



THERE OUR HEARTS WILL BE

*"Where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also..."*
- Matthew 6:21

2026 STEWARDSHIP THEME MATERIALS

CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN

the United Church of Christ Office of Philanthropy
and the Center for Faith & Giving,
a ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



Theme Overview

There Our Hearts Will Be invites us into a season of deep spiritual alignment—an honest, hopeful exploration of how our practices, priorities, and resources reveal what truly claims our hearts. Rooted in Jesus' teaching from Matthew 6, this theme reframes giving not as performance or obligation, but as the quiet, courageous work of placing our hearts in God's care. Turning to the breadth of our sacred scripture, we'll examine what we love, whom we trust, and how we live out our faith.

Ultimately, *There Our Hearts Will Be* is an invitation to:

- Re-center our lives on God's quiet, faithful presence.
- Let our giving reflect our deepest values and commitments.
- Align our actions with our confession of Christ.
- Allow God to transform, heal, and renew our hearts.
- Practice generosity that is not performative, but rooted, joyful, and Spirit-led.

Through this journey, we will discover again that faithful stewardship is not primarily about money—it is about placing our hearts in God's hands, trusting that where our hearts go, our lives, choices, and resources will follow.

Together, as a community shaped by grace, we will ask: Where is our treasure? How can our hearts more fully align with God's?

In this season, we commit to making our answer clear:
There our hearts will be.



What's Included

Your downloadable bundle includes coordinated materials for your congregation's annual stewardship efforts. This year includes the same robust content you've come to expect in an easier-to-navigate format.

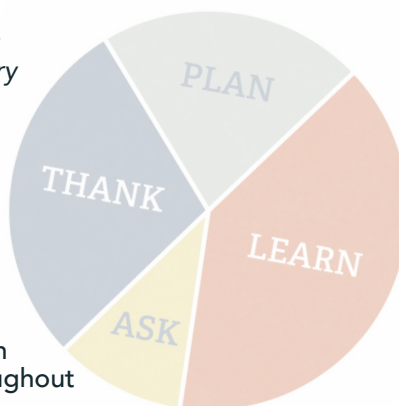
- Campaign guidance for every step of a year-round (recommended!) or seasonal effort.
- 8 scripture-based sermon reflections/commentaries and worship liturgies written by trusted theologians and church leaders.
- 8 corresponding Bible studies for small group use.
- Branding kit including logos, pledge cards, posters, bulletin inserts, and letters (with Canva templates for many materials).

Navigating These Materials

These materials are organized by the 4 steps of donor engagement:

- **PLAN:** The Leadership Team prepares, organizes, and reflects on the stewardship emphasis.
- **LEARN:** The congregation engages generosity as a spiritual practice through worship, sermons, and study.
- **ASK:** The congregation asks people to make a commitment of financial support for the coming year.
- **THANK:** The congregation expresses gratitude for gifts and shares stories illustrating the impact of the congregation's mission and ministry.

We approach this process as an *every-member canvass* program with a goal of contacting *every household* in the congregation via multiple communication channels. Letters, newsletter articles, bulletin inserts, preaching, teaching, testimony by lay persons, social media, emails, and phone calls are all employed to this end. When you arrive at your version of Commitment Sunday, no one should be surprised or caught unaware!



The most effective stewardship programs teach about the spiritual practice of generosity throughout the year.

Didn't take a year-round approach last year? Make a plan to take at least one step toward it this year.

Here are three ways to think about your stewardship emphasis:

BASIC

Centers around Commitment Sunday, when members turn in estimate of giving cards. Preceded by 3-4 weeks of testimonials & sermons.

Goal: Add at least 1 more stewardship sermon & adult study 6 months prior to Commitment Sunday.

BETTER

Several weeks' focus on stewardship leading up to Commitment Sunday, PLUS quarterly sermons & testimonials on generosity & a consistent process of thanking donors.

Goal: Add faith formation on generosity.

BEST

Involves a thoughtful Commitment Sunday, at least a monthly testimonial or sermon on generosity, regular faith formation for all ages that incorporates an aspect of generosity & a thank you routine that expresses gratitude & names the impact of the gift.

Commentary Excerpt

In Matthew 6, Jesus cautions, "Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention." We often hesitate around that word "religion." It can sound rigid, performative, even lifeless. But Jesus' concern isn't with the consistency of the practice, but rather with the intent bound up with our action. One possible origin of the word "religion" (like the one offered by St. Augustine) links the word to *religare*, "to bind fast." It suggests the idea of a bond (-*ligare*) or obligation between humans and the divine, with the prefix *re-* intensifying this act of binding. What I propose here is that Jesus challenges us to ask ourselves, "What is bound up with our acts of generosity? What intentions and agendas motivate acts of faith?"

Jesus speaks of "practicing" our religion, not "having" a religion, as in something to possess or showcase. Faith is something we train in; faith becomes second nature through repetition and discipline.

Generosity is, in this sense, a religious practice: a way of shaping the heart to mirror the generosity of God. The Center for Faith and Giving describes stewardship as "grateful and responsible use of God's gifts in the light of God's purpose as revealed in Jesus Christ." This is not merely about money or resources; it's about living consciously, purposefully, and faithfully: it is about letting our decisions reflect trust in the God who provides. It is about joyously taking on this divine obligation to be agents of God's will for the cosmos.

Jesus assumes generosity will be part of our regular rhythm of our *religare*: "Whenever you give... when you pray... when you fast..." Not *if* you give, or pray, or fast, *when*! These are not optional but essential expressions of faithful living in God's light.

Yet Jesus' command to give "in secret" challenges us. We teach our leaders to model generosity and faithfulness publicly. And our kids should see us putting into the offering plate. Public giving is a profound witness, especially in a world hopped up on greed and cruelty. How then do we reconcile that with Jesus' warning not to draw attention to ourselves? To keep it a secret?

Perhaps the issue is not visibility but motive and intent. Meaning, it's about the light toward which our hearts are turned. There is a difference between being seen and seeking to be seen. Recognition offered by others is not the same as recognition sought for oneself.

When we give to the poor, pray, or fast, the measure of our generosity isn't how others might react, much less how others might praise our charity. It's how closely our hearts align with God's own generosity. The question is not whether the act is public or private, but whether our hearts remain open to the One who sees in secret, whether our heart turns toward the divine light. - Rev. Daphne Gascot Arias

Bible Study Example

In Mark 8, Jesus and the disciples travel to Caesarea Philippi, a Roman city famed for its shrines to Caesar and the god Pan. In that setting of empire and idolatry, Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Messiah." That confession is an act of courage: it declares allegiance to God's reign over Rome's power. But Jesus quickly commands them not to tell anyone, explaining that the Messiah "must" suffer, be rejected, die, and rise again. His identity cannot be marketed as a path to prestige; it will be revealed in self-giving love.

Jesus then calls the crowd: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me." He reframes gain and loss: "What will it profit to gain the whole world and forfeit your life?" Discipleship is a kind of stewardship—an investment of the whole self in God's mission of love and justice.

This passage reminds us that authentic generosity often flourishes quietly. Jesus resists turning his identity into spectacle; we, too, are invited to invest our hearts and resources not for applause but for alignment with God's vision. Much of the kingdom's work is hidden—like yeast in dough or a seed in soil—yet profoundly transformative. Some acts of generosity are costly: they may challenge unjust systems, disturb comfort, or go unrecognized. But Christ promises that in losing life for the gospel, we discover true life.

As we study this text, we ask how our treasure—our money, time, attention, and presence—can follow our hearts toward God's reign of mercy and solidarity, even when unseen or misunderstood.

Discussion Questions

1. At Caesarea Philippi, the disciples' confession of Jesus challenged the power of empire. What "powers" or cultural forces compete for our loyalty today—career, consumerism, image, politics? Name one place where your calendar or budget shows competing allegiance.
2. Jesus ordered silence about his identity; he refused publicity. What might this teach us about motives for giving—doing good for recognition versus for God's sake? Share an example of hidden generosity you've witnessed or received. What impact did it have?
3. "Those who lose their life for my sake...will save it." Where do you see generosity that requires sacrifice—loss of comfort, reputation, or privilege? Some examples to get you started: climate activism, speaking up for the marginalized, and anonymous financial aid.

All 8 Bible studies include the scriptural text, a brief, accessible commentary, and 5 discussion questions. This excerpt comes from the Bible study on Mark 8:27-38, written by Rev. Larry J. Morris III.

Liturgy Sample

Call to Worship

One: We have come in with wandering and lonely hearts.

All: God draws us together in community.

One: We have come in with confusion about sharing our gifts.

All: God offers us clarity and hope.

One: We have come in for a good word.

All: Jesus offers us this calling, "Where our treasure is, there our hearts will be."

Prayer of Preparation

One: Holy God, there is always more for our hearts to learn as we strive to be faithful both in privacy and in community. You know our hearts and what they need today. You know our church and what we need in resources. Inspire us with your Spirit, so that we find the harmony of gratitude and giving, working together so that all may be blessed. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

All: Generous God, these gifts are from the hearts of our church. We do not offer them for status or recognition. We offer them for love, justice, and community. Keep our treasure and our hearts aligned as we use these gifts for your ministry. Amen.

Benediction

One: Go now with the blessings of Jesus, who whispers to our hearts and shouts in all creation, where your treasure is, there your hearts will be. Amen.

plus

Prayer of Confession
Words of Assurance
Response to the Readings
Invitation to the Table
Hymn/Song Suggestions
Children's Message



Our 2026 Stewardship Theme Materials include 8 full liturgies written by Rev. Amber Henry Neuroth, Senior Pastor of Hope United Church of Christ since January 2011. Amber holds two degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary: a Master of Divinity and a Master of Theology, which focused on feminist theology and pastoral care.

Graphics & Printables



Sample Letters & Letterhead and #10 envelopes

also:

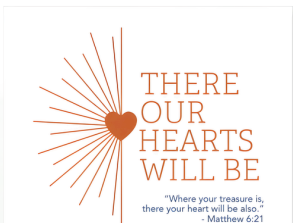
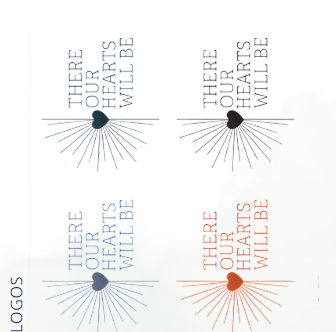
- + sample step chart & pyramid of giving
- + pledge cards
- + posters
- + NEW! Canva templates



Brand Kit (Logo, Colors, Fonts)



Bulletin Jackets



The Corinthian church lived in a culture that prized wealth, polish, and competition—and they were tempted to bring those same standards into their faith. Paul reminded them that God's wisdom does not look like the world's wisdom. It is not measured by numbers, status, or polish, but revealed through the Spirit in ways that often seem foolish to the world.

We face those same temptations today. Our culture whispers that success is found in bigger paychecks, well-padded retirement accounts, fuller sanctuaries, and slimmer programs. We catch ourselves comparing—measuring our worth against the megachurch down the street or the neighbor who seems to have it all together. But stewardship invites us into a different story, one not rooted in comparison or accumulation, but in trust, generosity, and grace.

Faith and generosity are not automatic—they grow through practice. Over time, endurance grows and builds a giving muscle.

Likewise, stewardship is not a single act, not a duty to check off, but a way of training our lives in the direction of God's grace.

Gift by gift, practice by practice, we are being shaken and shaped into people whose very lives tell the story of God's abundance. That's the race we're running together, a race that leads us deeper into the wisdom of God. Each time we give, each time we open our hands, we are being stretched, shaken, and reshaped. Over time, what feels hard or uncertain begins to grow lighter, even joyful. That is how our lives echo the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of this age.

CONSIDER YOUR GIVING AS A PERCENTAGE OF YOUR MONTHLY INCOME.

Annual Income	Monthly Income	2%	3%	4%	5%	10%
20,000	1,667	33	50	67	83	167
25,000	2,083	42	63	83	104	208
30,000	2,500	50	75	100	125	250
35,000	2,917	58	88	117	146	292
40,000	3,333	67	100	133	167	333
45,000	3,750	75	113	150	188	375
50,000	4,167	83	125	167	208	417
60,000	5,000	100	150	200	250	500
75,000	6,250	125	188	250	313	625
100,000	8,333	167	250	333	417	833
125,000	10,417	208	313	417	521	1,042
150,000	12,500	250	375	500	625	1,250
200,000	16,667	333	500	667	833	1,667

On average, Americans give 2% of their income to charity. Giving even 2% more of our annual income would be transformative for our congregation and other organizations doing good in God's world. Thank you for prayerfully considering your commitment!

Bulletin Inserts (front & back)

Contributors & Texts



Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Turning Toward the Light: Generosity, Intimacy, and Trust
by Rev. Daphne Gascot Arias



Deuteronomy 6:1-9

The Centrality of Love: A Reflection for Stewards
by Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer



Proverbs 3:1-12

Living One's Best Life
by Rev. Barbara J. Essex



Joel 2:1-18

A Change of Heart
by Rev. Sarah Kingsbery



Mark 8:27-38

Hidden Treasure, Open Cross: Generosity Beyond Applause
by Rev. Larry J. Morris III



John 14:1-14

"Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled"
by Rev. Jennifer Ruth Lynn Garrison



1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Open Hearts, Open Hands
by Rev. Kyeong Jung Kim



2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Subversive Stewardship
by Rev. Dr. Elena Larssen



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