From Obligation to Inspiration: Building a Culture of Joyful Generosity

I'll admit it — the fact that I'm writing an article about stewardship feels, on one hand, entirely appropriate for this season… and yet, it's not the kind of thing I ever find myself eager to read about, let alone write about. And still, here I am.

The truth is, I talk about stewardship quite a bit these days — at our Geographical Gatherings, in one-on-one conversations with pastors and lay leaders throughout the Conference, and in my work alongside local congregations. What I've come to realize is that stewardship isn't an isolated topic or a financial campaign; it's a byproduct of visioning and planning. It's what naturally emerges when a church discerns its purpose and begins to live it out. Because stewardship, at its core, is about the engine — the human, spiritual, and financial power that makes ministry move.

And now, as "Stewardship Season" begins across many of our congregations, I want to reframe what that means. It's not about obligation or dues or the yearly anxiety over meeting a budget. It's about gratitude, participation, and joy. It's about connecting people to the work of God that gives their lives meaning and transforms communities.

When we talk about stewardship, we're not talking about raising money—we're talking about raising meaning. Stewardship is the fuel that powers the ministry engine of the Church. It's a faithful response to God's goodness that transforms lives—both those who give and those who receive. According to Giving USA 2025, more than 83% of charitable giving in the U.S. came from individuals, in some form or fashion. That means the heart of generosity beats not in corporate boardrooms but in households like ours. Every act of giving—large or small—tells a story of faith in action. So how do we, as congregations, build a culture where generosity becomes joyful, consistent, and contagious? Here are eight practices that can help any church move from obligation to inspiration:

1. Say Thank You—Often. Gratitude inspires generosity. Send personal notes. Encourage lay leaders to offer thanks publicly and privately. When people feel appreciated, they stay engaged.
2. Expand How People Can Give. Different generations and households give differently. Make sure your church accepts online gifts, recurring contributions, and even gifts of stock or estate planning.
3. Broaden What People Can Give To. Not all wealth is liquid. Create opportunities for people to give through service, skill, or shared partnerships that stretch beyond financial giving.
4. Share Impact Stories. Host "impact events" where members see how their gifts make a difference. Videos, testimonials, or cards from those impacted remind us that giving transforms lives.
5. Develop and Share a Plan. People don't give to confusion—they give to clarity. A shared vision helps members understand why their giving matters and how it connects to God's purpose.
6. Integrate Generosity into Worship. Let stewardship be more than an announcement. Teach, celebrate, and model giving as an act of worship—something to be proud of, not pressured by.
7. Embrace Change Gracefully. Sometimes, faithful stewardship means pausing programs that no longer serve. Grace abounds when we listen, shift, and co-create with the God who is still creating.
8. Dream Boldly with a Campaign. Capital campaigns aren't just about buildings—they're about future ministry. They build alignment, clarify vision, and create opportunities for lasting transformation.

As congregations look ahead, the Florida Conference stands ready to walk alongside you — helping you discover and develop resources that are as unique to your congregation as your congregation is to your community. Whether that takes the form of a Visioning Retreat, a plan for future stewardship, or pledge drive/campaign facilitation, our goal is the same: to help you name your "why," nurture your gifts, and strengthen your church's capacity for faithful, joyful generosity. In the end, stewardship is not "extra." It's essential. It's how we express gratitude for God's goodness, fuel the life of the Church, and joyfully participate in God's dream for all creation.

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