Strategically Generous

By Andrew Warner

Ever find yourself thinking, “too many nonprofits ask me for money!” Or, “why does the church have so many offerings?” The number of ways that we can make a difference in the world can feel overwhelming.

Phil Buchanan, author of *Giving Done Right: Effective Philanthropy and Making Every Dollar Count*, speaks to this situation, “Most givers start as charitable bankers—responding to requests without a lot of clarity about what they’re trying to achieve.”

Instead of responding to whatever request comes across our desk, Buchanan suggests adopting a strategic approach. I realized many of the donors whose generosity inspired me gave strategically. Joe Pabst, a Milwaukee philanthropist, shared how he focused on organizations working in innovative and collaborative ways. One gift exemplified his approach. Joe knew people in abusive relationships sometimes stayed out of fear for what would happen to their pets if they left. He funded a partnership between a center for domestic violence survivors and the Humane Society to make it possible for people to create a safety plan for themselves and their pets.

Inspired by philanthropists like Joe, I began to articulate my philanthropic strategy. I built my plan around a

- **Framework** (what core values shape you?)—for our family, this was Jesus’ Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25: 31-46), “as you do to one of the least, you did it to me.”
- **Context** (what issues and areas do you pay attention to?)—beyond supporting our local congregation, the parable led us to focus on youth experiencing homelessness and development projects in Guatemala, the birth country of our children.
- **Marks** (what defines a faithful ministry or nonprofit to you?)—we prioritize nonprofits with a demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As you begin to think about your giving, create a list of all the organizations you gave to last year. Did you give everyone about the same amount? Did one organization stand out? Can you see a goal emerging from your pattern of giving? Does a particular scriptural story inspire your choices? Could your spouse or children explain your giving strategy?

Consider using the Season of Lent—a natural time of reflection—to develop or clarify your philanthropic strategy.
Reflect Your Gratitude in Estate Planning

By Andrew Warner

At the end of February my brother posted on Facebook, “Decided on my New Year’s Resolution: no more procrastinating.” It made me laugh, but of course, he’s ahead of me as I haven’t made my resolution yet.

But there is one thing I don’t want to put off any longer: gratitude. I feel grateful for many people and places. People like Reen (short for Maureen), who invited me to her congregation at a time in my life when I felt like no church would welcome me as a gay man. I’m grateful for that congregation, First Church in Cambridge. And I’m thankful for all the friends I’ve made since Reen and First Church. People who held my deepest hopes, waited with me in times of uncertainty, and rejoiced often. I’m thankful for a community of friends that I know as “Church” and how that community healed a part of my soul once long wounded by other experiences of Christianity.

All the ways the United Church of Christ touched my heart led me to include the UCC in my estate plans. I want the Church that so shaped me to continue vibrantly. And I want to say thank you to a Church that meant the world to me.

I wanted my gift to go to the Wisconsin Conference because of all the ways the conference nurtures strong and vital communities. I don’t know what congregation my children will belong to in the future, but I know the conference will be working to ensure those congregations embody the ethos of Jesus.

One can make a planned gift in so many ways. For my husband Jay and I, it made sense to designate the Wisconsin Conference as the beneficiary of my traditional IRA. Proportionally, it’s the amount I wanted to leave as a legacy. And giving this way will avoid some tax consequences for my children. This approach made sense for us, but each person should seek their tax and legal counsel when making estate plans.

Many people make estate plans in their wills or designate a charitable beneficiary of an asset. Please contact me if you would like more information on making a planned gift to your congregation, the conference, or another organization of the United Church of Christ.

Would you consider joining me in saying thank you to a Church that touched your heart? Would you join me in not procrastinating on your estate plans?
Generosity for Camp

By Glenn Svetnicka

The heart of the mission and ministry of United Church Camps, Inc. (UCCI) is love. UCCI’s operating sites at Cedar Valley, Moon Beach, and Pilgrim Center strive to love all of God’s people by giving them safe places to gather, full of nurturing hospitality, with world class programming. The events of 2020 have taught UCCI important lessons around receiving!

The Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ, its partnering churches, members, and ecumenical partners have been nothing short of amazing in sending love back to us. On top of the annual support and periodic capital campaigns, the Wisconsin Foundation UCC stepped up in a very overt and necessary way with a low percentage, interest only, loan of $500,000. The loan, part of the bond-fund of the Foundation, is an example of the values-based investing philosophy of the Foundation. Coupled with our cost cutting measures and tough decisions around furloughs, that loan helped UCCI stay financially solvent and operating in these unprecedented times.

On top of that overt support, we have received relational support too immense to fully capture! No matter how you measure, the Keep the Fires Burning Matching Gift Campaign was an amazing success. Over 600 individual donors helped us reach an initial match of $200,000 and a stretch match of $85,000. Behind the checks were amazing messages and heartfelt support that filled the souls and lifted the spirits of every UCCI employee. This relational giving was WAY more than the money it generated—it was inspirational comfort, and motivation to work hard to keep UCCI serving for another 120 years.

Thank you one and all for your gifts of money, support, and love. We are humbly grateful to the Wisconsin Conference and its members for your continual love. We appreciate the lessons on receiving God’s love and cannot wait to get back to giving you places to do the same.
Catalyst Grants: Funding Innovative Ministry Across the Conference

The Catalyst Grant Program of the Wisconsin Conference spurs, sparks, and stimulates creative experimentation in congregations. The grants primarily focus on funding efforts that strengthen a local congregation, embody an innovative approach to ministry, and help transform lives.

The generosity of individual donors and congregations created the Church Development and Renewal Fund which provides the resources for Catalyst Grants.

Representatives from each of our four associations work with Rev. Dr. Tisha Brown to review grant applications. “Reviewing Catalyst grant applications is one of the most inspiring activities of our team,” explained Tisha Brown. “We’re honored to provide funds to encourage the creativity, ingenuity and compassion of congregations all over our state, and through the grant we get to watch as those funds enable ministry expansion and transform lives.”

Ladysmith UCC, along with three other congregations, applied for a Catalyst Grant this fall to support its work with the Rice Lake Area Clinic. The clinic provides free healthcare to the medically uninsured and homeless in Barron, Washburn, Rusk, Polk, Burnett, and Sawyer Counties. About 8% of the residents in these counties lack health insurance. The Covid recession only made this situation worse.

The Rice Lake Area Free Clinic lives out the example of the Good Samaritan, providing help to any in need and going as far as possible to change lives with an all-volunteer staff. Nancy Kraft of the Ladysmith UCC, and a clinic board member, noted, “the Clinic has been a Godsend to immigrant and undocumented workers, who are the backbone of agribusiness in northwestern Wisconsin, and who do not have access to healthcare in the state. Without an expansion of Medicaid in Wisconsin, the Clinic also provides a sense of social justice and opportunity to protect the health of the poor, who rely on free healthcare the Clinic provides.”

“The Clinic has been a Godsend to immigrant and undocumented workers, who are the backbone of agribusiness in northwestern Wisconsin, and who do not have access to healthcare in the state.”
Through the support of the Catalyst Grant and other funders, the clinic will be able to expand the number of patients served while also procuring the necessary equipment to operate safely during the Covid Pandemic.

Tisha Brown remarks, “The Catalyst Team was happy to provide funds to this project because we knew that every dollar we sent to this clinic would enable them to meet the very real needs of their neighbors for a place to turn for safe and free healthcare for themselves and their families during an incredibly challenging time.” Together, we can nurture innovative ministry that changes lives across the Wisconsin Conference.

Have an innovative idea? Apply for the next round of Catalyst Grants by March 31, 2021. More information at wcucc.org/catalyst

One Great Hour of Sharing Offering

The One Great Hour Sharing Offering (OGHS) will be received on March 14. OGHS supports the humanitarian and disaster relief of the United Church of Christ both domestically and internationally. You can make a gift through your local congregation or online at wcucc.org/oghs.

Rohingya refugees cross a rickety foot bridge in the sprawling Kutupalong Refugee Camp near Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, where members of the ACT Alliance provide humanitarian support for the refugees. More than 600,000 Rohingya have fled government-sanctioned violence in Myanmar for safety in Bangladesh.
Building Community During Pandemic

By Rachel Payden

The Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ connects, supports, and resources local congregations and leaders as they creatively and vibrantly live out the values of Jesus in this time and place.

When I read this mission/values statement of the Wisconsin Conference UCC, I question: What are the values of Jesus? How do we creatively and vibrantly live them out? And, amidst a global pandemic, I wonder...what does doing that look like now—particularly—in this time and place? What will it look like in the unknown time to come?

One thing we might gather about the values of Jesus after reading the gospel stories? Jesus values being in community! Walking with the disciples, telling stories in a crowd, sitting with children, eating with elders, praying and talking with God...Jesus values connection and action and reflection and change. Jesus constantly adapts to the surrounding needs of the world while staying faithful to the pull of God within. Jesus is on the move, doing Jesus’s God-with-us thing!

When we are called to shelter in place and avoid community gatherings to keep our neighbors and ourselves safe, it is important to remember this Jesus movement—this movement of God in humanity—and continue to ask ourselves, “What now?” “What’s next?” “Where and how do we go from here to live in connection, as Jesus would do were Jesus living in a pandemic?” “How am I opening up to the change and endless possibility of God?”

Thanks to a grant that Bethel-Bethany UCC in Sherman Park received from the Wisconsin Conference’s Emergency Response Fund, and creative thinking of the Bethel-Bethany community, I have been grateful to connect with seven individuals by phone on a weekly basis since the end of November. Most of the individuals live alone, some are elders, all are deeply faithful storytellers and creators. Together over the last 10 weeks, we have engaged in sermon, scripture, and self-reflection, shared prayers, concerns, and tears, laughed and wondered, turned to music and poetry to steady our worry, and dreamed together of the world that could be, asking ourselves what we can do to be a part of God’s dream and how we need to change to come closer to embodying that dream.

And? We are left with as many questions as answers! Is this not the truth of our days? When we proclaim that Be the Church means “protect the environment, care for the poor, forgive often, reject racism, fight for the powerless, share earthly and spiritual resources, embrace diversity, love God, enjoy this life,” we ought to continue asking ourselves what protecting, caring, forgiving, rejecting, fighting, sharing, embracing, loving, and enjoying look like today. In every day! And to be assured that God is always opening up with us as we find the reflections to those questions changing with the needs of the current moment.
As Bethel-Bethany continues to discover how these deepened connections and one-on-one engagement in-between Sunday mornings might invite new life and growth in the community, I give thanks for the opportunity to be a part of the imagining. I also give thanks for a church that empowers us to live out—and keep discovering more about!—the values of Jesus in this ever-changing time and place. The Spirit is on the move!

The following prayer grew out of reflections by people Rachel Payden visited. You can join their voices in prayer by reading it reflectively.

Persevering Mystery,

We give you thanks, recognizing that the blessings of life are gifts from you. ‘Love of neighbor’ is fleeting until the bellies of our neighbors are full.

Thank you for the ability to pay our rent, to buy food for meals, to hear you talking in our ear, to feel your strength in our work.

Calm our confusion and reassure us of your companionship and the companionship of our ancestors past when our breath is shallow.

Give us wisdom to connect to whatever is beyond, following and traveling the path where you lead.

Help us to hear clearly your sound in our ears; the sound of wind gently blowing through the trees when rejuvenation is taking place, when we sense that time of transition is beginning.

Guide us to experience the beauty you create that lies within us and surrounds us. Support us when we choose to trust our independence.

Fill the space of the holes in our heart that remain after losing someone we love.

Strengthen our belief in new life that sparks deep within us, emboldening us to speak our hope aloud despite our fear of what tomorrow might bring. Increase our vulnerability to connect us authentically to ourselves, to each other, to you.

We name our prayers with the stories of your people in our hearts—

Amen.

Emergency Grants Available

Grants are available through The Wisconsin Conference Emergency Response Fund, which was created to pool resources as congregations deal with critical needs. We can offer grants of $500 to $2000 to congregations. To apply go to wcucc.org/emergencyfund.
Save the Date!
Wisconsin Conference UCC Virtual Annual Meeting
May 11-16, 2021

Powered by Generosity

God makes grace abound, more than enough, so you may do every good deed abundantly - 2 Corinthians 9:8

The fully virtual meeting will include an exciting keynote address, a variety of workshops and several opportunities for small group discussions on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evening. The business meeting will take place on Saturday morning and the meeting will conclude with a Conference-wide worship service on Sunday. More details will be available soon on the website: wcucc.org/annualmeeting