Giving to God

Stewardship as a way of living our faith

BY PAM GREER-ULLRICH
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Using stories and pictures, a narrative budget brings a spreadsheet to life for more people. It ties the line-item budget components such as property, personnel, evangelism and education to the church’s identified missions and services. It links every dollar to mission and every gift to faithful expressions of the joy of giving and the generosity of our God. A narrative budget uses a variety of communication tools to inspire, interpret, encourage, and build a culture of generous giving.

If only everyone had this little boy’s attitude. He wanted to give his all to God. When we realize that everything we have comes from God’s grace in our lives, then we are better able to express our faith and to be good stewards with all that God has entrusted to us.

While many people naturally want to give to help others, few understand what stewardship means in relation to faith and their church. The church has a role in helping its members understand that while giving comes from our generous impulses, it’s also our response to God. Giving is a way of participating in Christ’s mission — and we can feel good about doing so! To build a culture of generous giving, churches need year-round teaching and preaching on stewardship.

“The minister was giving a sermon on “total giving.” When it came time to take up the offering, the plate came to a pew where there was a very small boy. He looked up at the usher and said, “Could you lower the plate?” Thinking that he wanted to see into the plate, the usher held it down a bit. “No,” said the boy, “a little lower, please.” The usher lowered it a bit more. “More; could you just put it on the floor?” the boy asked. The usher was aghast but finally put it on the floor. The boy stepped into it, stood there, and said, “This is what I give to the Lord.”

— A Stewardship Scrapbook

stewardship emphasis helps grow giving for its ministry and mission via the operating fund. “We plan our balanced budget from both pledged commitments and a heavy dose of faith, and have been able to operate in the black since 2009,” Schramm said. In 2015, to prepare its ministries and facilities for the next 150 years, the church launched a $1.5 million capital campaign.

“People can be amazingly generous when they feel like their church is moving in the right direction,” said Schramm.

Communicate the plan

Leaders at Westminster made sure to clearly communicate objectives with the congregation. A key goal was that Westminster would be a safer, more energy efficient, more inviting, accessible and welcoming space for all who would enter its doors, so by caring for their church facility now, members would share faith, hope and love with those who will be there long after they are gone.

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Make giving easy

More and more churches recognize that increasingly parishioners prefer debit cards and online banking to cash and checks. As a result, churches increasingly take advantage of online giving in their stewardship strategy. Overall in 2016 online giving grew 7.9 percent, compared with 2015, according to Blackbaud, a software company that provides products for fundraising and charitable giving. Faith-based nonprofits saw a growth of 8.8 percent in online giving. Blackbaud also reported that 10 percent of gifts of $1,000 were given online.

“A significant portion of our general offering is received online via our website and the Presbyterian Mission Exchange,” said the Rev. Morgan Morse Hay, senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Peachtree City, Georgia.

About four years ago, the church began promoting online giving on pledge cards and pew cards, in newsletter articles and by asking others to talk about the ease and convenience of giving online.

Create a legacy

Planned giving is a way to create a legacy of faith and return to God that which God entrusted us with during our lifetime. Planned giving also strengthens Christ’s church for future ministry and mission.

Gaithersburg Presbyterian in Gaithersburg, Maryland, is not shy about asking for support. The church promotes generosity and a planned giving program through workshops, a full-color pictorial stewardship campaign report and other informational brochures and printed pieces available in the narthex.

“Nearly 250 of our 750 members have attended one of our financial planning workshops over the last five years,” said Phil Melberg, chair of the planned giving committee. Gaithersburg uses these workshops to plant a seed for future gifts.
Held three times a year, each workshop has about 30 to 40 people who come to learn about estate planning, minimizing taxes, and ways they can stretch their charitable dollars and create a legacy. Annually, the church honors the members of the Living Legacy Fellowship (LLF) at an appreciation dinner. The LLF includes people who have arranged bequests or planned other special gifts.

The church has received gifts to create permanent endowments, unrestricted funds for session distribution and scholarships for youth. The endowments help fund adult mission trips, retire debt, feed hungry people within the local area and support many other ministries.

But Gaithersburg doesn’t do it alone. The church partners with

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**PRESBYTERIAN FOUNDATION OFFERS GUIDANCE**

Not sure where to start when it comes to promoting stewardship or setting up online giving? Since 1799 the Presbyterian Foundation has been helping Presbyterian churches gather and steward the funds they need for the mission and ministry God calls them to do. Resources on the Foundation’s website range from ready-made sermons to online assessments, including:

- Financial Health Assessment
- Planned Giving Navigator
- Live Forward, Give Forward® Wills and Legacy Program
- Stewardship Kaleidoscope Conference
- Ministry Relations Team

Find a ministry relations officer at www.presbyterianfoundation.org or call 800-858-6127, option 3.
The Presbyterian Foundation for help with stewardship training and resources, as well as secure online giving and funds management services. The foundation also holds and invests the principal of a number of endowments and distributes the income directly to the church for its missions.

Legacy gifts don’t always have to come in the form of cash for an endowment.

“Because of someone’s real estate gift, we’re now able to provide a residence for the associate pastor,” said Melberg.

Plan for future use

A legacy is an act of creation and a will is a tool used to create

**GIVING EXPRESSES OUR THANKS TO GOD**

**BY ROSEMARY C. MITCHELL**

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God’s new heaven and new earth, praying, “Come, Lord Jesus.” — from A Brief Statement of Faith

God’s grace through Jesus Christ is a transformational gift in a person’s life and journey of faith. This gift compels us to give back to God, which is the way we say, “Thank you.” Our thank you to God comes through the prayers, gifts and actions of each of us and all of us.

As members of a connectional church, Presbyterians express their collective gratitude to God through our denomination’s mission efforts. Together we are stronger. Together we make a lasting impact. Together we are the visible sign of God’s love in a world longing for hope, peace and renewal. Jesus’ words compel us to love God and to love our neighbor. Presbyterians are the hands and feet of Christ through their deep commitment to mission.

Engagement in Presbyterian mission through your prayers, financial gifts and hands-on involvement makes a difference in your community, across the country and throughout the world. Your generosity demonstrates the love of God and the renewal of the Holy Spirit. Your gifts support:

- faithful discipleship;
- new worshiping communities;
- ministries for youth, college students and young adults, including the Youth Triennium;
- direct responses in times of disaster;
- mission co-workers and Young Adult Volunteers serving with partners in 50 countries;
- developing resources and providing training for racial justice and reconciliation;
- advocacy for justice and freedom;
- speaking the truth in love;
- promoting peace and conflict resolution;
- opportunities for leadership development;
- caring for God’s creation;
- working to end hunger and poverty.

Your gifts to Presbyterian mission inspire, equip and connect Presbyterians and other Christians around the world. The result is a Spirit-breathed synergy that makes God’s community more livable for all. Thank you.

For more information on how you and your congregation can support Presbyterian mission go to [presbyterianmission.org](http://presbyterianmission.org).

Rosemary C. Mitchell is the senior director of Mission Engagement and Support for the Presbyterian Mission Agency.
it. However, nearly 61 percent of Americans die without having written a will to direct their assets. Churches with a strong wills emphasis program keep the idea of creating a faith legacy in front of members.

“Sometimes when people begin thinking about end-of-life matters such as the type of service they want and whether they want to be buried or cremated, the door opens for a conversation about leaving a bequest to the church,” said the Rev. Dr. Louise Westfall. Westfall is pastor at Central Presbyterian Church in Denver. “Having other members share their stories of giving is another way to set the tone and get someone thinking about their legacy.”

Central Presbyterian hosts a luncheon the first Sunday in May for members of its Covenant Society. The Covenant Society was established in 2003 and includes Central Presbyterian Church supporters who have made an endowed gift to the church, or who have made provisions for a gift to the Endowment Fund in their estate plans. Central designates a Sunday in September for wills emphasis. In addition to a sermon on generosity, a testimony from a member who has made a bequest to the church is given during coffee hour.

“Our annual stewardship campaign runs six weeks in the fall, but I don’t limit myself to just those Sundays to talk about giving. I weave it in throughout the year,” said Westfall.

Mike Moon of Rancho Bernardo Community Presbyterian Church in San Diego echoes the importance of a long-range view.

“We work to educate and make people aware of how their generosity impacts the church ministry and mission,” said Moon, who chairs the church’s endowment committee. “Having a 12-month plan and calendar has helped us keep a year-round focus on giving, and we’ll soon be looking 18 months ahead.” Last year, Rancho Bernardo joined three of the largest Presbyterian churches in the area to share best practices in planned giving.

“Stewardship is more than money,” said Keizer. “It’s how we use our talents, time and treasure to live out our faith, show thankfulness for God’s amazing grace, care for the environment and ensure that Christ’s work in the kingdom continues.”

Pam Greer-Ullrich is an accredited public relations professional and the director of public relations for the Presbyterian Foundation.

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