

UCC Office of Philanthropy and Stewardship

The creation of the Office of Philanthropy and Stewardship for the national and global ministries of the United Church of Christ is an important culminating step in over ten years of work to develop fundraising capacity for the church. Designed **to gather and steward time, talent and treasure to enable excellent and faithful ministry in all of settings of the Church**, the proposal is the result of wide consultation over the years, and is designed to respond to current realities and lay the groundwork for long-term success.

The Context and Challenge

There is never a good or bad time to begin a focused fundraising program. As we begin to create a new effort to engage members and friends of the United Church of Christ in stewardship and giving in a more coordinated and aggressive way, there are opportunities and challenges to be faced. To achieve enduring success, we must build a program that responds to emerging movements in philanthropy, and builds on our strengths.

Particular challenges are:

The continuing decline in financial support for religious denominations and other traditional, national membership bodies. The decline in support for mainline denominations over the past several decades is well documented. Since the early nineties studies have identified multiple sources for the decline: increases in local expenses for congregations; the changing nature of denominational mission and consequent confusion / lack of knowledge about the case for support; generational differences in understandings of stewardship and giving; the lack of a fundraising infrastructure and culture of philanthropy; a skepticism about the viability of church institutions fueled by church closings, mission retrenchment, and a perceived lack of relevance.

A very slow rebound in charitable giving given the economic recovery. The Chronicle of Philanthropy reports that charitable giving increased by 1.7% last year, the smallest increase in a number of years and particularly modest growth given the recovery in many sectors of the economy, especially the stock market. Taking into account that the figure is not adjusted for inflation and includes a spike in giving due to natural disasters at the end of 2012, sustainable giving in fact decreased over the past year.

The picture for faith-based organizations is marginally better: the Blackbaud study of charitable giving in 2013 reports a 6.1 increase in giving, a still modest increase given inflation. More mixed news comes from the Lake Family Institute 2012 congregational impact study: 65.7% of mainline Protestant congregations reported an increase in giving between 2010 and 2011, but 58.7% report that increases in giving since 2007 had not kept pace with inflation. Together with increases in local community investment, and the lack of pass-through of even these modest increases to denominational offices, the clear picture is of a very competitive fundraising environment.

The increasing concentration of wealth and uncertainty about financial health. Insecurity about financial health on the part of individuals and families presents a challenge to all non-profits seeking to raise funds, but particularly those institutions in the early stages of widespread cultivation of individuals. A study in 2010 by Trivent Financial for Lutherans and the Kiplinger Personal Finance magazine found that 84% of Americans were concerned about their finances. While generosity ranked highest as the financial virtue people would most like to leave their children, the “new frugality” has had an impact on charitable giving: Thirty-four percent of those surveyed said that they made no charitable contributions or volunteered their time as a result. More recently, President Obama spoke in July about how the increasing disparities in income and wealth in this country continue to create economic angst with consequences across the social fabric.

The response to this uncertainty by mainline denominations has been tepid. The Lilly Congregational Impact study reports that only 32.2% of mainline churches offer any type of course on personal financial stewardship (as opposed to 56.1% of evangelical churches).

The Opportunities

Despite these sobering challenges, there are non-profit and faith-based organizations that are improving their fundraising performance in the current environment. CompassPoint, a San Francisco nonprofit consulting firm, and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund recently released a report called *Underdeveloped: A National Study of Challenges Facing Nonprofit Fundraising* that summarized the factors underlying fundraising success in the current context:

Investment in technology and systems (infrastructure)

True, meaningful engagement as ambassadors and solicitors by staff, leadership and the board (engagement)

A solid, organization-wide understanding of fundraising and philanthropy (a culture of philanthropy)

Connectedness at the strategic level between the fundraising effort and programmatic impact (a strong case).

These critical success factors mirror the recommendations of last year’s “Best Minds” gathering on stewardship and fundraising which formulated recommendations that form the basis of the proposal to create the UCC Philanthropy and Stewardship Office:

Aggressively engage individual members of the United Church of Christ in supporting ministry beyond their local community

Revitalize congregational support by inviting both unrestricted and directed support

Place engagement through technology at the center of our efforts with donors who are members of UCC faith communities and prospects outside the church

Develop and implement a multifaceted funding strategy that accounts for differences in generation, social location, economic means and theological understandings of stewardship and giving

Create educational and formation programs for clergy and lay leadership that cultivate theological understandings and practical applications related to money in our societal context

Develop mutually beneficial partnerships with congregations doing extraordinary philanthropic work.

These recommendations are based on a set of assumptions:

There is sufficient capacity in our congregations and among friends of the UCC to fund the ministry of all settings of the church

When the case is strong our constituents respond.

Strategic partnerships with our congregations and conferences in fundraising and programmatically are key to success.

The Office of Philanthropy and Stewardship

The work of the Office of Philanthropy and Stewardship will be divided into three principal areas:

Stewardship – Promoting the financial health of individuals and congregations;

Financial Development – Raising the resources to enable faithful and the long-term ministry in settings beyond the local church; and

Grants and Scholarships – stewarding the resources entrusted to the national and global ministries to achieve maximum ministry impact.

Stewardship - Fostering Financial Health in Congregations: Our experience (in capital campaign services, as well as in our planned giving efforts) is that congregational leadership is eager for the tools to help them assess and benchmark fundraising, investment and budgeting programs. A major new initiative will transform our current capital campaign consulting program into an effort that will work with individual congregations to assess financial health, help to define a desired state of financial health, and work to create and implement a plan for achieving it. Best practices gleaned from this work will be shared widely, particularly in “communities of practice” that will be created and gathered (in person and virtually) to continue the work and learnings.

Stewardship – Promoting Faithful Financial Stewardship for Individuals and Families: Several congregations within the UCC are already doing excellent and effective ministry in personal financial stewardship and in high-level lay Christian education, and the proposal aims to create partnerships with them to leverage that work for the benefit of the whole church. Two outcomes for these partnerships are currently envisioned: the first is a continually expanding library of “Ted Talk”—like video presentations and supporting materials featuring the best minds in personal finance and stewardship, and a series of webinars and other resources delivered through technology that mine existing curricula at the congregational level.

Stewardship – The Giving Program: Aligning grant and scholarship resources with the priorities established by the Collegium will be a major new emphasis of this program, beginning with an assessment of the restrictions (board or donor imposed) on each fund. An additional emphasis will be work with major gifts staff to identify and act on opportunities for growing appropriate funds and the development of a donor advised fund program.

Financial Development – Major Gifts: Major gifts officers will have a portfolio of prospects that will include individuals, major prospect congregations and conferences. Officers will serve as “moves managers,” engaging the Collegium and other senior leadership in the cultivation and solicitation of prospects. For conference and church prospects, officers will work closely with Congregational Mission Support staff to identify directed giving opportunities as part of proposals for comprehensive financial support. For individual prospects, the work will include an emphasis on legacy giving in addition to outright gifts and will incorporate the “Best Minds” work. The major gifts program will be supported by a prospect research staff person.

Financial Development – Annual Giving: A major emphasis of the new office will be to build a broad base of individual financial support for the work of the national and global ministries. This work will include expanding our work in direct mail / electronic solicitation, creating an aggressive donor acquisition program, and coordinating the work of the special mission offerings.

Financial Development – Congregational Mission Support: We will continue to provide support to Conference staff in promoting basic support and the special offerings, and to internal staff in identifying opportunities for directed congregational support. A major emphasis will be the creation, maintenance and dissemination of a catalog for giving that identifies opportunities for directed giving to conferences and the national church.

Financial Development – Legacy Giving: In addition to continuing the work of resourcing local congregations and the institutions of the Church in planned giving, and in administration of the life income gift program, a major new emphasis will be working with major gift staff to identify and successfully solicit prospects for legacy gifts to the national and global ministries.

September 2013