

**Presbytery of Boston**  
**E-Connection**  
**September 22, 2010**

**Stewardship: A Way of Life  
and a Witness to the World**

Wednesday, August 4, 2010  
By Charles Spencer

**A Spiritual Exercise**

Although frequently misunderstood as a matter of church administration and finance, stewardship is an act of spiritual exercise and formation. Sometimes stewardship is regarded primarily from the church's need to receive gifts of time, talent, and treasure to sustain its programs and facilities. Sometimes stewardship is relegated to a limited season, as if there were other seasons in which the fullness and riches of life did not come from God and merit a joyous response. Properly understood, stewardship is a year-round, all-season, spiritual endeavor primarily concerned with our need to give in joyous gratitude to God's gifts and in faithful response to Christ's call.

Scripture affirms that our giving is an issue of spiritual development and maturity: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Our hearts follow our investment of money, time, and energy. We may support a variety of charities, but our passion and commitment are with those in which we are invested as donors and volunteers. The newspaper's business section is of most concern to those who are invested in the market. Members who are invested with time, talent, and treasure in the mission and ministry of Christ's church find their hearts drawn into deeper commitment and maturity of faith and practice.

**A Witness to the World**

Stewardship is an act of Christian witness. We have heard, ". . . for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). But have we asked why? Do we imagine that God, who is creator of the earth and all within it, needs our gifts? Do we suppose God's delight is in the gift itself? No. Scripture tells us it is the faithful witness and testimony of the giver that is the source of God's delight: "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). A believer can be a cheerful giver today, having experienced God's faithfulness and generosity in days past and trusting in God for the

days ahead. Our gifts bear witness that we are sufficiently confident in God's promises for the future that we may freely, generously, and cheerfully give today.

The cheerful giver also participates in and shares abundantly in every good work that is the mission and ministry of Christ in the world. Cheerful and generous giving bears witness to the world that Christians through the church are continuing Christ's ministries of hope, help, and healing. The Westminster Confession of Faith affirms, "All believers are, therefore, under obligation to sustain the ordinances of the Christian religion where they are already established, and to contribute by their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts to the extension of the Kingdom of Christ throughout the whole earth" (Book of Confessions, 6.058). God's delight in the cheerful giver comes through the witness borne, the ministry maintained, the mission furthered, and the lives touched.

### **The Session's Role**

Among the session's responsibilities is "to challenge the people of God with the privilege of responsible Christian stewardship of money and time and talents. . ." (Book of Order G-10.0102 h). This is not primarily based on the church's need to receive the contributions, but because "giving has always been a mark of Christian commitment and discipleship. The ways in which a believer uses God's gifts of material goods, personal abilities, and time should reflect a faithful response to God's self-giving in Jesus Christ and Christ's call to minister and share with others in the world" (Book of Order W-5.5004). The concern is not only with what the members choose to give, but also with the testimony of the whole use of what God provides. "God calls a people . . . to use the gifts and abilities God has given, honoring and serving God in personal life, in household and families, in daily occupations, in community, nation, and the world" (Book of Order W-5.6001c).

To carry out its responsibility, the session recruits appropriate persons to teach and promote stewardship as faith formation and spiritual exercise. These may not be the usual suspects. When stewardship is approached as an administrative and financial task, we tend to recruit financial types—the accountant, financial planner, banker, or bookkeeper. Knowing about money is not the same as knowing about generosity, sharing, and faithful financial discipleship. Stewardship ministries are best carried out by those who are, according to their spiritual gifts, generous in giving their times, and talent—teachers, tithers, and creative folk who can tell the stewardship story in new ways and to new generations.

Herb Mather, of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship, writes, "Pastors and finance leaders in congregations today rarely receive new young-adult members with clear-cut training in generous giving . . ." Mather's research reveals that "without realizing it, the church has depended almost exclusively on parental teaching about giving."<sup>1</sup> Our stewardship efforts have been brief, fall excursions to remind people to be the generous souls their families taught them to be. In today's church that reminder often fails because the hearers did not receive the training at home.

We must begin with the education of our new members and young people in the spiritual discipline and mechanisms of proportionate giving. This is not a new challenge. The General Assembly urged in 1880 "that it be the unwearied effort of all elders of our churches to secure a general acceptance of the principle and adoption of the practice of proportionate giving"<sup>2</sup>. But it remains urgent that we not grow weary of this teaching in the church. Our members seek and deserve our guidance. General Assemblies since the 1870s have affirmed the usefulness of the tithe as a guide for spiritual growth and practice. They have cautioned only that we not let our gifts be limited to one-tenth, but that members be encouraged to respond freely in recognition that "the mightiest of all motives is the constraining love of God."<sup>3</sup> As our ministries seek to share that constraining love, let us also teach our members to share it through the faithful stewardship of their money, time, and talent.

### **About the Writer**

Charles Spencer currently lives in Lee's Summit, Missouri and serves as executive presbyter for Heartland Presbytery. Charles's service to the church includes three years as co-executive presbyter/co-stated clerk for the Presbytery of Great Rivers, six years on the General Assembly Council staff in the Office of Stewardship, and twelve years of parish ministry. He remains active in stewardship ministry through the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Stewardship Kaleidoscope, [www.stewardshipkaleidoscope.org](http://www.stewardshipkaleidoscope.org).

### **Endnotes**

1. Herb Mather, *That's What My Mother Taught Me: And Other Ways Generous Givers Develop* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2001), 19, 27.
2. *The Presbyterian Digest of 1898*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1898), 842
3. *Digest of the Actions of General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States 1861–1983* [Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1997], 588.

## **Alban Institute: What to Keep, What to Cut**

by John W. Wimberly, Jr.

Like many congregations and organizations, at the beginning of 2009 Western Presbyterian Church faced a serious budgetary shortfall. To deal with this painful situation, our session (governing board) needed to exhibit both leadership and management skills: leadership skills to bring our congregation along with us, management skills to work the numbers. We also needed to develop a transparent decision-making process.

As a session, our first challenge was to create a process to make the tough decisions we had to make. A flawed decision-making process could divide the congregation and us.

Much to my surprise, a rather heated debate developed over this question. We were far from united about how to move forward.

Some elders wanted to move quickly to cut the deficit. If we were going to reduce staff, we needed to do so quickly so that some salaries and benefits would stop being paid. If we were going to reduce benevolences, they needed to stop immediately before the treasurer dispersed them.

Other elders wanted to take a slower planning approach. They said we needed to pray about and meditate upon the overall direction of the congregation and that we needed input from the congregation.

By the end of our January session meeting, the elders merged the two approaches. Wherever possible, they froze payments that didn't need to be made until May. They asked committees to look for immediate cuts they could make to their budgets. They also authorized a condensed five-month planning process—complete with time for prayer and reflection—that would end no later than the June session meeting.

In February the session had an all-day retreat led by one of our members, a skilled facilitator. There was frank discussion as to what changes might need to happen to resolve the budget crisis. At times, "frank" became "contentious."

We began the retreat with small-group discussions about what we most valued in Western's ministry. People were asked to speak from their hearts, not their heads. As we focused on values rather than budgets, it provided a lot of unity. When things got heated, we kept coming back to the unity we embraced during this part of our meeting.

As with most congregations, the biggest single piece of Western's budget is personnel. Some members stated unequivocally that there was no way to address a budget problem this large without reducing staff. I was grateful to those who raised this issue because I knew it was being discussed in the parking lot and elsewhere. It is always better to have these conversations where they belong—among elected leaders—rather than among folks who may or may not have access to all the information.

Some, including me, argued that reducing staff would cause some members to leave (I had already been warned/threatened by a few members in this regard). Therefore, the net gain from salary reductions might well be offset by the lost pledge revenue from members who left the church.

There was an equally heated discussion about the benevolence budget. Some elders viewed it as discretionary spending. Others saw it as money that had to be spent. They also argued we would lose members who were proud of and committed to our mission efforts.

Finally, there was a lengthy discussion about revenue. If we went back to the congregation and asked them to increase their giving, how much could we expect them to

give? Some thought it would be very difficult for people to increase their giving in such a financial crisis.

With major issues identified, the session created small groups to flesh out information and possibilities in four discrete areas of our ministry: mission and benevolences, program, building/administration, and personnel. They asked a fifth group to think about creative ways to generate additional revenue, and they asked the Stewardship Committee to conduct a special fundraising campaign.

We planned a retreat in early April to hear the reports of the work groups and make decisions on a revised budget for 2009. Finally, the elders decided to create a budget not just for the rest of 2009 but for eighteen months (June 2009–December 2010). They hoped this would preclude facing another crisis in the near future.

Prior to finalizing their decisions, the session sent a detailed, seven-page letter to the congregation explaining the issues, the decision-making process, and the proposed outcomes. For the next three weeks the elders held four focus groups to which members of the congregation were invited. The feedback was extremely positive with several helpful fundraising suggestions, including better stewardship education with new members and small group stewardship meetings in the homes of members. With the feedback in hand, a relieved and excited session gathered. As it turned out, the June session meeting was anticlimactic. The combination of budget cuts, increased giving by the members, and additional revenues from other sources effectively closed the gap.

### **What We Learned**

Our process was educational. Here is a summary of what it made clear to us:

- \* Communication between the pastors and elders, the session, and the congregation was crucial throughout. We used e-mail letters to the congregation, announcements in worship, one-on-one conversations with key players, and small, open discussion groups to keep the process participatory and transparent.

- \* It was very important that we had an active strategic plan in place. (It is reviewed annually by the committees and session). The plan gave us our starting point. Our priorities were already established, our values clear. Therefore, we were able to move directly to the question, "What do we want to eliminate from the plan?" When the answer was "very little," we knew we had to solve most of our problem on the revenue side of the budget (through things like pledges, building rental, and fundraisers).

- \* Growth fuels a commitment to growth. Despite fears that the congregation would devolve into competing interest groups (mission vs. music, education vs. personnel, etc.), it never happened. As a growing congregation, our members did not want to step back from our strategic plan for growth. To sustain growth they put their treasure where their vision is. They also realized that everyone was going to have to experience some cuts in their favorite budget line items.

- \* Resolving the personnel piece was crucial. It was clear to everyone that we couldn't move forward with our staff intact if we didn't get more money. This was a key to

members deciding they wanted to contribute more financially. To protect the core of our ministry, sacrifices by members were required and made.

\* Working in small groups was very successful. When the session discussed issues as a bigger group, things got heated. When we talked in small groups people were pragmatic and in a problem-solving mode. The small groups unleashed a lot of creativity on issues ranging from fundraising to cutting building expense.

\* Trust builds trust. Prior to the crisis, the congregation had a high level of trust in the session. While there was some impatience that the process took months, most members realized the decisions being made required time. At every stage of the process, the session kept the congregation informed as to what was happening.

\* It is alright for people to have heated exchanges in a time of crisis. At one point in a session meeting, I clashed with an elder who is also a friend. We raised our voices as we argued with one another. Everyone wondered what would happen to our friendship. We remain friends—that is what happened. As a rule, most congregations fear conflict. When it happens naturally and we don't fall apart, the church is a much better place.

Hopefully, Western has not only resolved its own financial challenge but has been a good model for our members as they face their own personal financial challenges. An economic crisis isn't a time to panic. It is a time to pray, to clearly identify issues, to utilize—not abandon—the strategic plan, and a time to have open communication with all stakeholders.

## **"Planning for the Unexpected Financial Crisis"**

The September issue of The Parish Paper is dedicated to this topic. You may access the issue through the Presbytery of Boston website: [www.presbyteryofboston.org](http://www.presbyteryofboston.org). Click on the “newsletters” link at the top of the home page, and a drop-down menu will appear. Select “Parish Paper” and you will have your choice of both current and back issues. You may download and print the newsletter to share with members of your church and the Presbytery of Boston.

### **Prayer Concern**

Prayers are requested for Sandra Annunciacao, the wife of Institute for Christian Leadership (ICL) President Gercon Annunciacao. Sandra was diagnosed with Meniere's disease two years ago. She had lost hearing in one ear, and now is rapidly losing hearing in her other ear. Please pray for them both as they face this loss and all it entails. Cards of support may be sent to: 1928 North Main St., #2, Fall River, MA 02720.

## **Special 2011 Training Program for Active Plan Members!**

The Board [of Pensions] is bringing a professional and personal e-learning program to active Benefits Plan members for 2011. These 10 stress and conflict management courses and simulations are being offered through SkillSoft, a leading provider of on-demand e-learning solutions.

Topics for these self-paced courses and simulations include:

- \* handling conflict
- \* time management and balance
- \* effective meeting leadership
- \* connecting and communicating with others
- \* workforce generations
- \* emotional intelligence.

When:

Monday, January 03, 2011 -  
Wednesday, November 30, 2011

Where:

Through any high-speed Internet-connected computer

Program Fee:

\$25.00 per registrant\*

\*This fee helps cover some of the costs of offering the SkillSoft courses and simulations to active plan members.

Register by: Monday, November 15, 2010

Go to the Board of Pensions website to learn more and to find out how to register online: [www.pensions.org](http://www.pensions.org). You will see the link under "News, Events and Announcements."

## **Resources Available for Purchase**

We will be taking orders and payments for the *2011 Mission Yearbook* at the September meeting of the Presbytery of Boston. The cost of the yearbook is \$10.00. In addition, we will have copies of the new special issue on what it means to be Presbyterian, published by *Presbyterians Today*, which will be sold for \$2.00 each.

## Evangelism Sunday – September 26

“Good News. That is the essence of the New Testament’s word for evangelism. For many the word evangelism is associated with ideas and images of insensitivity, intrusiveness, judgment, legalism or guilt. We are reminded of programs and procedures that the world and culture around us have deemed as manipulative, irrelevant and impersonal. We need a new paradigm, a reclaiming of what evangelism is: God’s people joyfully and authentically telling and showing others that in and through Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are redeemed, we are transformed, we have purpose and meaning in life, we are sent to authentically love and heal, to serve and work for justice, to be reconciled and reconcilers, to be stewards of God’s creation. This is the Good News that the unchurched and dechurched in our communities desperately want to hear.” To download a packet for worship, go to: <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/2010-evangelism-sunday-worship-packet/>

### **Reframing Hope: Vital Ministry in a New Generation, by Carol Howard Merritt**

Hope may look different to a 25-year-old web designer than it does to a 60-year-old deacon. But it is hope nonetheless. In *Reframing Hope*, Carol Howard Merritt takes a look at what ministry in, with, and by a new generation might look like. She understands that we are not creating from nothing the vital ministry of the next generation. Instead, we are working through what we have, sorting out the best parts, acknowledging and healing from the worst, and reframing it all. An important new book by the author of the best-selling *Tribal Church*.

**Note: this Book will be among the new releases of our Lending Library at the September Presbytery meeting.**

### **THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION 2010**

Featuring The Reverend Dr. David Jones, Director of The Doctor of Ministry Program,  
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary – Austin, Texas

**FAMILY SYSTEMS IN THE CONGREGATION:  
Exploring the Benefits and Challenges of Employing Family Systems Theory as it  
Relates to Both Pastoral and Congregational Leadership**

**October 17th-18th, 2010**

**Place: Glastonbury Abbey – 16 Hull Street – Hingham, MA 02043  
Dates: Sunday afternoon, 4:00 pm until Monday afternoon, 2:00 pm.  
Cost: \$75.00; subsidized by COM and the East Boston Fund.**

# Presbytery of Boston Meetings

## SEPTEMBER

22 – Supplemental Packet Deadline

27 – Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of Boston, the Presbyterian Church in Burlington, 7 pm. Please Note: Pre-presbytery meeting on violence at 6 pm.

## OCTOBER

5 – Nominating Committee, 11:00, NPC

6 – CPM, 5:00, CHPC, Somerville

7 – COM, 7 pm, NPC

18 – CEM, 1:30 pm, NPC

20 – Trustees, 12 n, Sudbury

21 – S&B, 7 pm, NPC

CS&D, 7 pm, NPC

## NOVEMBER 1st

**Special Meeting of the Presbytery of Boston, 7 pm. Meeting location to be announced.** In order to provide adequately for presbytery handling of the proposed amendments, Council voted (a) to request that in keeping with G-11.0201 the Moderator call a special meeting for November 1, 2010, for the purpose of considering and acting on Amendments 10-A through 10-O; (b) to docket consideration and action on the proposed Form of Government at the January 24, 2011, stated meeting; and (c) to docket consideration and action on the Belhar Confession at the March 28, 2011, stated meeting.

## **“Revive Us Again”** *Spiritual Renewal in the Presbytery of Boston*

**Friday, October 22  
Newton Presbyterian Church**

**5:30 Blue Ribbon Bar-b-que Dinner  
(suggested donation \$10)**

**Mission Fair and Fellowship**

**7:15 Worship  
Praise, Prayer, Mission Celebration,  
Revival Music & Preaching**

**This event will be essentially a prayer service. We are asking every church to send at least one representative to share a prayer request for their ministry.**

It will be helpful to know how many people plan to come for dinner, so please sign up in advance!

- Bring group registration form to the September 27 Presbytery Meeting in Burlington
- Contact the Presbytery Office by email or phone: [presbyteryofboston@verizon.net](mailto:presbyteryofboston@verizon.net) or 978-365-5200
- Register at the meeting

**NOTE:** We are looking for groups to offer special music. Contact Burns Stanfield if you are interested in performing a song: 617-285-0039 or [bstanfield@hds.harvard.edu](mailto:bstanfield@hds.harvard.edu)

**You are joyously invited to  
Clinton Presbyterian Church's Choral Fest for Cameroon**

**October 24, 2010**

**5 pm Gathering with Refreshments**

**7 pm Worship with Local Choirs**

**Donations will go towards the Church's mission trip to Cameroon  
December 26-January 5**

**All Choirs are invited to participate in Worship**

**Clinton Presbyterian Church  
169 Chestnut Street, Clinton, MA  
(978) 365-6864  
[office@presbyterianclinton.org](mailto:office@presbyterianclinton.org)**

**Choirs Please RSVP by October 1  
Guests Please RSVP by October 15**

## **Looking for a Piano – Can You Help?**

First, Waltham is seeking a mid-size baby grand or grand piano in good repair to replace ours which is approaching the end of its life. We are hoping to find something that will better help lead God's people in worship. If your church or anyone you know has a piano they are looking to part with for a reasonable price, please let us know at [churchlife@fpcwaltham.org](mailto:churchlife@fpcwaltham.org).

## **The Committee on Stewardship and Budget**

*presents*

### **Establishing a Lasting Legacy – Estate Planning at Your Doorstep**

A community forum for understanding wills, bequests, and general estate planning.

**When? Sunday morning or afternoon at YOUR CHURCH. You pick the date –  
First come first serve.**

Have you been wondering about how to plan for the future of your family and cherished organizations? Are you unsure of where to start? Would you like to find out what a will is used for and how you can ensure your vision of the future is provided for now and after your lifetime? NOW IS YOUR CHANCE TO LEARN. The Committee on Stewardship and Budget has recruited the generous donation of time and talent from Margaret Muldoon J.D. LL.M, partner of Houlihan & Muldoon. Attorney Muldoon has offered to give a 45 minute presentation to your church on estate planning, creating a will, and establishing bequests.

**How can you book a presentation at your church?**

**Contact Thatcher Freeborn or Bob Stephens with potential dates using the  
information below.**

**Thatcher Freeborn**  
[tlfreeborn@hotmail.com](mailto:tlfreeborn@hotmail.com)  
617-913-8184

**Bob Stephens**  
[rassaa@aol.com](mailto:rassaa@aol.com)

## **Events**

*October 1-2 - 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Racial Ethnic Convocation at the Stony Point Conference Ctr.*

*October 2 – Gospel Fest at Hyde Park Presbyterian Church, 7 pm. All proceeds from this event go to support HPPC’s After-School Tutoring Program in its efforts to add a second day of tutoring. HPPC is located at 1109 River Street, **Hyde Park**. For more information, please contact Beth Wieman at: [bethwieman@hotmail.com](mailto:bethwieman@hotmail.com)*

*October 5 – “Transforming Divisive Conversation” a one-day workshop that will explore ways that congregational leaders can deal with divisive issues, covering topics such as preparing for conflict, preventing corrosive interaction, and helping members have constructive conversation. 51 Kondazian Street, **Watertown**, MA. Space is limited.*

Register now! The cost is \$125-250 (sliding scale).

<http://www.publicconversations.org/workshops/transforming>

*October 17-18 – Theological Conversation with David Jones* from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, at Glastonbury Abbey, **Hingham**, MA.

*October 18-22 – 2010 “Transformation Conference,”* sponsored by Grace Presbytery and the PC(USA) Office of Church Growth, at First Presbyterian Church in Fort Worth, TX. Online registration is available at:

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/church-growth/church-transformation/>

*October 23 – Presbyterian Partnership Group (PPG) Presbyterian Women’s meeting* at First Presbyterian Church in **Worcester**. The program will include Fair Trade Shopping – Displays – Mission Trip Reports – Greetings from PW Synod guests – Music – Lunch – Worship with Communion – and will close with a special passing of the peace. Registration is \$12.00. For further information, contact Beth Denier at 781-231-9247 or [a.denier@verizon.net](mailto:a.denier@verizon.net).

*October 24 – Choral Fest for Cameroon* at **Clinton** Presbyterian Church. 5 pm Gathering with Refreshments 7 pm Worship with Local Choirs. Donations will go towards the Church’s mission trip to Cameroon. Choirs Please RSVP by October 1. Guests Please RSVP by October 15: (978) 365-6864 or [office@presbyterianclinton.org](mailto:office@presbyterianclinton.org)

*November 4-7 - “The Changing Contours of World Mission and Christianity,”* sponsored by the Boston Theological Institute. For more information about this **Boston** event, contact the BTI: [www.bostontheological.org](http://www.bostontheological.org)

*November 6 – Massachusetts Council of Churches Ecumenical Dinner 2010, Keynote Speaker Brian McLaren, “Everything Must Change.”* **Boston College**. Tickets are available through the Council office at \$35 per person. For more information contact the Massachusetts Council of Churches at 617-523-2771  
[council@masscouncilofchurches.org](mailto:council@masscouncilofchurches.org)

*November 6 – Immigration Reform Workshop,* Presbyterian Church in **Worcester**. More information will be forthcoming. Contact Gary MacConnell with any questions:  
[gary.macconnell@verizon.net](mailto:gary.macconnell@verizon.net)