



Thanks to You...

A Newsletter from the Southeast District Stewardship Team | Volume 3, Issue 4 | November, 2011

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The purpose of the Southeast District Stewardship Team is to cultivate extravagant generosity within the people and congregations of the district through practical emphasis on prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.

Southeast District Stewardship Team

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Wesley UMC, Muscatine

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Miracle Offerings Alternative Giving at Christmas

In recent years the Ginghamburg United Methodist Church in Ohio has focused its Christmas services on mission giving.

Through the Sudan Project, Pastor Mike Slaughter has led the congregation to reach out to people in northeast Africa to address the poverty that is pervasive in the region.

Their 2010 Christmas Miracle Offering helped to expand the child development and protection program they worked to create. Funds also supported the safe water project in Darfur and provided seed money to begin humanitarian projects and a faith community in South Sudan.

These ministries are supported by 29 partner churches, schools, and businesses from 14 states across the United States.

The challenge given to every member of the

church was to contribute at least an equal amount to the Sudan Project as their family spends on Christmas gifts to each other.

They are anticipating their Eighth Annual Christmas Miracle Offering this December. Pastor Slaughter writes about the congregation's approach to Christian stewardship in his book, *Christmas Is Not Your Birthday*.

"At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of the Messiah who was born not only to die sacrificially for us but also to show us how to live sacrificially. Sacrifice is not a pleasant word for most of us. Just the idea of it can make us uncomfortable.

"So it's not surprising that, when all is said and done, most folks would rather have a holly, jolly Christmas than to give themselves as a 'womb'

for an honest-to-God Christmas miracle."

And yet, their church members have responded. Perhaps this is the year your congregation can approach Christmas differently, too.

Melvin Amerson, a stewardship consultant with the Texas Methodist Foundation, proposes a layaway plan for a special ministry gift that will honor Christ. His article appeared recently in *Leading Ideas*, a newsletter of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership.



Beginning on the first Sunday in Advent, he suggests, encourage members to make an additional "layaway offering" by placing a gift of \$10, \$15 or \$25 in

a special, designated offering envelope to set aside funds for special ministry projects or mission work that will bless others at Christmas.

Rediscover the blessing it is to be a blessing to others this Christmas season.



Best Practices:
**A New Year
 — with New
 Opportunities**
 with Lori Walsh

Communicate in many, multifaceted ways to keep stewardship at the forefront of our Christian walk. The resources for promoting and teaching a lifestyle of good stewardship for all ages in your church are endless.

What elements have fallen by the wayside at your church? What things can your committee do to bring a consistent focus on Biblical stewardship to your congregation? Here are a few ideas that you might consider for enhancing your efforts in 2012:

Teach the congregation about freedom from debt. When large sums of money are needed to pay off debt, fewer discretionary funds can be given to the church. Help members get out of debt by providing education and personal financial counseling.

Include a weekly generosity verse in your bulletin. At least 2,350 verses in the Bible deal with finances and material possessions. A weekly scripture keeps God's word about our offerings at the forefront of written communication.

Use giving testimonies in services and/or in written communication. There is nothing like the power of a personal true story to get people's attention.

Celebrate the offering intentionally during worship. Have the worship leader call attention to the offering as an opportunity for the congregation to give their praise and worship to God with a story or testimony.

Send giving statements quarterly — if not monthly. Regular written statements to donors, accompanied by a note of thanks from the pastor or stewardship chairperson, reminds givers that their money is doing something good for God's kingdom.

I have included these and other suggestions in my guidelines, *Stewardship: Putting the Pieces Together — Best Practices for Stewardship*. To receive a copy, e-mail me at loriwalsh@acityonahill.com.

Southeast District Latino Task Force

A District Mission Partner

The Southeast District Latino Task Force helps to coordinate our outreach to Hispanic persons in our midst. The United Methodist Church has a long history of supporting Hispanic ministries in this part of Iowa, dating back to 1978 when Don and Dora Campbell were appointed as pastors to congregations in the Muscatine area.

Muscatine and Louisa Counties are areas ripe for ministry development. Recent outreach in the Quad Cities has also begun. Edgar Solis, the associate pastor at Fellowship United Methodist Church in Muscatine, has been instrumental in nurturing these new ministries.



Last year the Latino Task Force worked cooperatively with the East Central District to start a new community of faith called San Marcos, after its host's name, St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Iowa City. They celebrated their first anniversary last September.

The task force continues to study demographics and consult with church and community leaders to discern new ways of reaching out in the name of Jesus.

The six ministries supported by local church mission gifts to District Askings include:

Mobile United Methodist Missionaries	60¢
Southeast District Latino Task Force	60¢
Iowa Wesleyan College	30¢
Justice for Our Neighbors	30¢
St. Paul's Hispanic Worship Center	30¢
Emerging Ministries	30¢

District Askings amount to \$2.40 per member per year. For more information please contact the Southeast District office. Thank you for your generous support of these vital ministries.

**We invite you to reprint articles from
Thanks to You in your local church news-
 letters and bulletins, as well as on websites.**