

IDEAS FOR AN ANNUAL STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN

1. **Plan, Plan, Plan!:** An Annual Stewardship Campaign requires foresight and planning. Hastily concocted campaigns tend to produce limited or disappointing results. An effective campaign is developed simultaneously on many fronts so that the congregation is informed, primed, and ready to make their commitments because of weeks of prayerful congregational, familial, and personal preparation. Campaigns typically require 3 to 4 months of lead-time for preparations and engagement of the congregation.
2. **Develop a Plan and Work Your Plan:** Determine if you want to develop your own campaign or purchase a commercial campaign that has been tried and revised through use in various other congregations. Campaigns such as Consecration Sunday, Pony Express, Discover the Joy, direct mail campaigns, telephone campaigns, every member visitations, and loyalty Sunday are available for purchase. Typically, only the materials that are needed in a congregation of your size need be purchased. These campaign programs have usually been honed through usage, and the deletion or significant alteration of any component usually produces a negative impact on the success of the campaign.
3. **Listen to the Professionals:** Eugene Grimm, one of the most proficient writers on Christian stewardship in the contemporary church, provides these suggestions for an Annual Stewardship Campaign:
 - A. Keep it positive.
 - B. Keep it Biblical.
 - C. Stress the Mission.
4. **Determine the Best Season for Your Campaign:** In an agrarian society, fall campaigns were appropriate. As crops were harvested, farmers and ranchers knew the outcome of their labors across the previous months. Since members of many congregations continue to rely upon income from agricultural sources, the scheduling of their Annual Stewardship Campaigns to coincide with the completion of harvests remains appropriate. As the American culture has become more urbanized, reliance upon crops and seasons has diminished. In its place have come economic realities such as regular salaries, promotions, commissions, benefits, and second incomes. In those settings that are not dependent primarily on agricultural income, there is flexibility to schedule the Annual Stewardship Campaign at other times, such as in the spring to coincide with the experience of new life in the earthly and spiritual realms.

5. **People Give to Ministries, Not Budgets:** The primary purpose of the Annual Stewardship Campaign is to create the congregational resources for the ministries that the church family intends to undertake to fulfill its mission. The effective campaign will emphasize ministry awareness and challenge growth in faithful stewardship. Budgets inspire very few congregational members. On the other hand, the stories of ministries completed and ministries projected can be truly exciting and inspirational.
6. **Prepare a Narrative Budget:** A narrative budget describes the ministries of the congregation in an informative and inviting way. It describes in “humanizing” fashion how the church is fulfilling its God-given mission. It helps the congregation understand that their giving does make a difference in the lives of persons and families. The narrative budget is forward looking also. It describes what more the congregation could be doing with additional financial resources beyond budget projections in various ministry areas. While a narrative budget is not an easy piece to write, its benefits have proven to be considerable, because people understand what is happening with their money with new clarity and interest.
7. **Preach, Preach, Preach!:** Research has indicated that congregations in which the pastor preaches at least one sermon on stewardship annually receive more liberally than those in which no such sermon is given. Further, those in which at least two sermons are preached annually receive even more liberally. Finally, those in which two sermons are preached consecutively receive even more liberally. The intensive phase of the Annual Stewardship Campaign is the interval in which the pastor can teach, lead by example through growth in giving, and preach the scriptural precepts of being good and effective stewards of God’s belongings.
8. **Emphasize Your Ministries:** Through your newsletters, with weekly bulletin inserts, in special times during worship services, in Sunday School classes, and in other settings, tell some of the stories of the ministries of the church. Have children tell the stories of how their lives are different because of the ministry of the church. Have youth tell their stories. Have musicians tell theirs. Have leaders in the congregation’s outreach programs tell theirs. By focusing on one ministry area each week for about 6 weeks, the congregation is provided with current information and compelling motivation to invest in these ministries.
9. **Show Your Stuff:** Schedule a time, perhaps on the Sunday prior to Commitment Sunday, when you “show your stuff.” Perhaps it will be a Mission Fair in which all of the various ministries and mission involvements of the congregation display their programs in one area of the church. Another engaging communication is to present by videotape, slides, music, and computer generated graphics a multi-media presentation during morning worship. Even though it is probably not economically feasible to have such a presentation developed by a professional firm, a high quality, near-commercial quality presentation can often be developed

using the skills, expertise, and resources available within the congregation. With a well-written and effectively delivered script, such presentations have proven to be both informative and inspirational.

10. **Involve People:** The more people that are involved in the planning and preparation of the Annual Stewardship Campaign, the more ownership there is for the campaign and its objectives. This produces more generous responses from individuals and families as they make their financial commitments for the ministries of the church during coming year. From a nucleus of 8-12 persons who serve as the campaign design and planning team, many others can be enlisted for specific responsibilities within a limited time frame.

11. **Plan Your Commitment Card:** First of all, you can call it something else. Maybe you will choose to call it your “Estimate of Giving Card,” or some similar title. Cards need to have the name(s) of those completing the cards, but they do not need to be signed. The alleviation of a signature can keep the card from seeming legalistic. Use categories such as “working toward the tithe,” “committing to the tithe,” and “giving beyond the tithe.” On the back of the commitment card or in accompanying material, provide a chart showing percentages of various levels of income up to and beyond the tithe of 10%.

12. **Our Congregation Will Never Sign Commitment Cards:** Prime the pump to reduce reluctance to complete a commitment card in the weeks preceding Commitment Sunday. Prepare and mail out to the congregation a series of cards to be filled out, returned to the church, and displayed. A letter of invitation from the pastor or a respected lay person accompanies each card to encourage the completion and return of that week’s card.
 - Week #1: Identify what you love about our church.
 - Week #2: Identify who you love from our church that has made a difference in your life.
 - Week #3: Identify your greatest dream for our church.
 - Week #4: In light of your responses in weeks 1-3, what is your financial commitment to the church? (This is the commitment card, and--just in case--the congregation is reassured in the accompanying letter that these cards will not be posted.)Some congregations have created colorful cards, cut heart-shaped cards, utilized rainbow paper, and developed other designs to make the process more fun and inviting.

13. **Encourage Growth in Giving:** Regardless of where an individual or family finds themselves, growth in giving is an appropriate encouragement. The tithe is the scriptural standard for our giving. Some will give above that, and some below. Research involving almost 25 denominations in America found that United Methodists give less than 2% of their income, so overall we have room to grow! A step chart can be used to give the current levels of annualized financial commitment to the ministries of your church. These various levels of giving,

such as \$1 - \$499, \$500 - \$999, \$1,000 - \$1,499, etc., can be shown with the number of units that have current commitments at each step. Encourage contributing units to take a step up in the individual or family commitment for the next year as each contributing unit moves toward the tithe of 10% and beyond.

14. **Let the Leaders Lead:** Invite the pastor, staff, and elected leaders, such as the Administrative Board or Church Council, make their commitments a few days prior to Commitment Day. This can be done in a special service of commitment for the leaders. Then, prior to or at the Commitment Day services, announce the total of the commitments being made by congregational leaders, the number of increases, and the total increase over the previous year's commitments. This can be highly motivational for the rest of the congregation.

15. **Assist People in Making Their Personal/Family Decision:** Often there is an inquiry for giving guidelines with a question such as "what is our fair share of the budget?" While that question works for community organizations, it is not an appropriate question within the context of Christian stewardship. In the context of the church, it can be more difficult to discern appropriate financial commitments. This is your opportunity to provide some different questions, such as these:
 - How has God blessed you?
 - Do you have a stewardship plan?
 - Where are you in that plan?
 - Have you ever really made a difference with your giving?Provide interpretations of Old and New Testament scriptural passages and stories. Describe the Wesleyan approach to stewardship of "Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can."

16. **Describe Ways Gifts Can Be Made:** Expand the thinking of members of the congregation about ways they can make gifts. Appreciated stock can be a beneficial gift to both the church and the donor in some economic circumstances. Encourage the congregation to think about all of the resources to which they have access. Be prepared to receive gifts of various kinds. It is important for the Board of Trustees to determine whether the congregation should receive an offered gift. Some "gifts" have the potential of bringing problems of sale, management, or tax liability.

17. **Be Inclusive:** For people who do not respond to the opportunity to make a financial commitment, send a note to give them some designated gift options. This can be done at any time, even months following the conclusion of the campaign. It works best if you learn some of their interests and promote areas of mission or ministry in which you know they have a specific interest.

18. **Give a Final Report:** Following Commitment Day, allow an interval of about 2 weeks before giving a final report to the congregation. Announce well in advance when that final report will be prepared and announced, and encourage everyone to

have commitment cards submitted by a designated date for inclusion in the grand tally.

19. **Interpret the Results of the Campaign:** Use some means to interpret the outcome of the campaign. A “step chart” can be developed visually with different levels of annualized giving, such as \$1 - \$499, \$500 - \$999, \$1,000 - \$1,499, etc. The number of units making commitments at each of these levels can be given along the steps. With the same imagery, interpret how many commitments have increased over the previous year. Provide an overall percentage of growth in comparison to the previous fiscal year, and describe how the ministries and programs of the church will be strengthened and expanded as a result.
20. **Say Thank You:** Develop multiple ways to express gratitude to those who have made commitments to support the ministries of the church for the coming year. A letter to each individual and/or family unit that has made a commitment can convey gratitude and verify the amount of the commitment and the intervals when it will be fulfilled, such as weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Prior to Commitment Day announce that the names (no amounts) of all those who make commitments will be published in the newsletter. This is a clear and effective way of expressing gratitude to those who are sharing the vision for the congregation in the coming months.
21. **Insist on Accuracy of Records:** No one likes to have his or her name misspelled. Be certain that the name, address, commitment amount, and other information is checked and re-checked before mailing anything. This applies to the mailings at the conclusion of the campaign and throughout the year that follows.



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