

Faith & Generosity

A quarterly newsletter for Foundation partners and friends

SPRING 2022

From David Snipes

What does Lent mean to you?

As the calendar turned to March, I was shocked to realize that Ash Wednesday was only three days away. It is not that I forgot it was coming. But so soon?

This revelation caused me to think...every year, we eagerly await Easter — when we can finally celebrate the risen Christ. Signs of spring give us hope that we will make it through the dark days and nights of winter. Earlier in the Christian year, we even count down the days to Christmas when we celebrate Jesus' birth. Yet, so often, the Lenten season creeps up on us.

Plainly and simply, we want to jump straight from Christmas Day to Easter Sunday so we can have something to celebrate. Consider the world in which we live today. This is not the case.

My daily newsfeed is filled with stories that leave one wondering: "Where is God in the middle of all this?" The tragedy unfolding in Ukraine. Political unrest. Rising inflation. None of these stories are appealing. None of them bring joy. All of them are going to take time to be resolved — if at all — before the celebration can begin. Such is the case with Easter.

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What does Lent mean to you?

Engaging in the journey

The Lenten season prompts us to slow down and intentionally consider our relationship with God. Often, this exercise takes the form of “fasting” as we imitate the sacrifice Christ made for us.

Letting go of something, or even picking up something, can be a challenge. It can make 40 days seem like an eternity. It can even be painful. But would you be surprised if I told you the journey was worth it? The emotional and physical challenges that accompany sacrifice often bring about transformation that helps us to be our better selves – the people Christ calls us to be.

So I ask you: “What does Lent mean to you?” Will you rush straight from the manger illuminated by the star to the empty tomb? Or, will you engage in the journey that is laid before us as we near the celebration of the risen Christ? As you contemplate this question, please know that you are not alone.

May your journey be filled with enlightenment that leads to renewal!

In Christ,



David Snipes
CEO

Spotlight Story



IN IREDELL COUNTY, THESE MEALS COME WITH A BLESSING

Volunteers find a new way to serve the community

When the pandemic brought an end to Bethel UMC's community dinner nights, a group of volunteers came up with a way to keep the ministry going. Now it is more popular than ever.

A drive-through in the church parking lot has become a place to connect with folks in need of a meal and friendly word.

"It's not just a matter of feeding them, but also reaching out to say, 'Hey, we know you're here.'"

Known as Lookout Community Café, the ministry hands out 275-300 free meals one Saturday every month, with about 90 of those delivered to shut-ins in the community. Most recipients are not church members, but folks facing tough times in this rural corner of Iredell County. Previously, in-person dinner gatherings drew 50 to 60 people.

"We've been able to reach so many more," said Rev. Anne Tavenner. "We did 150 meals the first night and it just grew. We put calls out to give us names of people who need a little support. It's not just a matter of feeding them, but also reaching out to say, 'Hey, we know you're here.'"

Volunteers deliver meals to Heroes House, a transitional housing community for Statesville military veterans, as well as a motel that serves people struggling to get by.

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IN IREDELL COUNTY, THESE MEALS COME WITH A BLESSING

Modeling ‘the heart of Christ’

At the center of the effort is Nicole Beam, a lifelong member of Bethel UMC who teaches in the Hickory Public Schools. Beyond Bethel, Nicole also finds time to to volunteer with Haywood Street Congregation, an urban ministry in Asheville.

“Nicole truly has a servant’s heart,” Pastor Anne said. “She is always noticing ways that we can reach out to others — especially with our youth. She models the heart of Christ.”

In addition to meals, volunteers hand out devotional materials and information on Bethel UMC and its partner churches. There’s also an opportunity to visit a prayer tent hosted by the pastor.

“Reaching out in love to our neighbors with a meal is an important step in making disciples for Jesus Christ,” Nicole said. “There must first be a connection made and relationship forged.”

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IN IREDELL COUNTY, THESE MEALS COME WITH A BLESSING

Responding to needs

The Foundation's Reynolds Ministry Fund served as a sustaining partner, providing a grant to remodel the kitchen and replace aging equipment. The level of interest led the church to start a freezer meal ministry for shut-ins and a project to distribute community blessing boxes filled with canned goods and personal hygiene items.

"We started out as a small prayer group, just asking, 'What can we do?'" said co-leader Jana Cook, who oversees meal planning and preparation. "And it's turned into so much."

Other congregations have drawn inspiration from Bethel's example. At First UMC in Troutman, a drive-through ministry called "Food for Thought" has distributed 1,150 meals since September on the southern end of Iredell County, including regular deliveries to a women's shelter and staff at a local retirement home.

Based on the level of need they've encountered, Pastor Jeff Hamrick said volunteer leaders hope to expand the program to 200 meals a month.

Bridging the gap

North Carolina has the 8th highest rate of food insecurity in the nation. Before the pandemic, 12 percent of people in Iredell County were considered food insecure, according to Feeding America, the nation's largest network of food banks and food pantries. The economic fallout from the coronavirus has left nearly 14 percent on the brink of hunger.

One major reason why food insecurity didn't go up more was that the government stepped in with stimulus payments, increased funding for SNAP and expanded unemployment benefits. That aid is now drying up.

"Some people are struggling with food, but a lot of them are struggling with connection," Pastor Anne said. "Since COVID, there's been a disconnect. And so it's not just feeding them, but also connecting with one another — keeping community."





DESPITE CHALLENGES, STEWARDSHIP ENDURES IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

Webinar series explored ways to cultivate year-round generosity

Tithing in the African-American Church has remained remarkably consistent, even in the midst of a pandemic keeping many worshippers away from the pews.

Did you know: Churches receive an average of 30 percent of their annual donations in the month of December alone.

But churches will need to adapt to shifting technology and giving preferences in order to reach members of the next generation, many of whom have their own priorities on philanthropy.

These are among the insights shared in “Transformational Generosity,” a five-part webinar series on stewardship in the African-American Church co-sponsored by the Foundation and Dr. Bill White, Director of Equity and Justice Ministries for the Western North Carolina Conference.

In many congregations, the offering happens without much forethought. We may even consider it an interruption to the spiritual flow of worship. But it’s actually an important, biblical part of the service. It gives us a chance to focus on giving thanks and giving back to the God who has so generously given to us.

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DESPITE CHALLENGES, STEWARDSHIP ENDURES IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

Leading people to generosity

Guest facilitator Rev. Melvin Amerson provided practical ways to encourage faithful giving, such as delivering sermons on stewardship; emphasizing giving throughout the year and not just on special occasions; using Scripture during the offering appeal; and celebrating the gifts and offerings that are received.

Melvin is an ordained elder, author and stewardship consultant with Texas Methodist Foundation.

He believes that churches grow in generosity when stewardship is preached, taught and embraced. This wisdom resonated with Melvin Scales, a lay leader at St. Paul UMC in Winston-Salem.

“You can’t lead a healthy and growing church without leading people into generosity,” Melvin said. “Having a healthy discussion about money in the church should not be a sermon after a few weeks of low offerings. It should be intentional.”

Younger members often have different motivations for tithing, Dr. White said.

“The current generation is more likely to seek ministries that meet their sense of mission and discipleship,” he said. “They do not see church as a building, but as ministry and relationship with the community. Oftentimes, the worship service is not seen as the central focus of the church but the catalyst for service to the community and support of a particular cause or group.”

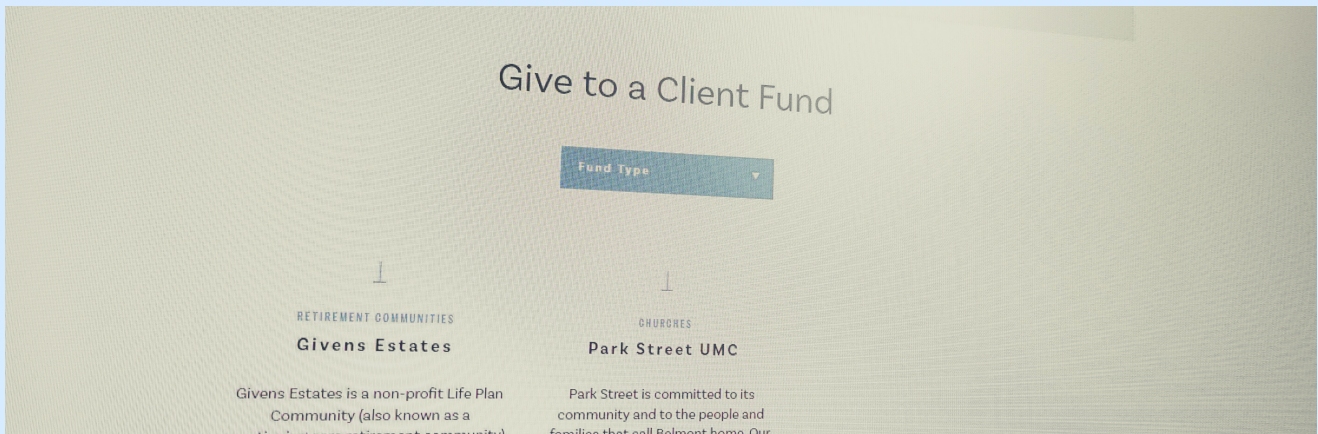
People give when they are engaged in the broader mission of the church, says Rev. Charlie Rivens, pastor of The Place UMC in Charlotte’s University City area.

“Churches today miss the opportunity of creating fellowship while raising money,” he said. “We want to run and do a check ministry. But ministry is more – it’s touching the heart, mind and soul. If you teach that giving is more than just your finances, your ministry is stronger.”

Many congregations reported stable or increased total dollars given in 2021. One of those is St. Stephen United Methodist Church, the oldest African-American church in Davidson County.

Dr. Arnetta Beverly grew up in the church and now serves as its first female pastor. St. Stephen, she says, has continued to be a gathering spot for the community and an important contributor to mission and outreach efforts.

“We have not missed a beat,” she said. “These are loyal members who love the church.”



THERE'S AN EASY WAY TO CONTRIBUTE TO FUNDS INVESTED WITH THE FOUNDATION

Add your church to our online giving portal

A new option makes it easier for people to give directly to the managed funds that you have invested with the Foundation.

Donors can make gifts — without having to write a check or mail a letter — through a secure online giving portal on our website. Our team can add your church to the portal and include as many funds as you wish.

Contact us and we will guide you through the process.

<p>Armstrong Memorial Preaching Fund</p> <p>Supports the preaching mission at First UMC, Belmont NC</p> <p>Donate</p>	<p>Barden Memorial Scholarship</p> <p>Provides a scholarship to United Methodist student(s) from the North Wilkesboro District</p> <p>Donate</p>	<p>Barnhardt Family Scholarship</p> <p>Provides a scholarship for a student pursuing a degree in accounting, religion, or education</p> <p>Donate</p>
<p>Ben Thomas Lawson Jr. & Megan Carrier Fund</p> <p>Supports Centenary UMC, Winston-Salem NC</p> <p>Donate</p>	<p>Benn Duff Endowment</p> <p>Supports the Asbury Nursing Center Supplemental Assistance Fund, Aldersgate Retirement Community, and the WNCC Board of Pensions</p> <p>Donate</p>	<p>Betty & Ed Mooney Endowment</p> <p>Supports Madison UMC, Madison NC</p> <p>Donate</p>

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THERE'S AN EASY WAY TO CONTRIBUTE TO FUNDS INVESTED WITH THE FOUNDATION

- You'll get a personalized page with a photo at the top followed by fund names and a description of each fund. (No account numbers will be shared online).
- Donors will receive an acknowledgement for making a tax-deductible gift for the full amount of their donation.
- The Foundation will notify your church or organization when a gift has been made.
- A similar service was launched last year for Foundation-owned permanently restricted endowments, which are typically set up in honor of individuals and families.

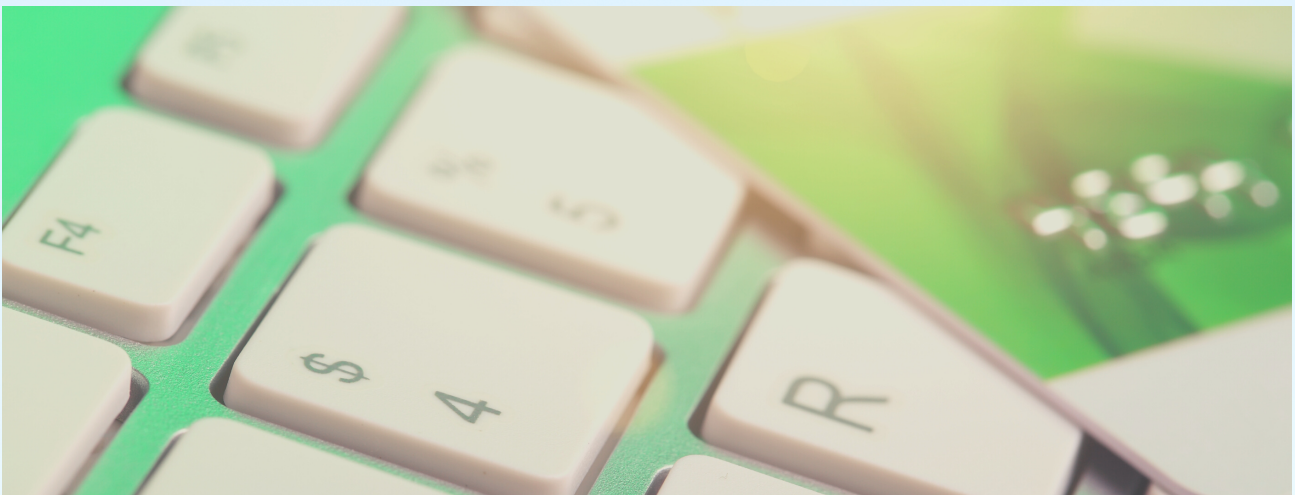
“Once we perfected the ability to accept Foundation gifts online, we worked with our web developer and said: “Can we add an opportunity for our clients’ donors to make gifts to the managed client funds?” said Susan Cothorn, the Foundation’s chief operating officer.

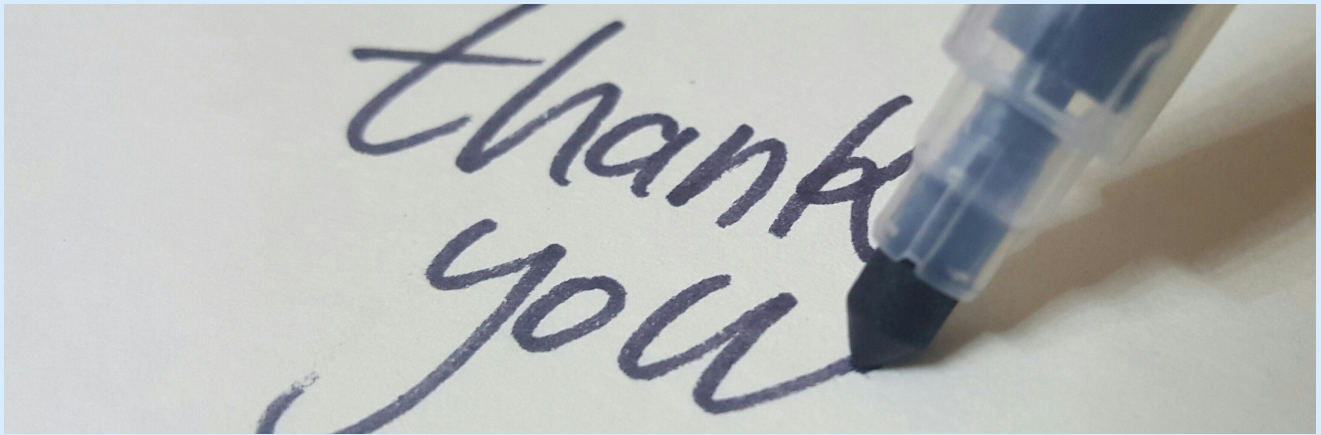
This project reflects the Foundation’s mission to find innovative ways to add value and serve individuals, churches and related institutions who invest in our managed funds. It also sets us apart from secular financial institutions.

The first church to sign up was Park Street UMC in Belmont. Pastor David Hiatt called it an easy decision.

“As the landscape of giving continues to change, this new service offers yet another option to help fund mission and ministry,” David said.

“Generosity is an important piece of our faith, and by expanding the ways in which people can give, we hope their generosity will grow.”





EXPRESSING GRATITUDE FOR RETIRED CLERGY, LOVED ONES

An annual gift to supplement retirement income

The Foundation supports retired clergy and their spouses with an annual distribution from The Superannuate Endowment Fund.

This fund was created to provide supplemental retirement income to WNC Conference retirees and loved ones. This year's distribution will be made via direct deposit on Good Friday, April 15, 2022.

Here is what you should know:

- The UMF Superannuate Endowment Fund provides an annual gift to WNCC retired clergy and widows(ers).
- The amount of the gift is based on the fund's annual spending policy calculation and the retirement/service rate schedule that the WNCC office provides to us.
- This distribution is separate from the Advent/Christmas distribution from The Duke Endowment/WNCC.



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EXPRESSING GRATITUDE FOR RETIRED CLERGY, LOVED ONES

In the 1600s, the word “superannuated” was generally understood to mean “Disqualified or incapacitated by age;” or “antiquated; made out of date or obsolete.” In this case, we prefer to focus on the prefix “super,” which means “over and above,” “extra,” or “surpassing all or most others of its kind.”

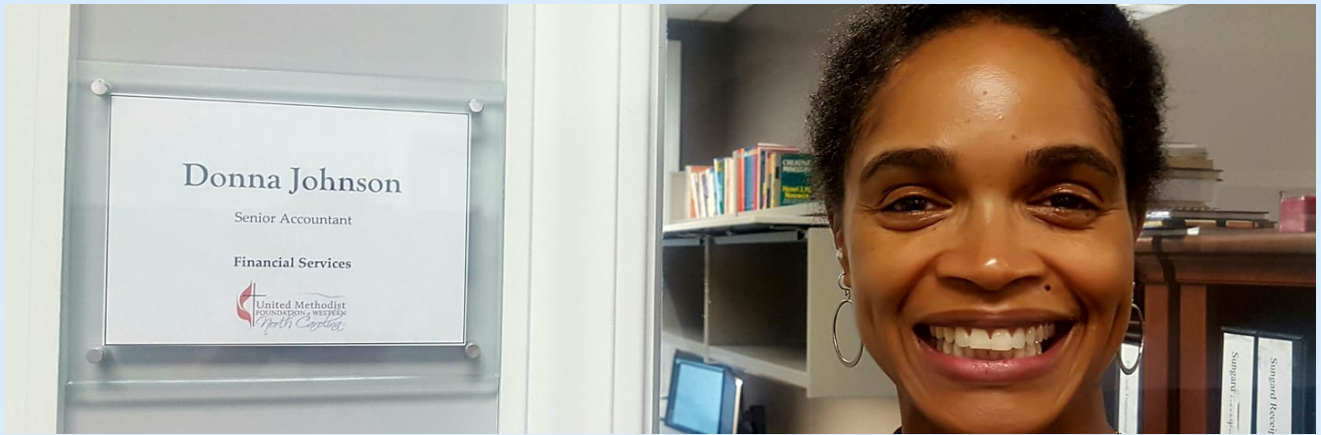
“Since the Foundation’s mission is to build the Church for generations to come, it is fitting to give thanks for those who helped us to fulfill this mission,” said CEO David Snipes. “It is an honor and privilege for us to share a small token of appreciation to those who have contributed to our success through the Superannuate Fund.”

For some, the distribution comes as a pleasant surprise.

“Quite frankly, I did not realize there was a fund like this,” one retired clergy person wrote to us. “What a blessing and means of grace!”

If you have any questions, please contact Senior Accountant Donna Johnson at 704-817-3990, Ext. 1505 or DJohnson@umfwnc.org.





OUR OWN DONNA JOHNSON EARNS PRESTIGIOUS DESIGNATION

Congratulations on passing your CPA exams -- on the first try

It was a proud day at the Foundation as we celebrated Donna Johnson, our senior accountant, for earning her certified public accountant (CPA) designation.

Donna put in many hours of work in preparation for the notoriously difficult CPA exam. She passed on the first try. Donna's husband, Elando, joined us for a surprise lunch and viewing of a celebration video.





FROM GOOD TO GREAT: APPLY FOR REYNOLDS PROGRAM IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Understand your congregation, navigate change

Now more than ever, the Church needs strong leadership. We are fortunate to have a unique – and no cost – opportunity to support our clergy leaders as they grow their capacity to lead. The one-year Reynolds Program in Church Leadership includes:

- A personal executive coach
- Renewed understanding of the mission of the church and the specific needs of your congregation
- Time for reflection and renewal
- Support from peers

The program is open to United Methodist pastors-in-charge serving in the Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, North Georgia and Western North Carolina conferences with at least five years of full-time church experience (beyond educational requirements) and who will not be moving to a new appointment in 2022.

Applications are due May 1, 2022. The Reynolds Admissions Team will review and prayerfully consider all applications. The team will notify applicants by early June 2022.

For more information or to request an application, please contact Caroline Cox, Director of Reynolds Ministries and Programs:

Website: umfwnc.org

Phone: (888) 450-1956

Email: CCox@umfwnc.org



EQUIPPING CHURCH LEADERS IN FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

'In today's world, it is probably more important than ever'

Local church finance leaders frequently express a desire for more training. In response, the Foundation partnered with the WNCC Office of Treasury Services on a course designed to strengthen management skills.

“There are many people out there who want to do the financial work of the church, but yet don’t feel like they have the tools or knowledge to do that in an effective way,” said Foundation CEO David Snipes.

Now in its third year, the inaugural cohort of the Certificate Program in Church Treasury launched in early 2020 following years of planning. The program is designed to help the volunteer finance officers of our local churches become more informed and trained for their ministry of efficient, effective management of local church finances.

“United Methodism is founded on accountability,” said Conference Treasurer Mark King. “The reason we’re called Methodists is because we’re so methodical in our spiritual disciplines. In today’s world, it is probably more important than ever. People want to know their church is keeping track — and doing the best it can with the gifts they’re giving.”

Over four weeks via Zoom, the group covers topics such as budgeting, investments, stewardship, law, apportionments, taxes and insurance. The current class of 25 individuals — along with the churches they serve — will be stronger and better equipped because of their commitment.

We commend these local church leaders who care enough about their role in fulfilling their church’s ministry that they gave up four Saturdays to complete the course. We would like to extend special thanks to the participants, the presenters and the WNCC Office of Treasury Services for this ministry offering.