

# **GATHERING ANNUAL** **COMMITMENTS**

## **Why Sign an Annual Commitment?**

Stewardship is a lifestyle. It is "what we do after we say we believe." It is discipleship in action. We can say it a thousand ways, but every way we say it, stewardship boils down to our commitment to Jesus Christ.

Writing that commitment on a card next to our signature also makes a difference. Wayne C. Barrett points out that in congregations that have a stewardship emphasis with the opportunity for pledges, members who fill out a pledge card give twice as much as those who don't. In congregations in which members estimate their giving based on a percentage of their income, those who complete a pledge card give three times as much as those who don't. He points out that the phrase, "I'll give, but I won't commit" usually means, "I won't give much." There are exceptions of course. But those exceptions represent very few of our members.

## **But There Is Another and Better Reason**

Growing in our giving helps us grow spiritually. The primary goal of doing a stewardship program is to help members grow spiritually. Even if there were no need to grow financially, growing in one's giving is a vehicle that helps members grow spiritually.

Congregations that are successful in conducting their stewardship emphasis use a variety of programs and methods from year to year. It is generally wise to change your stewardship activities at least every 3 years. Make sure that your program reflects the following steps:

1. Select your stewardship program.
2. Set up your plan.
3. Work your plan; recruit and train people to carry out assigned responsibilities.
4. Follow through. Make sure all members are contacted and thanked.
5. Pastoral leadership is necessary.

## **One Method to contact all members: "Gifts are for Giving"**

The following pages contain an example of one simple means of gathering annual commitments. It includes a celebrative event and the opportunity to gather regular offerings, designated gifts, and time and talent commitments.

### **"GIFTS ARE FOR GIVING"**

This method combines a positive stewardship message with a mission emphasis and includes small group gatherings with Bible study and a "Gifts are for Giving" Celebration. (The celebration may take the form of a party or fair!) All gatherings, including the Celebration, may be held at the church. The small group gatherings with simple meals and Bible studies are held mid-week and the "Gifts are for Giving" Celebration is scheduled on the next Sunday following worship, or between worship services. This "Gifts are for Giving" stewardship emphasis can be bracketed by Sunday worship services that feature mission and stewardship themes and guest preachers or special music and testimonies.

Members are asked to pledge financial support of the ministry at the Bible studies. Financial pledges are gathered at the worship time on the Celebration Sunday. Time and talent commitments are shared at tables and booths sponsored by ministry teams and committees at the Celebration. Opportunities to pledge financial support to designated giving opportunities (World Hunger, Disaster Relief, Mission Partners, Companion Synods, etc.) can also be part of the "Gifts are for Giving" Celebration.

### **Objectives:**

The purpose of this method is five-fold:

1. To celebrate the abundant gifts that God has provided.
2. To discern how those gifts can be used in service to Jesus Christ and in response to human need.
3. To express gratitude to those who give generously of their time and talents to the outreach ministries of the congregation.
4. To encourage other members to become more generous with their time and talents.
5. To build awareness and celebrate current outreach and partnered ministries.

## **Planning for the "Gifts are For Giving" Celebration**

The three mid-week gatherings may be held at the church with approximately one-third of members in attendance each night. (The formula may vary, based on the size of the congregation.) A simple meal may be served. Following the meal, a Bible study will be led, followed by small group discussions. The "Gifts are for Giving" Celebration is the culminating celebration.

## **Organizing for "Gifts are for Giving"**

The Chairperson recruits others to assist with communications, programs, and telephoning. A coordinator for each mid-week meal, as well as a coordinator for the "Gifts are for Giving" Party, should be recruited. Sign-up sheets should be posted in the church narthex with a cap of attendance for each night. Pastor and church council provide leadership and support for each event. Volunteers with various ministries create displays and provide food for the party.

## **Keys to Success**

The support of the pastor, church council, the planning committee and appointed coordinators is crucial. Good attendance at the mid-week dinners/Bible studies and "Gifts are for Giving" Party is the key to a good response. Meeting this Goal requires exciting program planning and communication, including strong advance publicity. Personal follow-up contact with those not responding will be necessary.

## **General TimeLine**

### **8 Weeks before the Celebration**

- Chairperson begins coordination and recruitment of teams and leaders

### **6 Weeks before the Celebration**

- Initial publicity, announces dates, themes, and plans for the "Gifts are For Giving" Celebration.

### **5 Weeks before the Celebration**

- Stewardship leaders begin meeting regularly.
- Newsletter articles are published.
- Letters are prepared.
- Step Charts are prepared.
- Commitment Forms are prepared.
- Member lists and telephone assignments are prepared.

#### 4 Weeks before the Celebration

- Temple Talks, Bulletin Inserts and Announcements begin.
- Mail Invitation Letter.

#### 3 Weeks before the Celebration

- Temple Talks, Begin making reservations, Bulletin Inserts.
- Announce at Adult forums and Sunday School Events.

#### 1 Week before the Celebration

- Temple Talk, Make reminder calls about reservations.
- Host a leaders dinner.

#### Sunday of Celebration Week

- Sunday worship includes testimonials about gifts received and gifts given.

#### Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday of Celebration Week

- Host Celebration Week Bible Studies. Ask for pledges.

#### Last Sunday of Celebration Week

- Worship with guest preacher or incorporate more testimonials.
- Gather pledges.
- Host the “Gifts are for Giving” Party, include displays, and sign-up opportunities for Time and Talent.
- Provide designated giving opportunities and mission interpretation times.

#### 1 Week after the celebration

- Thank workers and participants.
- Thank and respond to pledges and commitments.
- Follow-up with non-participants.