community Health and Agriculture Development Program (CHAD)** in Cambodia recently assisted 1,184 people with medical assistance and livelihood support and established 25 cow-raising groups and 25 chicken-raising groups through 73 Methodist churches.

In Nebraska and Kansas, **The Big Garden** combines more than 80 self-sustaining gardens created since 2005 with nutrition projects, including fresh food pantries, nutritious snacks for schools, Sunday school, summer and VBS programs, community meals, cooking classes, a seed bank and farm-to-cafeteria programs.

People wanting to give through The Advance can search for projects geographically or by their ministry interests. Find the current listing of projects of The Advance at [www.umcmmission.org/advance](http://www.umcmmission.org/advance).

**Special Sundays with offerings** — General Conference 2016 continued observances of six Special Sundays and set the dates and use of the offerings. Churches may observe them on another day, if necessary.

**Human Relations Day — celebrated the Sunday before the observance of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.** The offering supports the community developer program United Methodist Voluntary Service of Global Ministries and a Church and Society program working with non-violent young offenders through education, advocacy or leadership training and development.

**The Learning Gym** at Clare Christian United Methodist Church in Chicago offers a safe haven for urban youth with athletic tournaments, academic enrichment and life-skills workshops year-round. "It's our hope and prayer that The Learning Gym will create well-rounded individuals who will one day be the leaders of the future," said Ed Bickham, a community developer working with the program.

**UMCOR Sunday — celebrated the fourth Sunday in Lent.** Previously known as One Great Hour of Sharing, this special day supports the administrative costs of the United Methodist Committee



Marceline Bakaba Kongaiseko leads her class at the United Methodist Mangobo Secondary School in Kisangani, Democratic Republic of Congo.

on Relief (UMCOR), which receives no apportioned funds. The offering allows UMCOR to use 100 percent of its donations as designated for ministries of food, shelter, health and peace.

**Native American Ministries Sunday — celebrated the third Sunday of Easter.** This day celebrates the contributions of Native Americans to the church and society.

A part of the offering supports Native American ministries in annual conferences. Another assists Native American congregations, ministries and communities in rural, urban and reservation settings that relate to Global Ministries. It also provides scholarships for Native American seminarians administered through Higher Education and Ministry.

The gathering that draws Jones and his daughter to **Lake Junaluska** is among the ministries receiving support, and financial assistance is provided for some participants.

**Daphne Locklear Strickland**, Administrative Council chair at Triad United Methodist Church where the family attends, says, "To the average person, this might seem like a small thing, but Carson and his daughter look forward to this conference as the only vacation time they have to celebrate with other Native Americans from all over the Southeastern Jurisdiction."

**Peace with Justice Sunday — celebrated the first Sunday after Pentecost.**

Peace with Justice Sunday enables The United Methodist Church to have a voice in advocating for peace and justice through a broad spectrum of global programs. The special offering benefits peace with justice ministries in the annual conference and through the General Board of Church and Society.

**World Communion Sunday — celebrated the first Sunday in October.**

The offering provides scholarships for graduate and undergraduate racial- and ethnic-minority students from the United States and international students. The boards of Global Ministries and Higher Education and Ministry administer the scholarships.

**United Methodist Student Day — celebrated the last Sunday in November.**

Gifts allow Higher Education and Ministry to award scholarships and furnish loans for United Methodist students attending colleges and universities.

*Cindy Solomon is a marketing consultant and content writer living in Franklin, Tennessee. Contributing to this article were writers of articles from the Global Ministries website, [www.umcmmission.org](http://www.umcmmission.org), and Sam Hodges, UMNS writer; Priscilla Muzerengwa, Zimbabwe West communicator; Sophia Agtarap, freelance writer for Interpreter; and "The Revival of Stewardship and the Creation of the World Service Commission."*



# Giving TIME AND SERVICE

BY SOPHIA AGTARAP

**ISABELLA TINTE IS A YOUNG ADULT UNITED METHODIST. SHE ACTIVELY SERVES HER CONGREGATION — IN LARGE PART BECAUSE OF WHAT SHE EXPERIENCED AS A CHILD AND TEEN.**



COURTESY PHOTO

Isabella Tinte (right) and Hazel Rollolazo are part of the worship team at Beacon United Methodist Church in Seattle.

“Growing up in the church, I’ve always been surrounded with so many ‘ates’ and ‘kuyas’ (older sisters and brothers),” Tinte says.

“They were my teachers at VBS. They were members of the praise and worship band. They were my leaders at Christmas Institute, a winter camp for young people where they can grow spiritually and develop leadership skills. They came to serve as my role models in life whether they realize it or not.”

They are much of the reason she now serves as a member at Beacon United Methodist Church in Seattle.

“Their constant presence and service in church leadership inspired me to follow

their footsteps and become a role model for the next generation of youth. Today, I find myself leading worship, teaching the children at VBS and training to be a leader at Christmas Institute. I believe that leading by example — through our actions — is how we leave our mark on the world and how we can inspire others to continue the faith.”

When asked to serve on a church committee, volunteer for an event or lead a mission opportunity, how likely are we to say “yes” to these opportunities? Do we view the giving of our time and talents through the church as opportunities to live out our discipleship? Are these times to make real our membership vows and our understanding of who we are in relationship to God, to one another and to the world?

Whether you live at a frenetic pace, overextending yourself to the point of exhaustion or are the type who is most comfortable budgeting your time, one thing is certain: As Christians, we are called to be good stewards, balancing the resources given to us by God.

## Why I Give

**WE GIVE** to The United Methodist Church because we believe that all we have belongs to God and that it’s our responsibility as followers of Jesus Christ to see that these resources are used to help bring about God’s reign of love, peace and justice on Earth. Over the years, we’ve found that The UMC is one of the most effective human structures for accomplishing this holy task.

*Cynthia and John Astle, St. Stephen UMC, Mesquite, Texas*

**I GIVE BECAUSE** my parents taught me by example that it was the proper thing to do. I am sure there were times when funds were short for them, but they never failed to give to the church. My parents gave us an allowance every week and expected us to give part of it to the church on Sunday morning. I would say that example and

expectation were building blocks of our present-day giving.

*James D. Arnold, Grace UMC, Oelwein, Iowa*

**WHY DO I GIVE?** It is simple. I give because God gave to me.

*Sandy Berl, Idlewyld UMC, Baltimore, Maryland*

**I GIVE** to put a smile on someone’s face!

*Krista Edmunds, Burlington, Iowa*

**I HAVE BEEN** so blessed in my life that the natural response has been to give back, and when we give of ourselves, blessings abound.

*Judith Kim, Parker UMC, Kaneohe, Hawaii*

**I GIVE OUT OF** gratitude for all I’ve been given. Although I was taught to tithe as a youngster growing up in a Methodist parsonage, I have found that giving 20 percent to a variety of charitable causes

is a comfortable level. The connectional system of The United Methodist Church has enabled us to participate in a variety of Volunteers in Mission and NOMAD projects through the years.

*Roger Tanquist, Puyallup (Washington) UMC*

**I GIVE BACK** to God because I can. That is my personalized response for creation and salvation, and involves thankfulness for the individual blessings of my life — relatives, friends, home, education, health, fruit of the Spirit, spiritual gifts, baptism and Holy Communion renewal — and like the sparrow, enough to survive. I give because I can.

*DeLoris Witherington, First UMC, East Brewton, Alabama*





UMMS/MIKE DUBOSE

## THE *generous* LIFE

The Rev. Ricky Duncan (right) of Johnson Memorial United Methodist Church and parishioner Randall Lester help remove flood debris from the home of a neighbor in Alderson, W. Va.

“A life of discipleship requires all three things — time, talent, treasure,” says Kelly West Figueroa-Ray, a United Methodist doctoral candidate in religious studies at the University of Virginia. “Devoting these to the church is part of a full life of discipleship. Discipleship is not a hobby, but a way of life.”

Many people say they want to make the world a better place today and for future generations. They live out that desire by volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, supporting GoFundMe projects or providing scholarships for young people to go to church camps and leadership events — and by serving through the congregations of which they are part. The call to serve Christ as a member of the church carries with it commitments lived out by serving God and neighbor.

### *Time is essential gift*

In the United States, there are over 1.1 million nonprofit organizations — and approximately 370,000 churches, compet-

ing for volunteer hours, writes Clif J. Christopher in *Not Your Parents' Offering Plate* (Abingdon Press).

For churches and faith-based organizations, volunteers are a lifeline essential to accomplishing their goals and carrying out their mission and vision. Earlier this year, Independent Sector, a leadership network for nonprofits, foundations and corporations committed to advancing the common good, estimated the value of a volunteer hour in 2015 at \$23.56.

“As a new faith community, we rely almost exclusively on volunteers' contributions of time and talent to make our digital and physical programs possible,” says the Rev. Matthew Johnson, “but it is more than reliance, it is a relationship.” Johnson is founder of the Portico Collective, a collection of new faith communities based in Naperville, Illinois.

“By involving volunteers in crafting of our programs, we have a chance to include a variety of voices and perspectives. It is humbling to experience people

volunteering their time and talents to an idea you conceived. I think it is what turns ideas into ministry. It is validation that the Spirit is at work in what you are doing.”

How might you begin to invite others to join in the mission of your congregation? Simply reminding them of their membership vows is likely not enough.

Amy Webb, who forecasts digital trends for nonprofit and for-profit companies, has said, “Our culture is changing pretty dramatically ... That sense of ‘I need to give out of obligation’ — I don’t know that it’s going to be around 20 years from now.”

Any book on donor cultivation and stewardship discussing what motivates people to give time or money to an organization or institution will offer a list similar to this:

- » Belief in the mission
- » Regard for leadership
- » Fiscal responsibility of the organization

A church can identify, nurture and support cheerful givers of time and talents, as well as treasure, by:

- » Showing there is something to be cheerful about.

United Methodist volunteers in the Philippines clean up in observance of World Oceans Day. The cleanup of a coastal area that is a critical habitat was in coordination with the Save Freedom Island Movement and other groups.

COURTESY GLACY MACABALE







SOUTH CAROLINA CONFERENCE

More than 1,200 volunteers, including 500 youth volunteers, pack 285,000 meals for Stop Hunger Now during the South Carolina Annual Conference in Florence, S.C.

HELPING PEOPLE IDENTIFY THEIR SPIRITUAL GIFTS – AND THE PLACES OF SERVICE LIKELY TO BRING THEM JOY.

- » Recognizing the active disciples called volunteers in your congregation and community and inviting them to share their stories.
- » Demonstrating how the ministries through which people are giving time and service are changing lives.

Generosity, Missouri Bishop Robert Schnase says, is an aspect of character, extending beyond the act of giving financially. It is not a spiritual attribute someone acquires apart from the actual practice of giving. It becomes discernable through action.

While United Methodists promise to support the church with their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness, they recognize that God does not need these gifts. What God desires is a faithful response, a joining in mission and ministry that responds to God's love and grace.

As leaders inspire more and more of their congregation to give of their time and talents, they will see disciples being made, the world being transformed and more and more young people like Isabella Tinte following their example.

*Sophia Agtarap is a media consultant and freelance writer living in Nashville, Tennessee.*

## CULTIVATING GENEROUS PEOPLE

Church leaders can cultivate a spirit and culture of generosity that includes giving from all of one's resources — resources that include time, talent, money and others.

The Old Testament tells of God's people being asked to give the first and the finest offerings. An apropos question for laity and clergy alike today is, "Are we giving God our best? What are we sacrificing? How are we making ourselves uncomfortable — stretching ourselves to give — to be able to serve God and neighbor?"

Here are some ideas for beginning to shift a congregation's culture around generosity:

1. **Tell stories.** *The Message* has a beautiful retelling of Matthew 13:10-17 and why storytelling matters: "A lot of people, prophets and humble believers among them, would have given anything to see what you are seeing, to hear what you are hearing, but never had the chance."
2. **Inspire, don't guilt trip.** Coercion and guilt are not good bases for giving or creating environments where the Holy Spirit can move. Rather than focus on a dire financial situation, present opportunities to give time and resources to allow the congregation to offer hope through the church's ministries. People of faith and hope do not allow fear to dictate their actions. Show that we are people who have faith in a God bigger than our fears.
3. **Increase the number of ways you ask people to give.** Put yourself in the pew. What does the average churchgoer in your congregation hear about giving? If they were to come just six times a year, what would they infer about how to participate in the life of the church? They might hear of your fall and spring stewardship campaigns, automatic deductions for their monthly tithe and online giving. Would they also hear of opportunities to serve through the church, opportunities to lead and ways their generosity extends beyond the church building?

*Sophia Agtarap*

## Why I Give

**I GIVE BECAUSE** I am grateful for all of God's gifts — past, present and future. I also give because God asks me to and multiplies my gifts. I bless others when I give. My church does great work for God. Giving teaches my children to give, connects me to all of God's people and tells God, "I love you."

*Beth Borchert, Poughkeepsie (New York) UMC*

**I GIVE FOR** two reasons: to fulfill a promise I made to my local church to support the ministries of the church, both locally and in the world; secondly, as a thank offering for the many blessings I have received.

*Mary L. Brooks, Lyndon (Kansas) UMC*

**MY ROOTS** taught me to be the first to volunteer, stay until the end and sweat with all my might. Giving of all that I am naturally involves financial gifts. Giving flows out of every drop. I give to The United Methodist Church because it teaches me that we are connected and that my 'whole self' is not just those in my house but all. Giving is who I am and who we are.

*The Rev. Michael Mann, Northern Illinois Conference*

**MY UNITED METHODIST** church is a beacon to me and all the people in my community that God is at work in our world. I give to my church because I cherish it as the place I go to worship God and draw strength from the witness I see in my Christian sisters and brothers.

*Karen Tierney, John Wesley UMC, Fairmouth, Massachusetts*

**I GIVE BECAUSE** I finally realized that the church budget is a work of theology (how we believe God calls us to use money as a church) and that to give is to give up my individual right to control God's money.

*The Rev. Jason Villegas, associate pastor, First UMC, Morehead City, North Carolina*

**WHY DO I GIVE?** I don't know why I wouldn't. I feel that we are all family, and of course, we would help others in need whether it be financially or with our presence or prayers. If we do not give, we cannot expect the world to get any better, and in fact, it would get worse. I don't believe God intended folks to be homeless or hungry or sick or frightened.

*Jill Williamson, Richfield UMC, Minneapolis, Minnesota*

# Let the children give

BY MELISSA HINNEN



**Watch and listen** to “Let the Children Give: Raising Generous Children,” a 58-minute webinar, featuring the Rev. Rosanna Anderson, associate director of stewardship ministries, Discipleship Ministries, and Delia Halverson, longtime Christian educator and author of *Let the Children Give: Time, Talents, Love, and Money*.

## WHEN A FOURTH-GRADE SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDENT

at Los Altos United Methodist Church realized how much money her class needed to raise to purchase a llama for a family in need, her passion and creativity stirred.

“Mom, I’m worried we are not going to raise enough,” Faith Watters said. “I’m going to sell lemonade and artwork to make sure we can do what we promised.” Through her hard work, she raised \$300 for Heifer International to support the purchase of a llama.

Keeping the missional aspect of “extravagant generosity” relevant to children is vital to nurturing a spirit of stewardship and giving, says Lisa Conway. Director of children’s ministry at the church in Los Altos, California, she has incorporated both local and international projects to encourage giving.

“Asking a child to give 10 percent doesn’t mean much to him or her,” she says. “But if we tell them that the gifts from their own resources combined with their classmates’ gifts can purchase

an animal for a family through Heifer International, or provide breakfast for families in our own community, they begin to make the connections.”

In a recent webinar sponsored by Discipleship Ministries, Delia Halverson, longtime Christian educator and author of *Let the Children Give: Time, Talents, Love, and Money* (Upper Room Books), reminded participants that “children learn by watching and grow through action.” As children learn about the intersection of the “head and heart” of stewardship and the “hands and feet” of mission, Halverson suggests they must first learn to value the church.

The Rev. Rosanna Anderson, associate director of stewardship at Discipleship Ministries, says, “It’s important to engage children and youth with resources that are designed for their age and stage of faith development.” Resources such as *Earn. Save. Give.* (Abingdon Press) and the Advent study *Finding Bethlehem in the Midst of Bedlam* (Abingdon Press) can help families “become more personally involved in a churchwide stewardship campaign,” she says.

As part of the campaign, children can be asked to join their parents in pledging their gifts, prayers, presence, service and witness. Halverson says that a special pledge card designed for

children helps them promise to care for the church by cleaning up litter, tithing from their allowance, greeting and serving as an acolyte.

Nick Haigler, youth minister at Bethesda (Maryland) United Methodist Church, also uses a multi-response pledge system to reinforce stewardship. For example, during a capital campaign for a building addition, youth both pledged financially and committed volunteer time. Haigler says that when children and youth “understand all that needs to happen to care for the church, it invests them in the health of the church. They begin to make the connection between money raised in the church and how it translates to ministry.”

Giving with a joyful heart is not limited to placing offerings in baskets as pre-loaded debit cards become more common among young people and adults increasingly tithe through automated giving.

“We realized that with electronic giving, children today may miss the visual and tangible cue of people contributing to the offering,” explains the Rev. Ken Sloane, interim associate general secretary of leadership ministries. In response, Discipleship Ministries collaborated with United Methodist Communications to create “I’m a UMC E-Giver!” cards. Sloane says, “Now people who sit in the pews and do their regular giving electronically can participate in the Sunday morning offering by putting a card in the plate as it is passed.”

Haigler says the Bethesda church encourages electronic giving. “Technology is part of everyday lives. Everything is paid online,” he says. “We can buy a fast food burger through automated giving. Shouldn’t it be as easy to make a gift to the church?” he suggests.

*The Rev. Melissa Hinnen is pastor of Asbury United Methodist Church, Croton-on-Hudson, New York. She formerly served on the communications staff of the General Board of Global Ministries.*



Fourth-grader Faith Watters sells lemonade and art work to support the efforts of her Sunday school class to buy a llama. She is from Los Altos United Methodist Church in California.





# THE 'THIRD RAIL' OF BEING A PASTOR: *Knowing who gives*

BY ERIK ALSGAARD

**BY MOST ACCOUNTS, IT IS THE THIRD RAIL OF BEING A LOCAL CHURCH PASTOR: TOUCH IT, AND YOU'LL GET ZAPPED.**

"It" is the long-standing question, "Should a pastor know how much a church member gives?"

In late 2015, the connectional giving team — staff from United Methodist Communications that "works to increase visibility, awareness and financial support for the connectional ministries of The United Methodist Church" — did a survey where 372 people responded to that question.

The results were clear as mud.

"Most definitely yes," said the Rev. Tom Barnard, pastor at Crum's United Methodist Church in Berryville, Virginia. "Resources come in many areas and financial resources are critical to know as this usually determines commitment to the work of the church and kingdom."

"I am a firm believer that this is something that is between the member and God," said Carl Sudduth, supply pastor at Gainseville United Methodist Church in Livingston, Alabama. "If the pastor knows too much about someone's finances, it

might affect how he ministers to that family."

"I wanted to wait at least a year before I knew any financial giving information because I wanted to get to know the leaders, members and attendees first," said the Rev. Melissa Dodd, pastor at Asbury United Methodist Church in Springfield, Missouri. "Now I am aware of our top givers."

Some United Methodist churches have a policy that forbids the pastor from knowing what members give. Those that do will find themselves in violation of the soon-to-be-published *Book of Discipline 2016*.

General Conference 2016 passed legislation as part of a consent calendar amending Paragraph 340.2.c.(2)(c) of *The Book of Discipline 2012* to read: "...the pastor, in cooperation with the financial secretary, shall have access to and responsibility for professional stewardship of congregational giving records." One purpose cited is to provide pastoral care. The legislation is effective Jan. 1, 2017.

## *To know or not to know*

Stewardship consultant the Rev. Clif Christopher would agree with the move.

"The church is the only nonprofit on the planet that does not want its leader to know everything he or she can about how the nonprofit functions and pays its bills," writes Christopher in *Whose Offering Plate Is It?* (Abingdon Press).

In the book, he offers a plan for moving congregations away from the practice and writes, "Be sure that your leaders understand that your knowledge of giving is a spiritual diagnostic tool that you must have to be effective."

A pastor *choosing* not to know, Christopher continues, "constitutes clergy malpractice. ... It is well known that how one gives is one of the best indicators of the condition of a person's soul. If a person is not giving, you can just about take it to the bank that Jesus Christ is not the lord of his or her life."

Are there valid reasons for choosing not to know? The Rev. David Jones addressed the question in two 2012 blogs for The Rocket Company ([www.therock](http://www.therock))

etcompany.com). Now the pastor at First United Methodist Church in Decatur, Georgia, Jones wrote that he tells the congregation that, as their spiritual shepherd, he intends to lead them “without fear or favor.”

“But,” he added, “I found, early in my ministry, that promise was hard to keep when I reviewed people’s giving record. It made too much of a difference in how I felt toward some people, especially those who talked much about what the church should be doing but gave little or nothing to get it done.”

At Oakdale Emory United Methodist Church in Olney, Maryland, the Rev. Kevin Baker agrees with Jones, but he handles things a bit differently.

“I think a pastor has a right to know,” he said. “Do I know personally about you or anyone else? No. The problem with knowing how much a person gives is the potential to treat them differently. If they are big givers, you give them more attention or, if they don’t give at all, you treat them carelessly. Frankly, I don’t totally trust myself. I fear that if I knew what a person gave it might influence me.”

Baker does ask for giving numbers on a regular basis. Just recently, he asked for the giving numbers of each of the church’s board members. “I just asked them to leave off the names,” he said. “I didn’t want to know so much how much any one person gave as much as I wanted to know how much integrity our board has in their own giving. I don’t think it is ever right to ask the congregation to do something we the board and staff are not doing.”



HORIZONS STEWARDSHIP

The Rev. Cliff Christopher

## Talk about giving

Ultimately, the best way to foster a culture of greater transparency around giving is to talk about it more, notes Ann A. Michel, associate director of the Lewis Center and lecturer in church leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

“Pastors and other key leaders can model the way by openly discussing how much they give and why,” Michel said in an article at [www.churchleadership.com](http://www.churchleadership.com). “This sharing should be

done in thoughtful and appropriate ways, of course. But when we share testimonies about our giving, when we take encouragement rather than offense when someone learns about our generosity, we teach and inspire others about the importance of faithful giving.”

Michel said that the “conspiracy of silence” around money and giving in local churches is contrary to responsible stewardship. “Accountable discipleship requires that we be far more honest and transparent around everything having to do with faith and money,” she said. “And being a bit more open about our giving and a little less uptight about who knows are good steps in that direction.”



ALISON BURDETT

Frank Robert

The answer, he said, has been changing over the years. The Mid-Atlantic Foundation has put together a two-year intensive financial academy for pastors. They teach that



THE LEWIS CENTER

Ann Michel

pastors need to know, and should know, what a parish-ioner gives.

“Me, personally, I think (knowing) is one of the measures of Christianity,” Robert said.

“If your giving changes, I think the pastor needs to know that.”

Changes in a person’s tithe, he said, could alert the pastor to other, perhaps more serious, issues in a person’s life.

“Is Frank on drugs? Is there a divorce going on? Did he lose his job? What’s going on?” he said. “It’s a great sign for the pastor to know, or, at the least, to be alerted to the fact that Frank’s giving changed.”

Robert understands that people don’t want to flaunt their giving and that is something Jesus taught. At the same time, keeping a person’s giving “just between them and God” isn’t very effective, he said.

“You don’t take your money and just throw it directly up to heaven,” Robert said. “It doesn’t work that way. When you give, someone in the church is counting your money; you’re claiming it off your taxes.”

Underlying all this, Robert stressed, is that giving is a spiritual discipline; something that reflects one’s relationship with God. In a day and age when giving to charitable causes is rising, to an estimated \$373.25 billion in 2015, according to a report on Giving USA ([givingusa.org](http://givingusa.org)), donations to religious organizations have stayed flat for the last 10 years.

“We need to teach the next generation about giving,” Robert said. “The older generation understands it as a spiritual practice, but unless we teach this to the next generation, we’re going to lose it.”

*The Rev. Erik Alsgaard is editor of UMConnection, official newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.*



# ELECTRONIC GIVING RAISES TECHNO- THEO-LOGICAL questions

BY JEREMY STEELE

**THE PREFERENCE AMONG CHURCHGOERS** for electronic giving is clear. A recent study showed that 79 percent of 24- to 34- year-olds prefer to give electronically with 60 percent of all attendees stating the same preference.

The results of the Vanco Payment Solutions study are supported by the responses of pastors to a survey on online giving conducted by the United Methodist Communications' connectional giving team last spring. The General Council on Finance and Administration endorses Vanco as a provider of digital giving resources.

"Remove whatever obstacles might be in the way for individuals to practice generosity," the Rev. Matt Lipan wrote in response to the survey. "It has only been a positive experience for our congregation as more and more individuals sign up for online giving. It is also something I actively encourage from the 'pulpit.'" Lipan leads Gateway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis.

The challenge with meeting givers' growing preference is both technological (see page 25) and theological. Less than one quarter of all churches offer the option of electronic giving. People continue to make the lion's share of their offerings in person during worship. As more and more churches do adopt electronic giving, there is concern that people will lose an understanding of giving as an act of worship.

## **Connecting worship, giving**

It is important not to let the means minimize the ancient connection be-

tween giving and worship, said the Rev. Thad Austin, an elder from the Tennessee Conference and a doctoral candidate at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University. "The first act of giving as part of worship happens in the first family in the Bible with Cain and Abel."

Giving during a worship service carries power as it physically expresses a spiritual act. Giving the resources under their stewardship to the church lets worshippers match actions to their words as they sing about the sacrifice of praise.

The lack of "emotional connection that comes from putting something in that offering plate when it passes" concerns the Rev. Dwayne Scoggin, pastor of Courtland United Methodist Church in Mississippi. "Personally I don't see any harm in offering a digital way to give, but we do not need to stop the offering in worship services either."

Families moving to online giving may also complicate teaching children and youth about giving (see page 20). When

youngsters see their parents and grandparents placing checks and cash in the offering plate, they begin to understand the importance their family places on financial faithfulness. Without provisions for some sort of symbolic offering — in lieu of money — Austin said, "Children might see the plate pass by and never see their parents put something in it."

To address the dilemma of plate vs. electronic offerings, Austin said churches first "must allow people to give in their native language." That means the church cannot ignore the shift to electronic transactions any more than it could ignore the shift from using cash to writing checks.

"Why would we ever want to limit someone's ability to give in this ever-changing world just because we may not be comfortable giving this way?" asks the Rev. Russell Corben, pastor of West Freedom United Methodist Church in Parker, Pennsylvania. "My experience is that congregations that have integrated digital giving options have seen the level of generosity in the people gathering together go up significantly."

Offering congregants new ways of giving — online, texting, electronic point-of-sale tablets and church kiosks to name a few — also provides an opportunity to teach about the theology of giving and money in general. That can be through a sermon series or even a teaching video placed on the church website that explains how the new giving system works.

COURTESY PHOTO



The Rev. Thad Austin

## Offerings in the plate

When it comes to placing an offering in the plate, churches are finding creative solutions to that as well.

As congregants of Michelson Memorial United Methodist Church in Grayling, Michigan, register to give electronically, each receives 50 cards that say, "I gave online." At the end of each service, ushers remove those cards from the plates and store them to be sent again when the traditional givers are sent their box of offering envelopes.

First United Methodist Church of Childersburg in Sylacauga, Alabama, encourages people who give electronically, as well as those who give in person only once a month, to place a dollar bill in the plate each week to help them engage more fully in the worship service.

Austin knows of at least one church that gives members pebbles to place in their metal plates. The practice both gives worshippers something to put in the plate and engages another sense when the stone hits the metal.

Eureka United Methodist Church in Kansas invites people to take a gold card from the pew rack and place it in the plate to signify that they have given in another way. Still other churches have people simply place their attendance sheet in the plate when they have given online.

"By not embracing modern forms of giving, we are actually excluding people from being able to participate fully in worship," Austin says. "Opening the door to electronic giving does not have to mean closing the door to participating in the offertory in the worship service. With careful thought and planning, church leaders can both remove the barriers to giving and increase participation in worship."

COURTESY PHOTO



Beth Lodwick (left), finance and youth assistant at Christ United Methodist Church in Mobile, Ala., demonstrates use of a Square tablet to church member Angela Tait. The device lets buyers use credit and debit cards at church fundraisers. The church also promotes online giving of church offerings.

*The Rev. Jeremy Steele is Next Generation pastor at Christ United Methodist Church in Mobile, Alabama. An author, speaker and blogger, he regularly*

*contributes to the Technology department for Interpreter and Interpreter OnLine, [www.interpretermagazine.org](http://www.interpretermagazine.org).*





# Technology

## Online giving can increase blessings – for givers and churches

**M**aking the transition to offering online giving is bigger than acquiring the needed technology and simplifying giving for some congregants. The availability of online giving provides a potentially significant way for increasing total donations.

That is the argument the Rev. Richard Burstall brought to the finance team at Michelson Memorial United Methodist Church in Grayling, Michigan. “I’m in my 40s, and I haven’t written a check in I don’t know how long,” he told them. Burstall explained that the only place that not carrying checks or cash was a problem was when he wanted to give in church.

This lack of diversity in payment methods disproportionately affects younger churchgoers who are more prone not to use cash or checks in their daily life. If congregations want to make full participation in the life of

the church available to younger generations, they need to move forward and open the blessing of financial giving to them by allowing electronic giving. Churches offering electronic giving — along with the traditional cash and checks — find that a growing percentage of older members are also choosing to handle their financial obligations electronically.

After some mission-focused discussion, the people of Michelson Memorial Church decided to make it easy for all generations to be faithful givers in their church. They chose to sign up with the service recommended by the United Methodist General Council on Finance and Administration: Vanco Payment Solutions.

Beyond the trust that comes from knowing the denomination’s finance agency has vetted the company, Vanco provides much more for churches than a simple payment system. It offers downloadable resources ([http://](http://bit.ly/vancoonlinegiving)

[bit.ly/vancoonlinegiving](http://bit.ly/vancoonlinegiving)) to help churches explore this new territory before they ever make formal contact with a company representative.

From there, Vanco has simple planning tools to help guide churches toward implementation. Once the process is complete, people are able to give through a web browser, smartphone app or text message.

The result for Michelson Memorial? Many younger individuals and families have been able to become regular givers even when sports tournaments keep them out of church. At the same time, nothing has changed for those who prefer to put a check in an offering envelope.

Finance leaders experience some unexpected benefits. When it comes time to count the offering for online transactions, they don’t have to assemble a team of volunteers. They simply open the report that came in their email and input that information into

the church database. For some churches, the cost of processing the offering decreases with online giving. More and more banks are charging lower service fees for online transactions than they do to process checks.

Though the convenience and saving money are nice bonuses, the real benefit is giving all of God’s people equal access to the blessing of financial giving. As churches like Michelson Memorial embrace the missional growth possibilities in online giving, everyone can grow in discipleship through faithful giving.

*The Rev. Jeremy Steele is Next Generation minister at Christ United Methodist Church, Mobile, Alabama. He is also an author, blogger at [jeremywords.com](http://jeremywords.com) and a frequent contributor to MyCom, an e-newsletter published by United Methodist Communications.*

While the Rev. Richard Burstall promotes the availability of online giving at Michelson Memorial United Methodist Church, receiving gifts in the traditional plates is still a part of each service.



COURTESY PHOTO





# "We asked ... you said ..."

Several weeks prior to finishing each issue of *Interpreter*, we send a question to all readers for whom we have email addresses, asking them to respond with a short answer of 50-75 words. We include a few of the answers here and more at Interpreter OnLine, [www.interpretermagazine.org](http://www.interpretermagazine.org). This issue's question brought some of the heaviest responses ever. We hope you will join the conversation.

## YOU SAID ...

A generous lifestyle is where I realize just how greatly I have been blessed by God in so many areas that, in return, I seek to be just as great a blessing in his name to others.

*The Rev. Kevin Barron, Farm Hill UMC, Harrisburg, Arkansas*

Living generously is living gratefully, offering from one's abundance without thought of recompense or expectation of return in order to enhance and enrich the lives of others.

*David Bowman, Hamilton UMC, Neptune, New Jersey*

To be generous, you must make someone happy before yourself. You must give your time to someone who needs it even when you don't have time to spare. You must give your favorite belongings to someone who needs them. In short, to be generous, you must love the people around you more than yourself. It's a lovely irony that in the process, you will realize your own happiness, you will find your time well spent, you will find new favorite things, and you will find more love than you ever dreamed of.

*Matthew Bradke, First UMC, Bryant, Arkansas*

Like a heartbeat, generosity is involuntary — it happens without conscious thought. It is the "without a second thought" showing love to another.

*Diana Braziel, Fairbanks UMC, Houston, Texas*

A generous life follows John Wesley's admonition to "give all you can." Even in times of personal scarcity, a generous life looks to the interests of others more than self. Beginning with the "full tithe," the minimum standard of Christian stewardship for United Methodists, the generous life gives liberal offerings to church and charity. We are not generous to call attention to self. We are generous because we follow our Lord Jesus in the way of generosity.

*The Rev. Dennis W. Derr, retired, Harbeson, Delaware*

A generous lifestyle is a way of living that reflects intentionally a life touched by God. It is actually simpler than it sounds. It is living with eyes opened for opportunities to give to total strangers, to give repeatedly, and to give often. It is gratitude in action. It's a way of living that takes the neighbor into account. Finally, it is living with thoughts of God on the front burner.

*Vincent J. Dominique, Warren Temple UMC, LaGrange, Georgia*

I think "a generous life" simply requires a certain mindset. You make a conscious decision to live your life by loving your neighbor and yourself. Once this decision is made, God enables you to give freely. After all, we have Jesus as an example! While it's important to donate to good causes, it's not always about money. It's about relationship. Taking the time to listen, sharing your skills, lending

## WE ASKED:

What does it mean to live a generous life, to follow a generous lifestyle?

a hand. It's so good for you! And for those you touch!

*Sharon Kimmel, New Castle (Delaware) UMC*

A generous life is lived by one who has become addicted to gratitude and discovered the joy of giving.

*Judy Kline, Greenland Hills UMC, Dallas, Texas*

What best describes a generous life? A life of freedom and yet as a slave to Christ. A person who regards others as more important than themselves — a selfless life. One that gives freely and without compulsion love, time, service, encouragement and the truth and grace of the gospel. A generous life is a life that gives oneself continually to the Lord and trusts God even when God doesn't seem to be present or acting on their behalf.

*Judie Lemons, White Mountain UMC, Show Low, Arizona*

A generous life is a life lived with your hand open. Open to hold a child's hand crossing a busy street. Open to hold wrinkled, gnarled fingers twined in age. Open to give to the frightened, abused woman escaping to hope. Open to hear sighs of pain, smiles of love and tears of grief. Open to give money to fill a need. Open to give love so others might live.

*Mary Lou Luther, Kimberling City (Missouri) UMC*



## YOU SAID ...

A generous lifestyle honors “sustainable” concepts of the 21st century along with unconditional loving tenets taught by Jesus the Christ. This includes respectfully loving self, others and “God made” (natural) life and resources with a discerning understanding and application when participating in human-designed organizations, structures and resources. It is fearless and faithful dwelling in love, forgiveness and grace, a gracious lifestyle devoid of greed and worldly seductions.

**Janet Florence McCormack**, Zia UMC, Santa Fe, New Mexico

A generous lifestyle means more than being willing to provide funds and other financial and material support to others. It means being willing to give of yourself in every way, including accepting and loving others, and supporting and caring for those who may be different in any way.

**Lynn Moore**, Christ UMC, Tulsa, Oklahoma

A generous life is living modestly and humbly, always willing to share and give what you have, be it money, food, time, skills, advice, etc. It is always having open arms, an open and loving heart.

**Laddie Perez-Galang**, Laguna Country UMC, Laguna Woods, California

I think of a generous person as one who not only shares of her financial gifts but also shares of herself. The most financially generous people I know are often not actually giving of themselves. Often it is easier to write a check than to be in relationship with those we are helping. When someone shares with me a part of himself — his struggles, his joys, his encouragement, his love — then I feel blessed by a generous spirit.

**Jan Phelps**, Christ UMC, Franklin, Tennessee

A generous life begins in gratitude to God, which radiates out to others. When we know at our core that we are all connected, we listen with discernment, kindness and patience. A generous life means being attuned to God’s will and seeking inclusion. A generous person gives of herself and also cares for herself so that generosity comes with ease. Living a generous life offers openings to feel our belovedness and act in love.

**Pat Roundy**, Mason UMC, Tacoma, Washington

It is within us to bless others when we have been blessed. God has instilled this desire in us to help others. Just as he blesses us out of his loving kindness, so we also bless. The more we lift our spirit to be filled, God can’t help himself to commune back with us. It’s a glorious thought to know we are so loved.

**Cynthia Saarie**, Phoenix (New York) UMC

A generous life values all life, shares stories and builds community among all God’s beloved children.

**Jackie Shields**, Brentwood (Tennessee) UMC

A generous life is a continuous act of love, solidarity and dedication towards others. It is a pause to offer to others and bless them through your actions. Generosity comes from a thankful heart to God, which recognizes the needs of those in life and those around you. Generosity invites you to look around and model Jesus’ lifestyle of walking with intentionality in his heart, knowing that he would find human beings whom he would heal, feed and support in the process of life. Generosity is love that covers, nourishes and heals.

**The Rev. Virna J. Ortiz Solis**, Rev. José Espada Marrero Methodist Church, Puerto Nuevo, Puerto Rico

A generous life is one focused on Jesus Christ and serving the Lord by bringing the good news of redemption to those who do not know Christ.

**Steve Steiner**, Gethsemane UMC, Lino Lakes, Minnesota

Some of the most generous givers I know reside in prison. To the world, these are some of the poorest people imaginable. In addition to losing their freedom, in many cases they have lost their families, lost any material wealth, lost their status in their community and church. But, in shining the Christ light in the darkness, they give him not only to their fellow residents, but to us volunteers who pray with them weekly. I went to prison to bring Christ — but I found that he was already there.

**Fred Thomas**, First UMC, Milford, Ohio

A generous lifestyle is one that gives freely in all aspects of life — sharing time, sharing effort, sharing wealth, sharing attention with all regardless whether we agree with them or not, sharing the truth that the Holy Spirit grants us. This practice of sharing is done consistently and often enough that it becomes a habit. It gives these to itself as much as to others.

**Bill Wilkin**, Spring Valley UMC, Dallas, Texas

Generosity is, and should be, a joyful experience — not just in material/financial terms, but in openness to new ideas and relationships. Sharing ideas, opinions, and resources can lead to joyful obedience.

**Thomas Wussow**, Kingwood (Texas) UMC

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