
Making Generous Disciples:

Stewardship as Faith Formation:

Presbyterian Foundation

A vital part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), the Foundation gathers, stewards, and distributes funds to serve Christ's mission.

Bringing people and mission together.

Giving Trends in US Philanthropy

- \$592.5 Billion given to charity in 2024
- 25% of all dollars were given to religion in 2024
- 51% of all dollars were given to religion in 1991

Competition! Competition! Competition!

- 2 million charitable organizations in US
- 370,000 are congregations
- 55–140 new nonprofits every day

The church consultant is often called in when a congregation either has fallen behind or is too obdurate to meet the challenges of a changing world. The consultant leads the congregation in a process of speeding up, offering new models to speed them up to meet change. And then leaves, moving on to another congregation needing change. That feels like a straight line...

Point A: the church is stuck

Point B: give it the strategies to get unstuck

Point C: so that it can meet the speed of change

Point D: move on (and return periodically to tweak the strategies, asking the congregation to speed up further, then move on again)

But once the congregation is up to speed, it needs to forever maintain that speed, (and) also continually increase the speed year after year.

If the consultant raises the church to a new speed, this yokes the congregation to always be speeding up to meet the never-ending change that will always remain on the horizon, a carrot forever out of reach. Speed is the supposed gift of late modernity that can quickly turn into a depressive curse.

Andrew Root *The Congregation in a Secular Age*

Change is almost always considered to be some kind of growth, and in late modernity that which grows must continually grow. Modernity is about change because it is about growth. It takes a lot of work, and a whole different imagination, to disconnect change from growth. Untying the two leads to something completely different: transformation in the Spirit. *Being the church is about transformation, not change.*

Andrew Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age*

Stewardship isn't...

...a one-time event.

...about fundraising.

...about meeting a budget.

...about being financially conservative.

“The triune God is a God that communicates the goodness of the dynamic go-round of God's own life outward in love for what is not God.

The whole point of God's dealings with us as creator, covenant partner, and redeemer in Christ is to bring the good of God's very life into our own.

Our lives participate in that divine mission and thereby realize the shape of God's own economy by giving that follows the same principle: self-sharing for the good of others.”

– Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace*,

Stewardship is the **joyous discipline** of thanking God with the way we live our lives and spend and share our gifts.

Stewardship is about learning to live as God created us to live —**freely and generously.**

Philippians 2:4–8

Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, *did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself*, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Possessive Identity ➤ Eccentric Identity

Faith is the attitude of **trust in God's radical giving of reality as alone definitive of my personal identity**; at finite creature called and empowered to be, to act, and to give in my own place and time. Your personal identity is defined by God alone and not by any creature. **It is eccentrically grounded and defined.**

David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*

Why People Give

1. Belief in the Mission
2. Trust that the church is financially responsible
3. Relationship with the Leadership

Matthew 6

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven....

...So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do...

...And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen...

...And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting...

...Where your treasure is, there your hearts will be also.

“If the solicitation comes from the not-for-profit world, and all too often from the ecclesial world, it inevitably shares one common characteristic: It pulls at our heartstrings....Their assumption seems to be that first we care, then we share...

Jesus offers a contrarian word. He says, first we share and then we care. Treasure first. Our hearts follow our dollars and not the other way around...

Hearts follow dollars. Dollars escort hearts.

– God’s Gift of Generosity, Karl B. Travis

Keys to Success

1. Be Invitational
2. Build and Strengthen Authentic Relationships
3. Share your Story and your Stories
4. Practice Doxological Gratitude

Generosity Team

- Chartered by session
- Draws from each program area/committee
- Works year-round
- *Coordinates* ALL story telling, asks, and thanks

Or a Generosity Elder

Coordinates all story telling, asks, and thanks

Session committee reports:

1. What stories need to be told
2. Who could tell the stories
3. Who needs to be thanked

Session

- Sanctions/charters the Generosity Team
- Share their stories
- Supports the Generosity team
- Regularly pray for church members
- Pledges & Gives First

Pastor

- Talk about your own stewardship
- Preach about generosity regularly (once a month)
- Be the Storyteller
- Invite/ask
- Give Thanks

The Pastor: To Know or Not to Know

Practical: Pastor as Executive

Spiritual: Pastor as Guide

Pastoral: Pastor as Caregiver

What Pastors Should Know

At minimum, Pastor should be kept apprised of giving patterns in church and alerted when someone:

- Makes a first gift
- Changes their giving patterns
- Starts giving more regularly
- Stops giving regularly
- Gives a gift for a special purpose
- Is a particularly generous giver
- Is being considered for leadership

What is your Story?

What is it you do well? In your church, in your community, in the world?

How are you being the hands and feet of Christ?

Sharing your Stories

- Preaching
- Minute for Mission
- Newsletters & Brochures
- Sunday School/Formation Hour
- Video Testimonials
- Narrative Budgets
- One-to-One Meetings/House Meetings

Narrative Budgets

1. Define your “Ministry Areas”
2. Allocate staff time to each area
3. Allocate resources proportionally to each area
4. Consider including volunteer time
5. Celebrate the past year in each area

Make a Calendar

- Share 1 story per month
- Narrative budget precedes pledge campaign
- Pledge Commitment Sunday
- Legacy Sunday

What is a One-to-One Meeting?

A natural but uncommon conversation with someone you know but could know better about their values, vision, life, and motivations.

Steps of a One to One Meeting

1. Credentialing
2. Breaking the Ice
3. Discovering Interests and Connections
4. Proposal/Next Steps
5. Evaluation

House Meetings

What Are the Goals of a House Meeting?

- Elicit personal stories and build solidarity
- Identify areas of shared concern or import
- Build a mutual vision
- Identify leaders
- Propose new actions by discerning possible ways forward

Hosting a House Meeting

1. Invite 8–12 people, or multiple groups of 8–12
2. Prepare questions
3. Probe the initial answers
4. Take Notes/record the conversation
5. Evaluation

Be Authentic: Your Personal Stewardship Story

1. What is your earliest memory of giving or receiving?
2. (How) Did your family talk about giving in the home?
3. What did you learn from your family about giving and volunteering?
4. What are some of the practices of faith and giving that you remember from your childhood?
5. Who has most deeply touched your life or influenced you as a giver? Why?
6. To what people and places do you feel a sense of gratitude?
7. What is the most meaningful or memorable gift you've ever received?
8. What values or things do you hold most dear?
9. How do you want to be remembered?

Giving Thanks

Pastors: Write thank you notes!

Session: Write thank you notes!

Generosity Team: Write thank you notes!

Phone calls

Annual Celebration

Minutes for Mission

Expanding the Circle

Doxological Gratitude

“Christianity introduced a corrosive ingratitude. Jesus denounced the traditions of the elders, and taught his disciples to put loyalty to him even above grateful honor to parents. Jesus proclaimed a kingdom where debts are all forgiven, including debts of gratitude, and Paul is quite strict: to live as a Christian is to live without debts, including especially without debts of gratitude. Christian givers impose no debts; Christian recipients acknowledge no debts, except to love.”

Peter Leithart

Gratitude: An Intellectual History

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Romans 13:8

The Infinite Circle

- God is the source of every gift
- Thanks is due to God alone
- No obligation for return
- Gratitude defined as right use

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.

Phillippians 1:3-5

I am radically given to directly only by the triune God. Faith as trust responsive to God's giving is the attitude that my right to be and act, and the justification of the time and space I take up being and acting, is not contingent only my meeting the needs or acquiring the approval of any of those finite others to whom I give and from whom I receive in the society of creatures.

Faith is the attitude of trust in God's radical giving of reality as alone definitive of my personal identity; a finite creature called and empowered to be, to act, and to give in my own place and time.

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Practicing Doxological Gratitude

- Give. And learn to talk about your giving.
- Celebrate time, talent, *and* treasure.
- Pray and Teach the Examen
- Prioritize relationships in mission.
- Say thanks, but give it, too.
- Talk about God. Even if it's awkward.

"They yearn to know that God can still speak."

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