

“Five Effective Annual Stewardship Campaigns: How They Work and When to Use Them”

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The big question: How can we get clergy and lay leaders to move beyond stewardship education methods controlled by (a) ‘the way we’ve always done it’ and (b) a short list of influential laypersons who block their congregation’s use of effective stewardship methods?

Churches that use the following principles see significant annual increases in their total offerings. Their members report positive feelings about these opportunities to consider the spiritual dimensions of giving money to God’s work through their congregations:

A. Conduct an effective stewardship campaign *every year*. Avoid the two big time-honored mistakes:

- Churches that repeat an *ineffective* campaign for several years because the leaders “know how to do this one”
- Churches that stop using an *effective* campaign after one year

B. Talk about need of the giver to give for his or her spiritual benefit, not the need of the church to receive. The leaders in a small-town congregation expressed their pride in not having stewardship campaigns of any kind like this: “When we need the money, people always come through.” These leaders should have been embarrassed instead of proud. Their May Day method (S.O.S.—the ship is sinking) is not Christian stewardship; it is a bill-paying, dues-paying, and fund-raising mentality that (a) blocks members from a significant spiritual growth experience and (b) keeps their congregation’s mission and ministry in poverty.

C. Instead of asking, “What does the church need to balance its budget?” these churches ask, “What is God calling you to give as a percentage of your income?” This makes the giving of money a spiritual issue that fits the different income levels of each household. (Most young-adults respond even better than older adults to this spiritually focused question.)

D. Talk about percentage giving, not as a legalism but as an appropriate faith commitment for which God’s Grace empowers us. Avoid fundamentalist statements that rigidly demand parishioners to give 10 percent of their income. Avoid judgmental approaches such as repeatedly stating “what people ought to give.”

Repeatedly, consistently, teach people to ask themselves, “What percentage of my income is God calling me to give?” Repeatedly, consistently, teach that giving a percentage of income to God is “a response to God’s Grace, empowered by God’s Grace.”

E. Complete the annual stewardship campaign first, before establishing and publishing the church budget. Churches that teach Christian stewardship instead of fund-raising, dues-paying, or bill-paying set the operating budget *after* rather than *before* completing the stewardship campaign.

Building the budget *before* conducting the campaign builds a ceiling above which giving cannot rise!

Building the budget *after* the campaign takes the lid off potential increases (a) by eliminating the inevitable negative reaction everyone has to one or two items in the printed budget proposal, (b) by eliminating the “my fair share” syndrome that focuses on 3 percent to 5 percent increases in the operating budget, and (c) by building a biblical foundation that grows congregational giving 15 percent to 30 percent each year.

F. Talk about time and talent stewardship during a different month than the annual financial campaign. Talking about money and time-talent at the same time (a) reduces the focus on the central question, “What percentage of my income is God calling me to give?” and (b) causes some people to treat the giving of money and time-talent like a multiple-choice question.

“I’ll give time instead of money” is an inappropriate spiritual decision. Congregations that intend to build strong disciples of Jesus Christ should never offer that kind of choice.

G. Recognize that lay people do not like to visit other lay people in their homes and ask them to fill out a pledge card during the annual stewardship campaign. This approach, which was used forty years ago when the old Every Member Commitment method—the first type of annual stewardship program denominations promoted—was inappropriately used in many smaller congregations and churches in small towns.

One use of that approach caused many clergy and lay leaders in small towns and small churches to disdain *every kind* of stewardship program for the next thirty years.

Because they have never heard of any kind of stewardship campaign other than visiting people in their homes to ask for pledge cards, they refuse to run the risk of damaging personal relationships.

H. Recognize that congregations can change. Skeptics often quip, “It takes people a long time to give up old habits and adopt new ideas. Other churches might use a new approach to stewardship but ours won’t!”

That observation (a) denies the power of the Gospel—whose bedrock presupposition is that people can change—and (b) denies the record of history. People can change quite quickly when they notice that other people—especially other people like themselves—made changes and greatly benefited from those changes:

- Alexander Graham Bell exhibited his telephone at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia; the first telephone and switchboard were installed in Boston in 1877. A central switching office opened in Manhattan in 1878.
- In 1994, people began to get onto the Internet with their PCs and a dial-up modem. Ten years later eight hundred million people were on the Internet.

I. Stifle the temptation to create a homemade stewardship campaign. Find a published program that has proved itself in other churches. “Do it by the book,” with no shortcuts. (For numerous additional principles, see *Herb Miller’s Nuggets, Volume #5, “How to Increase Financial Stewardship.”* E-mail HrbMiller@aol.com for contents-description and purchasing information.)

The following stewardship programs have excellent track records in United Methodist congregations across the United States.

Effective Stewardship: Building on Biblical Principles. Developed by a United Methodist layperson, Ken Williams, this year-around stewardship program often works well in churches that resist any type of classic-style annual stewardship campaign. The program has been used in 423 United Methodist Churches during the past twelve years, plus more than 1,447 churches in 22 denominations in 38 states and Canada (ranging in size from 35 people to over 5,000).

Effective Stewardship uses the printed page and lay people as the primary spokespersons to heighten parishioner awareness of what God's Word says concerning money, material possessions, and giving. The program runs for 48 months (however, a church can discontinue it on thirty days' notice). Each month, the program provides the following:

- A small "box" in the bulletin each Sunday contains a principle and a Scripture verse.
- A lay person gives a three or four-minute presentation that explains that month's principle.
- A newsletter article examines that month's principle from another perspective.
- One Sunday each month, Sunday school classes and youth groups receive a discussion sheet and a request that teachers spend five minutes leading students in discussing it.

All materials are provided in the Scripture version preferred by each church. Printed materials are provided either as camera-ready copy to match a church's bulletin and newsletter or on diskette. Materials are sent monthly to several key people in each church so that using the program (including the photocopying) does not become "another big job" for the pastor or the church secretary.

Comments from United Methodist churches: "Our people (who hadn't done a campaign in over ten years) grew educationally, spiritually and in their giving. As a direct result of the *Effective Stewardship* program, our offerings increased 25 percent in seventeen months." (Rev. Randy C. Grimmatt, St. Paul UMC, Olney, Illinois)

"Since we began using the *Effective Stewardship* program six months ago, our giving is up 16 percent." (Rev. Dan Flanagan, First UMC, Norfolk, Nebraska)

"Through using the *Effective Stewardship* program, our giving is up 10 percent over last year." (Rev. Randy Mitchell, First UMC, Duncan, Oklahoma)

The program's cost is based on each church's average attendance. For a free video and explanation materials, visit www.klwenterprises.com or telephone 800/805-8702 or write Ken Williams, KLW Enterprises, 3705 Old Caseyville Road, Swansea, IL 62226. (KLW Enterprises also provides a Fall Campaign model and Spring Campaign model, with new themes each year—which many churches elect to use following their positive experiences with the 48-month *Effective Stewardship: Building on Biblical Principles.*)

Quill: the Personal Demonstration Stewardship Program. Developed by a United Methodist pastor, Gary Arnold, this program works especially well in large congregations in metropolitan areas where few members know and associate with one another during the week. However, *Quill* has a positive track record in churches of other sizes. Congregations that purchase *Quill* receive this written warranty: *Use it without variance and your church will achieve at least a 20 percent increase in pledging or your fee refunded.*

In this program, the congregation's largest givers (a very small number of people who serve as an ad hoc committee) meet for two evenings to personally select a few names of other, relatively good givers and hand-write each one a personal letter that invites yet more generous giving. (*Quill* provides specimen letters.)

Typically, only 50 percent of a church's present givers receive that handwritten letter. The other 50 percent of a church's present givers receive a handwritten or word-processed letter from one of the good givers.

Each letter contains a personal pledge card, a stamped reply envelope, and a *personal* giving-goal chart. The letter's author indicates his/her present pledge amount and the amount to which

he/she is moving. The gist of the letter: "Would you like to join me/us, so we can encourage others to better giving?" A copy of the church budget is NOT included with the letter. Letter writers do NOT ask their friends and church members to give more because the budget requirements are greater. The letter asks members to set a personal Giving Goal.

For three consecutive Sundays, one of the ad hoc committee's members witnesses his/her new-gift decisions during morning worship, following a carefully prepared format provided by *Quill*. Pledges are dedicated on the fourth Sunday, using a brief suggested ritual. No names or gift amounts are published. Only the people writing personal letters and the three Sunday morning speakers share the actual dollar amounts of their personal giving.

Feel free to check with Kirkwood UMC, St. Louis (22 percent increase in giving) or St. Mark's UMC, Lincoln, Nebraska, (24 percent increase); other references available on request.

A detailed manual guides a good-giving layperson who serves as *Quill* Clerk in preparing the personalized stationary, pledge cards, and other details. Obtain comprehensive information from www.quillinc.com or 800/826-2048 or Quill, Inc., 825 Collyer Street, Longmont, CO 80501.

Cycles of Discipleship: A Stewardship Program for the Local Church. Authored by Jack Phillips, a layperson who is a development and stewardship consultant in the West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church, this program combines the "every member in ministry" approach (made famous by John Ed Mathison, Frazier Memorial UMC, Montgomery, Alabama) with financial stewardship education. The program is especially helpful in (a) smaller congregations that are unwilling to conduct an annual stewardship program of any kind and/or (b) congregations of any size in which the pastor is uncomfortable teaching the principles of percentage giving of income.

Cycles of Discipleship has a strong biblical foundation (2 Corinthians 8 and 9) and its message is one of loving, caring, and sharing. The program does not stress money, but ministries. The focal point is on building a *Budget of Ministries*, not on attempting to underwrite a church budget. Christians are inspired to "excel in the grace of giving" when they understand the multiple ways the church serves its families, its community, and the world. Members and friends gain a new appreciation for the role of the church in their lives and are motivated to give liberally of their time and abilities as well as their money in order to enhance the varied and valuable ministries of their church.

Cycles is introduced to the congregation with a four-Sunday program highlighting

- *Celebration*—a joyful remembrance of the prayers and gifts across the years that have made today's church possible
- *Vision*—a challenging view of what God can help the church accomplish, today and tomorrow
- *"A Place for You"*—an opportunity for service, as Christian disciples make a promise of their time and abilities for the ministries of the church
- *Commitment*—after considering the ministries of their church and its value to their own families, members and friends make a "Discipleship Promise" of their financial resources

A unique element of *Cycles* is that it gives people the opportunity to renew their *Discipleship Promise* every four months rather than making the traditional annual pledge. If circumstances change, a person may change the amount of his/her promise on "Renewal Sunday" at the beginning of each Cycle during the year.

The objective of *Cycles of Discipleship* is to integrate stewardship into the life of the church. Observing the three Cycles during the year makes the annual fund drive obsolete. The three Cycles help make stewardship a part of the church's lifestyle, rather than an annual event.

Since its introduction 18 months ago about 94 churches in the West Ohio Conference have implemented *Cycles*, and another 25 are implementing the program this spring. Reports from churches using *Cycles* indicate the following results:

33.3 percent experienced increases in giving of 22.0 percent to 63.0 percent

29.2 percent experienced increases in giving of 15.0 percent to 18.5 percent

20.8 percent experienced increases in giving of 12.0 percent to 14.0 percent

16.7 percent experienced increases in giving of 3.0 percent to 6.1 percent

The average attendance of the reporting churches range from 54 to 419.

Comments from United Methodist congregations: "Our Ministry Fair on 'A Place for You Sunday' made a great impact. Our people were amazed at the scope of ministries we were providing. Our giving increased 33 percent!" (Hyatts UMC, Powell, Ohio)

"When our church implemented *Cycles*, we experienced a 20 percent giving increase among 110 households that completed pledge cards, compared to the previous year. (Centenary UMC, Granville, Ohio)

"I attend Indian Run UMC, Indian Run, Ohio, (average attendance was 350)" said Jack Phillips, who invented the program. We used *Cycles of Discipleship* in its first, experimental form eight years ago. The church's giving increased 24.5 percent compared to the previous year. During the next three years, per capita giving increased from about \$1,200 to \$1,540, a total of \$60,000."

To order *Cycles of Discipleship*, visit its www.cyclesofdiscipleship.com Website. The Program Kit has nine Program Guides, a Training Video, a CDROM containing all promotional materials needed, plus a CDROM with Sunday school lessons for children, youth and adults. Churches receive on-going support from the Cycles of Discipleship Website, including an UpDate that begins each of the Cycles with suggestions for planning each "Renewal Sunday."

New Consecration Sunday. Authored by Herb Miller and published by Abingdon Press, Nashville, this program has been used in twenty-five denominations and hundreds of United Methodist congregations for several years and works in every size church

Prior to publishing the new 2002 edition—which uses the same principles as the original version but is more user-friendly by answering several frequently-asked implementation questions—Abingdon Press employed an independent research firm, Perdue Research Group to interview people in 150 congregations that have used *Consecration Sunday* during the past several years. In 31 of those 150 churches, financial giving increased 25 percent or more the first year they used it. Another 37 of the 150 churches reported a 20 percent increase. Another 36 of the 150 churches experienced a 15 percent increase and another 30 churches reported a 10 percent increase. Only 16 of the 150 churches reported a 5 percent increase in giving.

Of the 150 churches interviewed, 131 had used *Consecration Sunday* three or four years. One United Methodist Church had a 14.4 percent increase in giving the first year, a 10.3 percent increase the second year, a 13.4 percent increase the third year, a 13.6 percent increase the fourth year, and a 19.6 percent increase the fifth year.

In another congregation, financial giving increased 25 percent the first year, 18 percent the second year, and 30 percent the third year. The congregation's financial secretary said, "Three reasons produced these three years of dramatic increases: (1) virtually no households lower their giving during the annual campaign. (2) Between 66 percent and 88 percent of the households make some degree of annual increase. (3) Four to six new households decided to tithe each year we used *Consecration Sunday*. These households, some of which grew from giving 4 percent of their income to giving 10 percent of their income, were a major part of our enormous annual increases." *Summary:* Repetition gets results. Not everyone in a congregation makes a growth-in-giving decision at the same time.

Order from Cokesbury, 800/672-1789 or obtain in Cokesbury Bookstores around the country.

United Methodists often ask “How does the *Consecration Sunday* program work?” and “What’s the difference between *Consecration Sunday* and *New Consecration Sunday*?” Published in 2002 by Abingdon Press, Nashville, *New Consecration Sunday* is an updated edition of *Consecration Sunday* that uses the same principles as the original version but is more user-friendly by answering several frequently-asked implementation questions

Overview of *New Consecration Sunday*. The following outline does *not* include the how-to-do-it elements but overviews how it works. Obtain the *New Consecration Sunday* Audiotape, Program Booklet, and Guest Leader’s Guide from Cokesbury (800/672-1789) or from the Lubbock Cokesbury Store.

Step #1: *Your congregation selects as guest leader a pastor or layperson you are confident will follow the timeline instructions; can speak in an effective, interesting manner; and is available on the appropriate dates.* Guest leaders who meet those three criteria achieve the same results the first time they lead a *New Consecration Sunday* as they do the tenth time they serve as a guest leader. *New Consecration Sunday’s* results come from the *process*.

You might select as guest leader a judicatory staff person, a retired pastor who lives in your area, a pastor in a nearby community, or a capable layperson. In some settings, two pastors lead *New Consecration Sunday* in each other’s congregations. In preparation, ask the guest leader to first listen to the Audiotape (you can also play the tape for your committee or board), then read the *Program Booklet*, and then study the *Guest Leader’s Guide*.

A guest leader is necessary for several reasons. (a) People and pastor work harder. (b) The guest leader takes a fresh approach, which results in more attention and serious consideration given to the subject. (c) Committee members are far less likely to take shortcuts. (d) Committees make fewer mistakes because the pastor can suggest that “we telephone and check with the leader about that.” (e) Since the presence of a guest leader makes a 10 percent to 30 percent difference in total dollar results, he or she is well worth the small honorarium and travel expense.

The guest leader makes three trips to the church: (a) About six weeks prior to Consecration Sunday, the guest leader conducts a one-hour orientation session with the Consecration Sunday Team that your church’s governing board appoints to lead *New Consecration Sunday*. Using detailed instructions in the *Guest Leader Guide*, he or she helps the Consecration Sunday Team personalize the program for their congregation. (b) The guest leader speaks at the dinner on Sunday or Monday evening prior to Consecration Sunday—for the governing board, committees, Consecration Sunday Team, and the spouses of people in these groups. (c) The guest leader preaches during morning worship on Consecration Sunday. The honorarium and travel expenses you decide to pay are between you and that person.

Neither Cokesbury nor Herb Miller maintains lists of experienced guest leaders. Often, you can obtain names by checking with your denomination’s judicatory office or that of another denomination in your area.

Step #2: *Several kinds of publicity unfold during the four weeks before Consecration Sunday,* using several model letters and announcements. No one asks anyone for money. Everything focuses on getting people to attend the worship service and the Celebration Luncheon on Consecration Sunday.

Step #3: *On the two Sunday mornings before Consecration Sunday,* a Consecration Sunday Team member requests Celebration Luncheon reservations from each person present. The majority of members make their reservations at that time. Large churches with sizeable attendance at three, four, or more worship services each weekend, in which the Celebration Luncheon is not practical, select from among a list of several options in the program book a strategy that accomplishes the objectives of the Celebration Luncheon.

Step #4: *On Sunday evening, one week before Consecration Sunday,* (Monday evening in some communities), the guest leader speaks at a dinner for governing board members, committee members, Consecration Sunday Team members and the spouses of people in all three groups. No

financial commitments are taken at this dinner; the presentation is inspirational and motivational stewardship education.

However, everyone at the dinner is requested to help contact all members and friends of the church who have not yet made their reservation for the Celebration Luncheon next Sunday. These contacts are made on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Consecration Sunday. (This final week prior to Consecration Sunday is the only point at which large numbers of laypersons put time and energy into the process.)

Due to this systematic process, the attendance on Consecration Sunday is 20 to 60 percent higher than usual. The whole church family shows up—the people who attend every Sunday, the people who attend twice a month, the people who attend once a month, and the people who show up a couple of times each year.

Step #5: *On Consecration Sunday*, the guest leader preaches at morning worship and conducts a seven-minute commitment session at the end of the service, inviting people to fill out an *Estimate of Giving Card*. At this concluding section of the service, the guest leader (a) asks the ushers to distribute cards throughout the pews, (b) gives a brief motivational/theological rationale for this decision, along with instructions for how to complete the card, (c) asks people, after they have made their decision, to come forward with their cards and lay them on a table placed on the floor level of the sanctuary, and (d) asks people to go directly to the Celebration Luncheon after they leave the sanctuary

Step #6: *The Celebration Luncheon on Consecration Sunday*, immediately following morning worship, is not a potluck. It is catered meal that was not prepared by the women of the church. Some large churches with two, three, or four morning worship services successfully replace the Celebration Luncheon with a brunch after each service and a dessert fellowship for their Saturday evening service. This accomplishes a key element of Consecration Sunday—namely, taking advance reservations. This ensures both a large attendance and large numbers of people focusing their attention on the question, “What percentage of my income is God calling me to give?”

Step #7: *The Celebration Luncheon involves no program except for the announcement of the campaign results at the end of the meal.* The program preceded the luncheon: it was the worship service and the commitment session during worship. In most churches larger than 300 in average worship attendance, computing the results takes so much time that the church usually announces the results in the newsletter and the Sunday morning worship bulletin the following week.

Step #8: *On Monday after Consecration Sunday*, the church office mails a letter that includes a stamped, self-addressed envelope and an *Estimate of Giving* card with the appropriate name, address, and telephone number to each household *not present* for Consecration Sunday.

Grow One Sunday. Authored by Herb Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press), this program uses the same principles as *New Consecration Sunday* and some similar procedures. *Grow One Sunday* is valuable in (a) small congregations of fewer than 50 in worship and (b) large churches that find the traditional “celebration luncheon” in *New Consecration Sunday* logistically difficult due to lack of space. Hundreds of user churches indicate giving increases of 5 percent to 15 percent, with some congregations reporting much higher increases. (Download by clicking on “Digital Store” at www.cokesburv.com)

