

Extravagant Generosity

"Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity."

-Luke 6:38, The Message

Generosity Campaign

Fall 2011

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| Generosity vs. Stewardship <i>We will be holding a Generosity Drive this year rather than a Stewardship Drive. It is a change in terms that strikes at the heart of Christian character.</i> Page 1 | Mortar <i>We have been blessed with beautiful buildings and resources - it is our responsibility to make sure we use these the best way possible for the communication of God's love.</i> Page 2 | Ministry <i>Bible Studies, Worship, Youth, Children, Fellowship. The church at its best is about people. We must invest in people and their relationships in order to answer the calling to be a Christian church.</i> Page 2 | Mission <i>"Whatever you do to the least of these..." "Go into all the world..." Our focus must expand beyond the confines of our local church. We are called to make a difference in the world.</i> Page 2 | Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Church Giving <i>Read this section to get more information about the practice of regular giving (tithing) to the Kingdom of God.</i> Page 3 | Celebrate! <i>We can never outgive God! When we are obedient and faithful he showers us with blessings. Join us to celebrate the blessings of God on Sunday, November 20, 2011</i> Page 4 |
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Generosity vs. Stewardship

"Generosity is an aspect of character. It is an attractive quality which I aspire to and desire to see cultivated in my children. The opposite of generosity is selfishness, self-centeredness, greed, and self-absorption. No stories from Scripture tell of people living the God-related spiritual life while fostering a greedy attitude."

-Robert Schnase, *Practicing Extravagant Generosity*

Defining Our Terms

If you have been in church for any time at all, you are used to the idea of having a Stewardship Drive each year to pledge your giving to the church. While the concept is one to be embraced, the practice has become more "paying your share" than "giving with a grateful heart." Therefore, this year, we will be holding a **Generosity Drive** at First United Methodist.

Language is powerful and helps to shape our actions. In our culture, the concept of *generosity* seems to reflect the idea of Christian giving more closely than the use of the term, *stewardship*. As the quote by Robert Schnase reminds us - generosity is an aspect of character. For those of us who are Christian,

generosity is a "fruit of the Spirit" which we should all cultivate.

Cultivate Your Character

We hope you will join us this year in the cultivation of our Christian character and how it relates to our participation in the Kingdom of God, the Body of Christ, and our response to a loving God.

Please take the time to move beyond "what we've always done" and into the idea of "what is Christ calling me to do."

Three Areas of Focus For Our Generosity

This year we will be highlighting three major areas of focused giving for our Generosity Campaign. Each of these areas is an important part of our participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ, and is integral to our future as a church that pleases God. Below is a brief description of these areas, and on page 2 is a fuller description.

Mortar

While the buildings we worship in and use for ministry are not "where God lives" (because he lives in us), they are nevertheless important aspects of our witness to the world.

Ministry

The heart of God is for people... this is why he

sent his Son into the world. The ministry areas of our church are how we help the people (of all ages) in our congregation and community come to know God better.

Mission

The Gospel of Jesus Christ commands us to take the love and grace of God beyond our walls and comfort to those in need. We should extend his love to the poor and needy in all parts of the world. Mission is the task of every Christian and every Christian church.

A Call to Extravagant Generosity

We hope you will join us this year in extending ourselves toward *extravagant generosity* in our time, talents, and treasures. Our God has demonstrated this concept to us over and over again. He has never "just done enough" or simply "done his share." Instead, God has poured himself out for us in extravagant ways. As his people, we are called to do the same for the world around us.





Mortar

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At First United Methodist Church, we are blessed with beautiful and awesome facilities. For over 100 years, this block of property has hosted important events, weddings, funerals, baptisms, and celebrations. Within our walls, many people have come to love Jesus and discovered the forgiveness and grace of God.

As with any structures, they deteriorate over time and need constant attention and maintenance. While our historic site is a blessing, it is also a great challenge for us to keep it working well and reflecting our adoration for God.

No one gets inspired by paying utility bills or by replacing a roof - and yet, if we do not take care of this facility it hampers our ability to share the Gospel with others effectively.

We believe the church is the *hope of the world*. God has given us the awesome responsibility to shine his light in the midst of the darkness that surrounds us. Our facilities are the “toolbox” that allow us to develop our ministry and mission to the world.

It is within these facilities that we hold our weekly worship services. It is here where children and youth are taught of God’s love. It is here where we train up leadership that might have an impact on the world around us. In short, what happens here changes the world!

In order to keep our church vital and moving we must continue to use our facilities to the maximum of their potential. Therefore, the costs involved in play an important role in taking the love of Christ elsewhere.

The brick and mortar may not be inspiring to some..., but it is an important piece of who we are.



Ministry

The heart of God is for people... this is why he sent his Son into the world. The ministry areas of our church are how we help the people (of all ages) in our congregation and community come to know God better.

People matter. Relationships are important. We all have much to learn about who God is, and who we are called to be. The ministry of First United Methodist Church strives to be a place where *real people* discover a *real relationship* with Jesus Christ that makes a *real impact* in the world.

At First United Methodist Church we have a great foundation of ministry that affords us the opportunity to expand and develop ministry to people of all ages. The main obstacles that stand in the way of expanding our ministries are money and leaders. Yet, through extravagant generosity of our time, talent, and treasures, these obstacles can be overcome through the power of Jesus Christ.

Your generosity in these areas would allow us to hire a Youth Director and a Children’s Director. It would enable us to expand our learning/study activities to people of all ages, and increase the opportunities for training of leaders, faith development, and care for one another.

We have big plans for the ministry of First United Methodist Church, but without your help and generosity, they will simply remain items on a “wish list.” How much is it worth to help a young family discover the grace of Jesus Christ, or to help an elderly person at a nursing home know that they are not forgotten? If we follow the teaching of Jesus - that is a priceless opportunity!

People matter. People need God. The church is the vehicle through which many people will come to know him. Are you willing to give generously to help that happen?



Mission

The Gospel of Jesus Christ commands us to take the love and grace of God beyond our walls and comfort levels to those in need. We should extend his love to the poor, needy, and forgotten in all parts of the world. Mission is the task of every Christian and every Christian church.

We have already highlighted the fact that people matter. What we often forget within our churches, though, is that ALL people matter. The ministry of Jesus Christ is not fulfilled unless we are doing our best to share the love of God with ALL people.

Of the three items discussed here - this is the biggest challenge of fruitful Christian ministry that we face at First United Methodist Church. We must *intentionally* extend our ministry beyond the walls of our church and into the streets, the regions around us, and into all parts of the world.

Once again, as a church, we have big plans for this area of ministry in our church. We are currently developing plans for outreach to our local schools, to the needy within Harlingen, to the fire victims in Central Texas, and beyond into the world.

There will never be a shortage of what *could* be done... “the poor will always be among us.” Our limitations here are the same... people willing to sacrifice their time, talents, and treasures to take the love of Jesus Christ to the world.

It is an overwhelming task, and it is messy work - but work that will bring honor to God, satisfaction to our souls, and justice to those who are mistreated.

*“This is what the Lord requires...
Do what is right,
Love mercy,
Walk humbly with God.”
-Micah 6:8*

Frequently Asked Questions (F.A.Q.)

Why does the church need to talk about money?

Jesus had a great deal to say about money and giving. He demanded that his followers not serve wealth, but God. The greatest struggle in our Christian lives is the battle to make sure we do not allow anything to be more important to us than our relationship with God. Jesus taught the importance of generosity and sacrifice. There are over 2300 verses in the Bible that deal with money and generosity. It is uncomfortable for us to talk about money - and that is precisely why we need to deal with it in consideration of our faith. Our discomfort often reflects that we are looking to our finances as a source of fulfillment.

What is the expected amount of giving?

First United Methodist Church would like to emphasize the fact that you are to give to God as an act of worship and obedience, not out of compulsion or guilt. It is not our intention to force anyone into a commitment they are not ready to make. Our goal is to nurture your relationship with God. Our only expectation is for you to prayerfully and honestly consider how God is leading you to respond. If you are being honest with yourself and honest in seeking God's will, what more could we ask?

What is a tithe?

The teaching of the Scriptures directs us toward the practice of proportional giving of our resources to God through the church (the Body of Christ). The historic standard is called a tithe, or 10% of our earnings. The concept is that we do not give God what is "left-over," but instead we give "off the top." For some, giving one-tenth of their income may seem an impossible goal. For others, it is the starting point, and their giving far exceeds ten percent.

The important thing is to start somewhere, that your giving be in proportion to your income, that your giving reflects an appropriate offering to God who has blessed you, and that your giving expresses both your desire to serve the Lord and your investment in God's work around the world.

Why do you ask for Pledge Cards to be turned in?

There are several reasons it is important for each member to consider making a pledge of their giving:

Tangible Commitment - A pledge card gives you the opportunity to respond as an act of worship in written form to what you believe God is calling you to do on behalf of Christ's ministry through our church.

Planning Tool - In order for our Administrative Teams to create a realistic budget and seek to make the best use of every resource, the pledge card is our best means of estimating the future resources of the church.

Faith Pledge - This is a way for you to grow your faith in God's providing for us. You are communicating your desire to trust God to make your finances work.

What If I am unable to pay my pledge?

While we use the pledges as a planning tool, we do not consider them a bill due. We understand life throws challenges at us from time to time, and you may need to amend or cancel your pledge. You may

revise your pledge at anytime, and you do not have to feel shame or guilt about this.

We will send out giving statements at least twice a year. However, this is not to receive "past due" payments; it is simply a way for us to make sure our record-keeping is correct and to provide you with information for your own financial records.

Isn't there more to generosity than just money?

When you join the church, we ask you to commit your prayers, presence, gifts, service, and story to this local church. These five areas are what we consider our stewardship commitments. All of these areas are important and help us to grow in our spiritual lives toward a fuller sense of discipleship.

At this time, we are asking your consideration of your gifts to the church. Throughout the year, we will emphasize the other areas of extravagant generosity. A healthy disciple will be active in all of these areas to one degree or another.

When do I turn in my Pledge Card?

You may turn in your pledge card at anytime by mailing it or dropping it off at the church office. We will have a special Celebration Sunday on November 20, 2010 during both the 9:15 AM and 11:00 AM Services. During worship service, we will give you the opportunity to turn in your pledge card as an act of worship. However, if you are unable to attend that Sunday, we really need the information by the 15th of December so we may make our budget plans for 2012.

Is it OK to give to special needs and not to the general budget of the church?

As mentioned earlier, your giving is between you and God; however, we would like for you to consider that the church is the primary vehicle through which many of the mission agencies, programs, and special interests are served. We believe that the church is the hope of the world. We hope you have enough trust in our church leadership to allow us the flexibility to make decisions as to where the money is most needed and most effective. You can be assured we will make these decisions with prayer and a desire to follow God's will for this church, community, and our world.

What about Alternative Giving methods?

We have the ability to do two forms of alternative giving that many folks find helpful in fulfilling their pledge.

Automatic Debit of a Checking Account - if you would like to set up an automatic draft of your pledge amount, we are able to do this. Some people find this a helpful way to hold them accountable in paying their pledge. If you check this on the pledge card, we will send you the necessary paperwork.

Transfer of Stock - there can be many advantages of transferring stock to a non-profit. Please discuss with your financial advisor.

Other Questions? Please feel free to contact David Payne or members of our Leadership.

Celebrate!

Join us on Sunday, November 20, 2011 for our Celebration Sunday. At both services (9:15 am and 11:00 am) we will have the opportunity to celebrate God's faithfulness to us, and to bring our "sacrifice of praise" to him.

Included in this information is a **Faith Pledge** response card. While we hope you consider sharing your planned giving response with us (by December 15, 2011) it is strictly a decision for you to make. All we ask is that you prayerfully seek out God's will for you.

Should you decide to share your response with us, you can turn your response card in on Sunday, November 20, 2011 at one of the worship services. If you are unable to attend, or wish to turn in your response at another time, you may mail it to the church office or drop it in the offering plate at anytime. The mailing address for the church is:

First United Methodist Church

321 E. Harrison Ave.
Harlingen, TX 78550

We recognize that the idea of pledging may be intimidating to you. If this is the case we suggest that you try to "step up"

toward your intended goal. In other words, move a little closer this year than you have been before.

We believe that God is faithful in his response to our obedience. We further believe that you will grow closer to him through this act of faith. But whatever you choose to do, do it with a cheerful heart.

Extravagant Generosity is not something that comes easily to any of us... it will take effort, prayer, sacrifice, faith, and the willingness to be obedient to the teaching of Christ. But we do not serve a God of guilt and compulsion - we serve a God of joy and blessing!

"I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."
Jeremiah 29:11

The Mission, Vision, and Purpose

OUR MISSION

Great Commandment - Matthew 22:34-40 and Luke 10:25-29

"You must love the Lord, your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind."

Great Commission - Matthew 28:18-20

"I have been given authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

OUR PURPOSE

To develop a Christian community that helps people move beyond empty religious practice into a vital and deeply committed relationship with Jesus Christ.

OUR VISION

Real people discovering a *real relationship* with Jesus Christ that make a *real impact* in the world.

OUR JOURNEY

Learning to love the Lord, our God with:

Heart (Worship)

Mind (Growth)

Strength (Mission and Service) in the future.

*Please mark your calendar for Monday, December 5, 2011 at 6:30 PM. We will hold our Annual Church Conference with our District Superintendent, Rev. Laura Merrill that evening.

