



Lewis Center  
for Church Leadership

# Leading Ideas

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## **Growing Generous Givers: One Congregation's Story** by Steve Price

In June 1997, my wife, Catherine, and I were appointed to co-pastor a new church start in Bradenton, Florida. On Easter Sunday 1998, Harvest United Methodist was born. From its beginnings, a consistent pattern of generous response and bold faith has characterized each financial opportunity or challenge the congregation has faced.

By June 2000, Harvest was financially self-supporting. In 2002, the congregation began participating fully in connectional giving and has paid 100 percent of its denominational apportionments every year since. The next year, just over 100 families made financial commitments enabling the church to construct a facility with ample space for newcomers. Total congregational giving and the average giving per worship attendee have increased every year over the life of the church. Even in the current economic downturn, the congregation, now with 1,100 members, was able to launch a much-needed building expansion in late 2008, and giving for the first quarter 2009 is up from the previous year.

What lies behind this story of generous and faithful giving? I would suggest several contributing factors:

- Ongoing preaching and teaching that encourages people to operate out of a theology of God's abundance rather than scarcity
- Acknowledging financial stewardship as a vital part of every person's faith response to that abundance
- A consistent appeal to the church's vision for ministry
- Regular communication from the pastors (including quarterly letters along with giving statements) about how giving is making a difference in the church, the community, and the world
- A willingness to talk openly about giving, including the sharing of our own commitments and the testimonies of others as examples and encouragement for the congregation

We have never passed an offering plate at Harvest. While this approach may not work in all churches, it has helped people in our congregation view their giving as an intentional act. Gifts can be placed in offering boxes as people come forward to receive communion, which is celebrated each week. In extending an invitation to the table, worship participants are reminded: "As you come to receive God's gift for you, there is an invitation for you to give in response." Another practice that varies from the norm in many churches is that Harvest does not conduct an annual pledge campaign. Instead of making a once a year effort, the church uses a variety of means throughout the year to encourage persons to consider prayerfully their giving as an integral part of their faith.

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