

Generosity Forward

*Growing ministry
through financial
sustainability*



Giving for What Matters

By Jane Ilgen

I believe that our lives matter. We are put on this earth to help to make the lives of all of those in our communities richer and more fulfilling. Education and educational opportunity are fundamental to this mission. Much of my working life and my chosen volunteer activities have been devoted to educational opportunities for children, children in Madison communities and children across the country and around the world. Education affirms that children's lives matter.

From an early age, I was attracted to working with young children. I earned a college degree in Elementary Education and spent years teaching in both elementary schools and in pre-school educational settings. I taught children from low-income neighborhoods, children of international students, and the youngsters of military families that had been posted abroad. Later, I took a position charged with supporting childcare facilities throughout the state of Wisconsin. Through these experiences, I became an advocate for early education and improved childcare services with others lobbying the state legislature.

I am particularly concerned at this time that we affirm through our actions that the lives of African American children matter. In this spirit, I am committed to a project that will make a contribution to the lives of African American children in Madison, a sustainable project that will grow and blossom through the work of like-minded community members when my contributions come to an end.

Working with Orchard Ridge UCC and the Wisconsin Foundation UCC, I created the Jane Ilgen Literacy Fund. The endowment fund will provide annual support to Orchard Ridge UCC to use in support of literacy projects for African American children in the greater Madison area. Contributing to the educational uplift of African Americans and the missional support of my local congregation helps me to affirm that my life has mattered.

Please reach out to Andrew Warner at 414-758-6233 if you would like to establish a fund at the Wisconsin Foundation UCC.

Contributions to the Jane Ilgen Literacy Fund can be sent to the Wisconsin Foundation UCC at 4459 Gray Rd., DeForest, WI 53532 (please put the name of the fund in the memo line).



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The Spirituality of Generosity: Stewarding Hope

By Andrew Warner

Too often we reduce giving in the church to a transaction related to the congregation's budget: "We need a new roof—who can give to pay for it?" Speaking of generosity this way ignores the spiritual aspects of giving. More than meeting the budgetary needs of an organization, generosity can be understood best as a way of living in the world.

In my own faith journey, I came to see generosity as a spiritual practice reflecting my deepest hopes, my enduring values, my faithful risks, and my heartfelt risks. The Generosity Forward Newsletter looks at every aspect of generosity. We start with hope.



One of the windows from my former congregation helped me think about generosity as the stewardship of hope. It showed the shepherds at just that moment when they heard of Jesus' birth from the angel but are not there in Bethlehem yet. Instead they lay on the hillside, filled with hope, poised between expectation and fulfillment. The star shines before them, a vision not yet realized.

The donor inscription from 1917 reads, "In honor of Dr. Sarah Monroe by her friend Emily

Greenleaf." These two *friends* lived together for their adult lives; today we'd know them as a lesbian couple. These two women hoped in what the church would become; they gave in hopes of a just world for all; and now lesbian couples and many more marry beside their window. Sarah and Emily could only envision the world today; they looked with hope towards it.

Generosity involves the stewardship of hope over time. It means working on problems larger than what I can do on my own, larger than what we can solve in a year; it means working together over time to make a just world for all.

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As you think about your own approach to generosity, you might wonder:

1. What enduring hopes shape the decisions you make about your giving?
2. What does it mean to work toward a vision you may not see realized in your own lifetime?
3. How does a common hope bring together your community of faith?

Scholarship Affirms Potential

By Shannon Joshi

I was honored to be the recipient of the First Congregational Church-McDowell Scholarship to be used towards my seminary education on my path to ordination. I am currently in my first semester at Dubuque Theological Seminary.

It means a great deal to me to have the support of the Conference behind me in this process. The financial support is a blessing (for which I applied to purchasing books...lots and lots of books!), but even more meaningful is the message of encouragement and endorsement of my path.

“To know you confirm my call and see potential in me means a great deal.”

COVID-19 forced all of us to do things a bit differently, including my MID process. When I had first planned to go to seminary, I had not imagined I would be unable to be face to face with the people in my congregation, to step foot inside our local hospitals to minister to congregants,

or be unable to sit in a room with my advisors/mentors to engage in discussion. This curve ball is teaching me to think outside the box. It is also giving me a new lens through which to view scripture.

Like many of you, I look forward to the day when we can return to ministering inside our church buildings. Until then, I will continue to think creatively about living out my call both in my coursework and in my congregation.

Your gifts at the ordinations and installations of pastors provide the resources for the Wisconsin Conference to support seminarians and Members in Discernment.



Shannon Joshi at First Congregational UCC, Eau Claire, First Communion and Scout Sunday, 2018

Botched but Renewed Planned Giving

By Revs. Tom and Deborah Payden

It shouldn't have happened, but it did. It wasn't anyone's fault but our own.

We take our financial stewardship to the church seriously, and as a meeting about Planned Giving with Rev. Andrew Warner approached, we were feeling pretty good about our situation. In retirement our giving to our local congregation continued and small gifts were made to congregations we visited on given Sundays. We had a copy of our will where we could show that the local church would receive a portion of whatever estate was there to be settled. Things were in order.



A couple of days before meeting with Andrew we looked over the will to be clear about the language we had included for the church's portion. We had to read it twice, but in the end, we were embarrassed to realize that no designation for the church had been included in our will! None! It wasn't there! We both have clear recollections about our own conversations with one another and in our attorney's office about including a financial gift to the congregation. But, for whatever reason, it was not included in the will.

We shared our surprised and rather embarrassing realization with Andrew when

we visited together. We still plan on including a financial gift to the local congregation where we are members upon our death. We told Andrew we would contact our lawyer and change the will to include this important witness to the life of the church. However, we put that aside as the Covid-19 pandemic raised its ugly head and our attention was drawn to other practicalities.

When we finally decided to make the call to our lawyer, we discovered he had retired and moved. So we decided to meet with the other attorney in this office who was still in practice. That has yet to be accomplished at this writing. Suffice it to say that this will be changed once our physical distancing is eased enough to get back to our attorney's office!

Including a financial gift, no matter what size or in what form, in your will to the church is a witness to the ministry of stewardship and to faith and hope in the future church of Jesus Christ. We hope

"Make sure about the language you have included about your Planned Giving. Check, and re-check, over the years to reassure yourself that your wishes have been made clear."

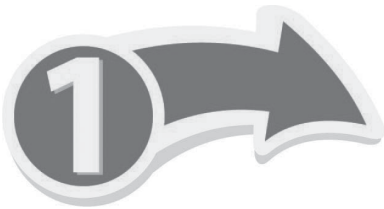
you will find a way to do this. Make a conscious decision to include the church in your will. These gifts, often a surprise, can be a significant foundation for dreaming about what is possible in church ministries. Also, make sure about the language you have included about your Planned Giving. Check, and re-check, over the years to reassure yourself that your wishes have been made clear.

Of course, you should talk about it with your spouse, partner or family, but actually make sure you have included it in writing in your will! Perhaps this will prevent you from having a slap-your-forehead moment like we had!

Bequests: As Easy as 1, 2, 3

A bequest to the United Church of Christ can sustain the work of our Christian movement for a more just world. Such generosity will leave a lasting impact and touch the lives of your neighbors, near and far.

Follow these three steps to make a bequest to the Wisconsin Conference, your congregation, United Church Camps, Inc., or another UCC agency.



First: Identify the Beneficiary—Most estate gifts come as bequests because these gifts can be easily created as part of a will. You can also make a charitable bequest by designating a charity as the “payment on death” (POD) of a bank or stock account. When writing your will, decide if you want to make a bequest as either a percentage of your estate, a specific dollar amount, or contingent on the primary beneficiaries.



Second: Designate the Gift—Include instruction on the purpose of your gift so that the beneficiary knows how best to use your gift. Your gift can support one or more charitable institutions or purposes.



Third: Share your Story—We learn generosity from each other. Your story can inspire other people to include a planned gift. The amount of your planned gift and the beneficiaries can of course remain anonymous but other people would be encouraged to make a planned gift if they heard about the hopes and gratitude that lead you to make your gift.

You can learn more about including a charitable bequest in your estate plan by visiting the Wisconsin Foundation UCC page on the Conference website: wcucc.org/foundation. Or call Rev. Andrew Warner at 414-758-6233.

Seminary Debt Reduction Program

The Wisconsin Conference offers pastors assistance with seminary debt. Established by the Forward in Faith Campaign over ten years ago, the program provides up to \$3,000 a year in debt reduction grants.

“When I was searching for a new call,” explains Rev. Rachel Bauman, “I got really excited about the unique possibilities presented by the call at St. John’s on Madeline Island, but assumed I wouldn’t be able to take the position because it was such a significant reduction in pay from my previous position (I was coming from the San Francisco Bay area) and I had (at that point) over \$70,000 in student loans.”



Rob MacDougall told Rachel about the seminary debt reduction program, “Generous donors who understood the incredible value of rural and small-town churches created this fund to help those congregations attract and retain clergy.” The program made it possible for Rachel to accept the call to St. John’s. “This grant opportunity was a significant factor in my acceptance of this call. I’m super grateful.”

Installation of Rev. Rachel Bauman (2019)

From left: Rev. Rob MacDougall, Rachel, and Debbie Knopf, Council President of St. John’s UCC, La Pointe

Questions about assistance for pastors?

Please be in touch with your Associate Conference Minister for information about ministerial assistance or seminary debt reduction.

The Christmas Fund: Sustaining Those Who Serve the Church

Many who serve local congregations struggle to make ends meet during their careers. This frequently becomes an even greater challenge in retirement. Those who served smaller congregations, or who have worked part-time or bi-vocationally are often without the resources to live with comfort and security in retirement. The unexpected expenses associated with a medical crisis, a natural disaster, or essential home repair can sometimes overwhelm.

The United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance (UCBMA), the philanthropic arm of the Pension Boards, distributed \$2.5 million in direct financial assistance to servants of the church across the country last year, including \$68,000 to those retired or working in the Wisconsin Conference. These grants can make all the difference, as Rev. Bill Clyma recently experienced. “Retirement came a little earlier than I expected, then came open heart surgery, a long recovery and delays getting Social Security worked out. When my health recovered, but my finances didn’t, a grant from the emergency fund made it possible for me to move to the place where I wanted to spend my retirement years.”



The compassionate mission of UCBMA is funded primarily by gifts to the **Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross**, one of the four Special Mission Offerings of the UCC, usually received on the Fourth Sunday, or on Christmas Eve or Day. **Since April, requests for emergency grants have quadrupled from a typical year**, and so the success of the all-Church offering this Advent is even more critical.

Supporting the Christmas Fund through one’s church, or by making a gift directly (www.christmasfund.org), is a loving way to express appreciation for the faithful service provided by so many. “I know pastors who served small churches or started ministry as a second career may not have much saved for retirement, so I made a gift to the Christmas Fund to help out,” explained one recent donor.



Your generosity to the Christmas Fund will make a difference in the lives of retired pastors and church workers.

Helping Churches Adapt

The Wisconsin Conference created the **Emergency Response Fund** to help congregations adapt to the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic. So far, grants have directly helped 44 congregations and United Church Camps Inc. **Your generosity has touched 20% of the congregations in our conference.**

Help sought by congregations varied over time.

- We provided 22 small grants to help congregations set themselves up on Zoom.
- We provided 16 grants ranging from \$250 to \$2000 to help congregations meet specific needs.
- We gave scholarships to 12 pastors seeking additional continuing education opportunities as they faced adaptive challenges.
- We provided support to UCCI as the camps dealt with the loss of income from the suspension of outdoor ministries this summer.

NEW RESOURCE!

Welcome to the second issue of Generosity Forward. This quarterly newsletter highlights the impact of our giving, lifts up ways people can make gifts, and reflects on the practice of giving in our faith.

Sharing our stories of giving helps us feel hope as we see the difference we make together. Stories help us feel connected, and give us a deeper understanding of how and why to give.

We hope you will find these insights helpful in your own generosity practices.

wuccc.org/generosity

website at

Also find resources on our

wuccc.org

resourcecenter@

topics in this newsletter, email

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