

SECTION I

Introduction to
Planned Giving Ministry

Stewardship of Assets

God will provide what we need, not by dropping it into our laps, not by resolving all our insecurity in advance, but by inspiring us to “Get up and walk!” as Jesus told the man waiting for a cure (Jn. 5:8).

A Biblical Mandate for Planned Giving

PLANNED GIFTS ARE ALMOST ALWAYS FUNDED from accumulated resources or assets rather than income. From the daily provision of food as the people of God journey through the wilderness (Ex. 16:15–20), to the admonition of Jesus not to worry about what you may need tomorrow (Mt. 6:19–20, 25–34), the message of the Bible seems to be that God will provide—do not save it up.

But the point is never against “accumulation” or “assets.” The argument is never against “possessions.” The concern of scripture is with possessiveness. The problem is our tendency to seek security for ourselves by conserving and controlling all we can. The Bible challenges that common disposition. All that we cannot give easily possesses us unless matched by a desire to relax our grip and share what we have. This is no harsh moral but an invitation to happiness and love no longer short-circuited by anxiety about controlling and possessing.

We have what it takes to do anything that needs doing. Although we have faith but the size of a mustard seed, that is said to be enough to move mountains. But we won’t know this if we wait for assurance before we act—before we give. That hesitation is the equivalent of denying God’s promise of love and guidance.

Faith is for us as it was for Abraham and for Caleb after he spied out the future God had promised, bucking the fears of others. It is going out believing in the challenge and saying, in effect, “Give me the mountain!” Faith is trusting in God’s promise of blessing, giving all that is possible to the specific promise and opportunity at hand (Gn. 12—15; Num. 13; Heb. 11:8–19). God cannot steer a parked car! Unless we start moving and keep going, we deny divine grace and guidance.

We cannot accumulate and “store up” security. This assurance is actually the truer “asset” waiting to become known as we move out and give not just guard, share not just keep, risk not just protect—and so live more happily, less defensively. On the move, getting up and getting going, giving from all we have beyond

simply the income in hand, then, as with our biblical forebears, we discover how real is God's promise of blessing.

Talking about how giving is inhibited, James Baldwin had this to say in his classic essay, "The Fire Next Time": "Most people guard and keep. They suppose that it is they themselves and what they identify with themselves that they are guarding and keeping. . . . What they are actually guarding and keeping is their system of reality and what they assume themselves to be."

Our assumptions about ourselves, like our "system of reality," easily deny or diminish the reality of God. God is power already at work in us, "able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20). Fear of not having enough for ourselves and our loved ones is a consequence of how we look at life, not of how much we actually have to give, just as we are "without one plea," as the gospel song has it.

Our accumulated resources or assets, like what income we have at our disposal, is part of God's power already ours. But like the big lamp in the living room, we've got to turn it on—otherwise it is useless. "Use it, or lose it!" was Jesus' message in the parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14–30). And so it is for us. We turn on the assurance that God does "provide." And every last little bit of what we share is multiplied to produce abundance beyond anything we can ask or imagine (Mt. 14:13–21, Mk. 6:30–44, Lk. 9:10–17, Jn. 6:1–14).

Asked by her pastor how she was doing after successful hip surgery, an elderly woman replied, "I'm better than I feel." So are we, whatever the weakness and liability we face. We are more than we think we are! And by the grace of God we have more to give than we think we do. Let us remember not just our income, but what we can give while honoring our own needs through wills and bequests, gift annuities, life insurance, property, securities, and charitable remainder trusts. These planned gifts can be designated to any aspect of the United Church of Christ.

God has given us all things to enjoy and share in the spirit of love and happiness far greater than we can keep to ourselves. Let us grow in our experience of this love, knowing that it is in giving we receive—beyond anything that is ours alone.

The Place of Planned Giving in the Church

A planned gift (sometimes called a deferred gift) is a gift that is planned for during the donor's lifetime but not actually received by church or charity until after the donor's death. These include bequests, life income gifts, and certain life insurance arrangements. Life income gifts include gift annuities, pooled funds, and charitable remainder trusts, and provide the donor with income for life. Following the death of the donor, the remaining principal of the gift is paid out to that part of the United Church of Christ designated in the donor's agreement.

Stewardship—The Big Picture

STEWARDSHIP IN THE CHURCH is often limited to meeting next year's budget by members giving out of their current income. Seldom is the holistic perspective of stewardship cited—that all we are and have been given is a trust from God, including one's accumulated assets.

A Ministry to Persons

Planned giving is a means by which persons are assisted in responding in a more holistic and faithful way as Christian stewards. This is accomplished by enabling individuals to make sound financial plans that take into account their own needs and those of family, as well as commitments to church and charities.

Persons are often reluctant to seek assistance in dealing with financial matters, thus making this a valuable pastoral ministry of the church. The primary goal of planned giving is not providing another fund-raising technique, but rather helping persons be faithful stewards in their financial planning for family and in giving to the church as part of their family.

Mission into the Future

A hoped-for end result of the Financial Development Ministry is to have persons provide for the work of the congregation and the United Church of Christ through gifts to endowment funds. This involves the development of a long-range plan and the establishment of an endowment fund on the part of congregations.

The invitation to consider a planned gift is a most important and often neglected aspect of individual and congregational stewardship. Understanding the stewardship of one's assets, engaging in estate planning, and building endowments all are important, but the invitation to become "stewards of the future," needs to be extended.

God calls members of the church not only to be faithful stewards now, but also to join the mission into the future.

All in the Family

The image of “family” suggests an appropriate way to describe the most common types of giving that occur in the church.

Planned Giving and Other Giving

PLANNED GIVING. The most significant difference between “planned” and other types of gifts is that a planned gift provides a **future** value to the church rather than an **immediate** value (such as an outright gift of cash or securities). Historically, most planned gifts have come from donors’ accumulated assets. Though limited, today there is a discernable increase in the number of gifts coming from earned income as church members learn that at least part of their retirement security can be built on life income gifts, one of the most frequently funded of the planned gift types. The donor funds a gift now and receives income for life, after which the church receives the remaining principle. Life income gifts include gift annuities, pooled funds, and charitable remainder trusts. In addition to life income gifts, planned gifts also include wills and bequests, and certain life insurance arrangements. (See “A Summary of Ways of Giving” at the end of Section VI.)

To understand how planned giving can relate to other types of giving in the church’s life, it is helpful to:

- review the five principal types of giving
- look at the challenges most commonly faced as churches consider any type of giving
- distinguish how planned giving can support other types of giving

Types of Giving

The image of “family” suggests an appropriate way to describe the most common types of giving that occur in the church. Among the members of the giving family, the categories include:

- **Annual Giving.** Usually a one-year pledge, contributed weekly or monthly, to fund the ongoing costs of church operation. The source of most annual giving is earned income from the family paycheck.

- **Capital Gifts.** Gifts for special purpose such as:
 - building restoration
 - endowment
 - new building
 - staff additions
 - new programs
 - special mission appeals
 - debt reduction

A capital campaign typically raises a large sum over a period of several years. Sources of income: earned income and accumulated assets.

- **Planned Giving.** Planned gifts or life income gifts have come from donors' assets, including retirement plans. Donor makes the gift now, and the church receives the income in the future.
- **Special Offerings.** Typically a once-a-year appeal for a special cause, including annual denomination-sponsored offerings. The appeal may be based on the hope of obtaining an immediate response to meet an immediate need, including natural disasters and other emergencies. Source of income: immediate available cash.
- **Memorial Giving.** Gifts made in memory of family members or friends upon their death, often designated for a particular purpose or fund. May also be made to an endowment fund. Source of income: usually, available cash.

Planned Giving and Other Giving

Planned giving relates uncommonly well to other forms of giving because it so effectively supports and undergirds each of the other forms. Consider the following possibilities:

- **Annual Gifts.** A donor can provide a life income gift (or a series of gifts over several years) that, when the donor dies, can provide income to continue the donor's annual contribution in perpetuity.
- **Special Offerings.** A donor can make a life income gift that provides, when the donor dies, an ongoing stream of income for that special program or purpose. Special programs change with time, however, so it is wise for a donor to have an "escape" clause that will allow the church to redirect the income if the original need no longer exists.
- **Capital Gifts.** If endowment development is included in a campaign, a donor's life income gift can become a guaranteed future addition to that endowment and can be included in the capital campaign goal.
- **Memorial Gifts.** A donor can make a planned gift designating a memorial fund or an endowment fund in memory of a loved one.

Competitive or Complementary?

The several different ways that church members contribute are not in competition with each other. However, secular mindsets tend to prevail in the church and create some erroneous and unexamined assumptions about how church members give.

First, some churches are reluctant to develop a planned giving ministry because they fear that planned giving will increase a church's endowment and that, in turn, a large endowment will discourage annual giving.

The notion that poor giving by church members is the fault of a large endowment is an appallingly false claim. Poor giving results from poor stewardship leadership and practices. To blame the commitment and generosity of our forebears for our present-day failures raises serious questions about a church's integrity.

No matter how large a church's endowment may be, if the endowment-income policies faithfully reflect the church's mission and are not simply used in a self-serving manner to fund current operating costs as a way of avoiding serious stewardship, that church will be blessed and not burdened by its endowment assets.

Second, "pigeonholing" can also be a problem for church leaders who think about giving. Many persons tend to separate rather than integrate their thoughts about giving and, as a result, develop a single-focus mindset.

For example, a prevailing view held among many church leaders is that a capital campaign will automatically reduce regular giving. The erroneous assumption is that church members will "rob Peter to pay Paul," reducing their regular giving if they are asked to give for a special purpose, and that church members will not give for more than one appeal.

This incorrect assumption is, in reality, a seriously negative judgment on the basic attitudes and generosity of church members. The real truth is that those members who give the most are also those who will make the greatest effort to respond to a special appeal. Again, the real issue is the quality of stewardship leadership provided by the church.

Planned Giving: The Best Kept Secret in the United Church of Christ

Each year clergy bury hundreds of people who would gladly have made a life income gift during their lifetime if they had known about the possibility.

Increasingly, church members are encouraged by educational, medical, and other nonprofit institutions to consider a life income gift. Our church members are given planned giving opportunities by every organization except their church. The benefits and potential of planned giving may be the best-kept secret in the United Church of Christ.

A critical dimension in developing a planned giving ministry is getting it started and keeping it going. Church members need to learn about planned giving early and be reminded often.

One major deterrent to planned giving success in local churches is the difficulty of communicating a new concept or to communicate it in a way that is so technically complex that people get confused and discouraged.

Planned Giving as a Testimony of Faith

Planned giving supports the church's total mission for individuals as well as the institution. A planned gift is a living testimony to a vital faith. The testimony of the planned gift is vitally needed in most churches. Planned giving can help church members witness to one another in their acts of faith.

The person who gives a life income gift is one who genuinely believes that the church will "be there" for future generations. And the person who believes the church will continue indefinitely is one who firmly believes that it is God, not humankind, who is in charge.

Planned Giving Is Part of the Family of Giving

The financially, intellectually, and spiritually healthy church will clearly understand that each type of giving is part of the "family" of giving. Church members are not asked or expected to choose one or another members of the giving family; all methods of giving are equally accessible and helpful to the donor as well as the recipient(s). None of the methods is or ought to be seen as a deterrent to the other. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Each method helps the other—commitment inspires commitment and generosity inspires generosity.

If the church is to be serious and authentic about stewardship in any of its varied forms, it is imperative that a major commitment to the stewardship of assets be included. Our assets, in the Christian understanding, are gifts from God entrusted by God to our management. How we deal with our assets accurately reflects our values and whether we believe the Gift-Giver. Planned giving needs to be an integral part of a church's life. It is a ministry of faith in action.

EXAMPLES

A retired couple may be limited in their ability to contribute to a capital campaign because they may need the income that their investments provide. However, they may be able to transfer highly appreciated stock or other property to the church to fund a life income gift that may reduce their taxes and increase their income. Thus, enabling them to make the generous gift they would like to make but couldn't afford until they planned their giving.

Or again, a donor may have appreciated property that costs taxes each year but produces no income. Such property can be transferred to the church and sold by the church to provide a life income gift for the donor. This provides income rather than a loss for the donor, as well as enabling the donor to make a generous cash gift for the church's campaign.

