



It's a great
Time for the
church to
shine
as a beacon
of hope

Weathering a Recession

"...at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." Acts: 16:25

Imagine that: plunged into unbearable circumstances yet choosing to rejoice, becoming a miracle to those around them! Is this the attitude your church is taking as we struggle through the dark clouds of difficult times? With headlines and airwaves full of bad news, we must not fall prey to doom and gloom, but continue to be the bearers of Good News.

Problems may surround us but we choose to put our focus on God's promise for our lives and the possibilities that still abound. This is a time for the church to shine as a beacon of hope, help – and miracles – to the increasing numbers seeking our support.

In this booklet your California-Nevada United Methodist Foundation Capital Campaign Team offers 16 practical, actionable suggestions to help you and your church shine during a recession...and beyond.

Shine: Offer Personal Support and Job Transition Assistance

1. **Develop congregational care and financial assistance.** Personal support can be a lifeline, whether from Stephen Minister relationships, pastors, lay visitors and/or regular prayer support. In sharing groups and one-on-one relationships, people cherish confidential space, a place where they can pray for themselves and others, an opportunity to stay positive and know they are not alone. In the wake of job loss, people often need help to shift from defining themselves by their work position to focusing on their relationship with God.

At the same time, financial assistance embodies personal care. Many people have never been in tough financial straits, so they value learning how to establish utility and medical payment plans and knowing what government or community programs are available. Help with payment of rent, utilities, car or COBRA (health insurance extension) can be crucial.

2. **Create Support and Referral Networks.**

These networks can take a number of forms. Messiah UMC (MN) has a monthly group called Network 24/7 which hosts speakers on self care, interview skills, resume writing, and formal and informal networking. Brentwood UMC (TN) created a Career Transitions Support Group led by human resource professionals. Their discussions also include job search techniques, goal setting, creating a target list of potential employers, and job negotiation. The Church of the Resurrection (KS) has a Job Seekers Support and Prayer Group for sharing personal experiences and coping techniques to manage the stress of job loss. They also sponsor an Employment Transition Group, providing quality strategies to help participants in their job search through both church networks and the Kansas City Job Club Association.

3. **Let human need trump brick and mortar** In this “new normal,” several foundations and granting agencies are changing the recipients of their giving from their usual program emphases to more basic priorities, such as food for the hungry and shelter for the homeless. Now is a key time to adjust the church’s budget line items to the most practical human needs, cutting out all that is secondary. High human touch elements are increasingly expected in major projects, and you may choose to shift the church’s major projects to a specific nearby or global community. South Reno UMC (NV) personally connected with missionaries at Tiu Rancho retreat center in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Seven years ago, they began making annual mission trips to do building projects. Now they support and encourage local youth/youth adults who run school and community breakfast and after-school programs, and reach out to a smaller neighboring village.

4. **Encourage saving banks on family tables,** designating them for specific church ministries. Encourage families to put in change and turn them in when full. Santa Rosa First UMC (CA) has been doing this in

an effort to reduce the cost of their loan payment. The effort has resulted in several thousand dollars savings on interest, and the people consider it amazingly effective. You can order inexpensive, custom-imprinted banks in a variety of shapes and designs at several websites, such as:

<http://www.saveonpiggybanks.com/> and
<http://www.absorbentprinting.com/toys-andnovelties/piggybanks/piggy-banks/house-bank>.

Shine: Build a Congregational Culture of Gratitude and Generosity

5. **Build the trust connection.** Significant trust for financial giving comes from frequently telling people how their monetary gifts are being used and helping them understand how financial management, audits and accountability are hugely important in your congregation. Keep an open atmosphere on church finances and strive for transparency in all financial reporting. Unapologetically spend money on an annual independent audit and proclaim the results. Invite leaders to share how they give in appropriate situations. Send a thank you note to families after their first gift to the church.

6. **Send year-round thank you messages.** Every month, invite someone to write a letter to all on the church mailing list about a ministry and its impact on their lives, thanking the church family for their support. Make each letter personal, building a climate of gratitude for their giving. *Letters for All Seasons* a book by Herb Mather, offers a great example of monthly letter topics by givers and receivers (children through adult) who are involved in church-supported ministries.

7. **Make a vital connection between faith and finances.** Develop a theology of financial stewardship and teach it, including from the pulpit. For pastoral courage and historical precedents, read Timothy Bagwell’s book *Preaching for Giving*. Use Tanya Barnett’s

excellent stewardship commentaries on the three-year Common Lectionary in *Radical Gratitude* and other great resources from the United Methodist Foundation of the Northwest (www.nwumf.org). Openly celebrate generosity based upon spiritual formation, making a vibrant connection between faith and finances. Create a long-term culture that helps people give abundantly toward the church's compelling vision.

8. **Invite regular testimonies in worship** witnessing to how people are giving and why they continue to give. Let the congregation hear the struggles each person is experiencing with giving during a financial storm: how they are surviving and thriving by rearranging priorities. Highlight stories about how the generosity of your church has changed lives.

Shine: Do Money-Related Teaching and Preaching

9. **Teach money management to children, teens and adults.** Particularly emphasize getting out of debt. The *Financial Sanity* series by Nathan Dungan (MN) has excellent materials for children, teens and adults (for samples, see www.sharesavespend.com). Good Sense Ministries, by the Willow Creek Association (IL) offers *Freed-Up Financial Living* (www.willowcreek.com), a terrific DVD and workbook course. Various regional leaders have seminars such as Betsy Schwarzentraub's (CA) "Drawing the ENOUGH Line." *The Power of Enough*, by Lynn Miller (IL), makes an excellent study book for group exploration.
10. **Offer practical teaching series about dealing with money.** Get as specific as possible: Have a seminar on "Survival in Recession," geared to your area and led by an expert. In the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, Lay Leader Sue Burgess organized a seminar called "Want to Be Debt-Free? Ginghamburg UMC (OH) held

a popular class on "Saving Money with Coupons and Rebates." The Church of the Resurrection (KS) has a "Simple Living" teaching series using pastor Adam Hamilton's new book *Enough*, with a live presenter each week who offers tools for spending and saving. Or use John and Sylvia Ronsvalle's book *At Ease* (Alban Institute) for a creative, reflective small group experience on money and values.

11. **Preach and teach first fruits living.** Help people put God first in their economic lives. "Firstfruits living" means giving to God the first and the best, and managing the rest according to God's generosity. Instead of giving a flat amount of money (large or small), we can focus on the percentage we give based on what we have received, and seek to increase that percentage over our lifetime. Firstfruits living is more than just giving, and more than just money – it can open us up to God's work in surprising ways. At this time, when many people have less money to share and use, they can learn how to change the way they give – giving to God first, by percentage of money, of time, of relationships and more – and feel more fulfilled in the process.
12. **Highlight stewardship education.** Now is a great time to remind one another of the bedrock of biblical stewardship and to deepen our stewardship understandings based upon God's radical generosity. Stewardship includes all aspects of dealing with money (earning, giving, saving, managing, and dealing with debt). It also embraces our relationships; use of time; personal commitments; spiritual gifts (abilities and passions); the common talents we all have; possessions and assets; treatment of the earth and environment; and life itself. Hold a retreat, a seminar, or a worship series focused on The Big Picture to help us all put the current status of this economy into a much larger faith perspective.

Shine: Create a New Perspective on Spending and Giving

13. **Talk and act intentionally about finances.** Speak clearly about the dead-end results of endless credit and the solid ground we find in biblical teachings on financial stewardship. Many people are more open now to an alternative stance regarding money than ever before. Model how to adjust spending patterns as a local church, redeploying budget line items to more practical human needs, such as food banks and justice and mercy ministries. Help your church leaders personally model radically generous giving.

Provide coaching and elevate the gift of giving. Visit those who have been or may become major givers, to listen and be open to guiding them in the mechanics of making wise gifts. They may be concerned about the impact of giving too much to family members or to the congregation. Contact your United Methodist Foundation or other trusted professionals to advise on the “how” of giving, so you can focus on the “why.”

14. **Make cost savings as circuits or districts.** Two or more congregations can go together to purchase materials or services or to share equipment far more economically than duplicating one another in separate locations. What could we do together to strengthen our resources and still have our unique ministries? We don’t have to wait for a new budget year to do this, either: a congregational spending plan could be changed at any point in the year. The key is one of attitude, when we ask “What resources and strengths do we have to share, and how can we benefit from one another?” Think of the little things, and build from there.

15. **Promote planned giving.** Now, when people may be struggling with their regular giving, it’s a terrific time to help them focus on what may be the largest monetary gift of

their lives. Planned giving comes out of long-term assets, not income. People appreciate hearing about how they can make enduring gifts that express their values and create a win-win-win situation for themselves, their family members, and the church or any other charity. Hold an Enduring Gifts Sunday; host a Foundation workshop on a variety of planned giving topics; set up or promote your local church endowment fund; recognize or encourage members of the John Wesley Society (planned givers to United Methodist ministries, in CA-NV). We all are encouraged when we realize we can continue to give to God’s work beyond our lifetime – no matter what the level of our regular incomes.

16. **Shift the church’s way of inviting giving.** Identify a worthy cause and do a Miracle Sunday, which can be done in as short a time as five weeks. (See www.cnumc.org; click on Ministries, then on Stewardship & Generosity. Look in the section called “Creating a Climate for Generous Giving.”) Don’t assume there is no money available – giving is not about money but about vision, mission and ministry. People give to things that make a difference. Encourage people to find unique ways to contribute (like selling items that are cluttering up your household on Craig’s List or eBay). Make sure the results of a Miracle Sunday are indeed a miracle.

These days, people give when we change the traditional methods of asking. Identify specific benchmarks and stress validation of the proposed project. Make the case sacrificially clear and compelling. Describe our giving as an investment which helps people directly. Focus on the poor. Look outside the church walls. Contact “Alternatives to Giving” programs and help people find new ways to give gifts to relatives and friends for Christmas, birthdays and other special occasions.



Your Chance to Shine: Share Your Experience

We welcome your feedback and invite you to share your experience, ideas and suggestions. Please go to www.canvumf.org/shine and let us know how your church is helping your members and your community through difficult times. Feel free as well to pose questions and stimulate some brainstorming ... we all benefit when we hold each other in prayer and take on these challenges together!

Created by your California-Nevada United Methodist Foundation Capital Campaign Team from a variety of sources including our professional experience and multiple online resources.

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