

Ideas for End of Year Giving

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Recently I was “drafted” by my pastor wife to be the lay liturgist for Sunday morning worship in our local United Methodist church in Orlando. That meant I had to prepare a children’s sermon. Fortunately the Gospel text for the day was Luke’s account of Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan, kind of a no-brainer in the children’s sermon world. I asked the children to think about how the Samaritan had been a good friend to a person who really needed a friend, and how he had shared what God had given him to help a person in need.

Then I asked the children to hold out their hands. Instinctively, they held their hands outstretched, palms-up. I reminded them that we need to have open hands to receive the blessings that God gives us, and we need to have open hands to share those gifts with others. “Now, make a fist,” I said, “and hold it really, really tight. What do you notice?” After a few seconds one little boy starting shaking his hands and said “It hurts.” “Right!” I said, “and notice that when your hands are balled into fists you can’t receive any more from God and you can’t share what God has given you with others.”

In a bleak economy, we can be tempted to make a fist rather than hold our hands open. But it is during times like these that the church becomes even more important, as we seek to reach out with open hands to serve people in our communities, people who are reeling from the loss of a job or home, wondering how to pay for college tuition, and worried about shrinking retirement savings plans, feeling alone and scared.

The good news is that faithful Christian disciples have always responded to God’s call on their lives by giving generously in times of financial crisis. In fact, according to *Giving USA*, which tracks American charitable giving, total giving in the U.S. declined by a modest 2% in 2008 over 2007, but giving to religious institutions actually increased by around 5% in 2008. However, many churches across our Annual Conference are suffering through a very difficult “church economy” which often lags the national economy. In other words, it takes longer for a recession to affect local church giving, and it takes longer for an economic recovery to revive giving to local churches.

Remember, we are made in the image of God, the ultimate source and giver of all that we are and all that we have. We look the most like God when we are generous. We reflect the face of Jesus when we compassionately and generously share what God has given us. Generous giving grows from our need to give as part of our spiritual journey, rather than the church's need to receive. In other words, the question is, "What is God calling me to give?" rather than "What does my church need from me?"

As we approach the end of 2009, here are some specific giving ideas to consider.

Gifts of Cash

If you made a pledge for calendar year 2009, and your economic situation allows, please consider paying your pledge in full by the end of the year. No matter your income level, if you itemize deductions on your tax return, you will receive a tax deduction for your gifts.

Gifts of Appreciated Securities

Even in today's economy, it may be possible to give gifts of appreciated securities (shares of individual stocks, bonds, mutual funds) that have increased in value. If you give appreciated securities to your church, not only do you receive an income tax deduction for your gift but you also avoid the capital gain tax were you to have sold the securities yourself. When you give stock to the church, the church sells it tax-free and receives the full value of the gift. If you own stock that has gone down in value you may be able to sell the stock, make a gift from the cash proceeds to your church, and apply the realized loss on your 2009 tax return. Please be sure to check with your financial advisor before making any securities gifts or transactions to see which strategies are best for you.

Gifts from Your Will or Living Trust

Consider a bequest from your will or other estate planning vehicle. A bequest is an excellent way to "leave your legacy" to your church as a statement of lifelong, comprehensive Christian stewardship. If you already have a will, a simple codicil is all that is required to make a bequest. If you don't have a will, we strongly encourage you to have one written, and please consider a bequest to your church when you do so.

Gifts from Retirement Plans

A gift from your retirement plan can be a tax-advantaged way to give. Distributions from retirement plans often are taxable to you and your family. The IRA Charitable Rollover provision allows taxpayers 70½ years of age or older to make tax-free distributions in 2009 from their traditional and Roth IRAs directly to their United Methodist church, mission, agency or other qualified charity. An owner of a traditional or Roth IRA may instruct the IRA plan administrator

to make distributions directly to qualified charities. While the annual minimum distribution for persons 70½ and older has been suspended for 2009, you may make up to \$100,000 in tax-free distributions to as many qualified charities as you wish. This gift opportunity is for traditional and Roth IRAs only, and may not be used to fund a charitable gift annuity, charitable remainder trust or any other life income plan.

Life Income Arrangements

Life income arrangements, like charitable trusts and charitable gift annuities, combine a planned gift to your church with income to you or loved ones. These are excellent planned giving alternatives that not only benefit your church, but also include income and tax benefits for you or your family.

We encourage you to check with your own professional advisors before making a gift.

No matter how the economy is performing, we can be assured that God is by our side in good times and bad. Now is our time to focus on open-handed giving – God’s continuous giving to us, and our giving to God through the mission and ministry of our United Methodist Church

For more information, please contact your local church office; or call, click or write the Florida United Methodist Foundation at 1-866-363-9673, www.fumf.org, or PO Box 3549, Lakeland, FL 33802.