



What If Campaign

28 days of Prayer

As we embark on our "What If" journey together, we want to use prayer as our guiding focus. You are invited to pray this simple prayer with us daily as we move through the campaign:

God, what is it you are asking me to do during SUMC's "What If" campaign? How can I be in prayer for and in service to others?

Be open to hearing from God about how he can use you to help SUMC position itself to move confidently into the future God has in mind for us as a congregation.

Generosity is grounded in gratitude, revealed in prayer, and lived in faith!

Day 1

Debt can be a hard thing. Debt can impact families from generation to generation (at least, in a way). Debt can impact businesses and even churches.

In Old Testament times, God did not want families in debt to continue to be impoverished (and enslaved due to debt) from generation to generation. So, there were laws given from God to the Israelite people to prevent that from occurring. From a simplistic point of view, one law allowed someone enslaved into debt to have that debt released after 7 years. And then, there was the year of Jubilee. (See Leviticus 25:8-13.) That year, after 7 cycles of 7 years, was a big deal. In the year of the Jubilee, the law called for all ancestral land that had been given up, to be given back to the original owners, slaves and prisoners freed, debts forgiven. There is debate about whether the year of Jubilee was ever celebrated (or how often) and whether the year was really the 49th year or the 50th year. Whether this really occurred or not and if it occurred, whether it occurred in the 49th or 50th year is not important. The point was valid then and is still valid today: debt is hard, and it has many impacts. Wouldn't it be great to be freed from being enslaved to debt?

Our church has acquired a significant amount of debt over the years, all was felt necessary to allow us to do ministry in this community. However, we may just be at a point in the history of our church when we would and should say that "debt is hard." In fact, the debt we now have may in fact be preventing us from doing ministry in the ways this community needs.

What if we celebrated the Jubilee year and the debt was just automatically forgiven? That would be nice, but it doesn't work that way. If we are to eliminate our debt which would allow us to do so much more in the community, we must do it ourselves.

The passage in Leviticus called to "blow the ram's horn loud and long throughout the land" to begin the year of the Jubilee. Maybe we should listen and see if we can hear the ram's horn being blown loud and long today. If we don't hear it, maybe we should be doing the blowing. If we can hear it, when we hear it, let it start a time of eliminating our debt, being freed from the chains that shackle us and that keep us from doing ministry in the name of Christ.

Pray: God, help us hear the joyful noise proclaiming the year when our debt is eliminated. And help me understand how I can be a part of that. Amen

Doug Shinkle

Day 2

Fellow SUMC members—

When I first learned of the church leadership's campaign to retire the debt, I thought, "In the middle of a pandemic? Whose crazy idea is that?" But the more I thought about it, I came to the conclusion that man's history in the world has rarely taken place outside of some sort of crisis happening somewhere in the background. Just in the last century alone in this country we have faced such traumatic events as assassinations or attempted assassinations of well-known leaders, 9-11 terrorist attacks, many wars, the pandemic of 1918, and numerous financial crises including the Great Depression, and, well, the list goes on and on. In fact, it is rare that we are not in the middle of some sort of crises, personal or as a community.

Charles Dickens probably said it best in the *Tale of Two Cities* when he penned that famous opening line, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." For you see, when things seem to be caving in all around you, for others it has proven to be a great opportunity not just to survive but to thrive. For instance, a company like Amazon was certainly successful prior to our current pandemic. But when people realized they could stay safe and well in their own homes and get about anything they wanted with the click of a mouse, things for Amazon and other companies with a similar business model exploded. Porches and front steps have become delivery stops and not just entrances to our homes. Bicycle shops have reportedly been backlogged with repair and maintenance requests, and the sales of new bikes have exceeded their supply.

That got me to thinking. While there are situations all around us of serious trouble including the illness and even death of friends and loved ones from this terrible virus, job losses, business failures, evictions, and long lines at food pantries and food banks, to mention a few, there are people within our own midst that may have found themselves, in some ways, better positioned to respond to this financial campaign than in pre-pandemic days. Real estate agents, in fact, report that business has never been better. With mortgage interest rates having plummeted due in part to the pandemic, some homes in the area are going for over list price with multiple offers. Some companies have been able to pivot their production to PPE that have seen their profits soar. Here are four advantageous situations in which some of us may have found ourselves:

Eating at home and lack of travel—While many of us relish in the thought of going out to our favorite places to eat or new and different places, and traveling to those familiar destinations or new adventures that we have longed to visit for years, I don't know of many people who haven't pressed "pause" on these activities and the expenses that surround them. We all hope to resume those activities in the near future, but where has the money gone that would formerly have been used to underwrite those endeavors? Some have just put it in a savings account.

Stimulus checks—for many people these and other "safety net" programs have been life savers to get them through some really tough times. Other people have confessed that while not really needed, it has been nice having the extra money. National surveys have shown that folks in this group most often either save it or pay down some debts that aren't really pressing.

Reduced commuting expenses and reduced driving in general—Quite a few people are now able to work remotely, thus reducing the cost of commuting. I myself have seen much less traffic on the road since the pandemic hit. I know of one case where a person has 400 miles less in commuter miles a week due to that. His company doesn't foresee that changing in the near future even with the lessening of the pandemic. Others of us are finding our miles traveled have been pared way back just to stay safe. One person the other day told me he doesn't think he has driven his car 1,000 miles in the last year.

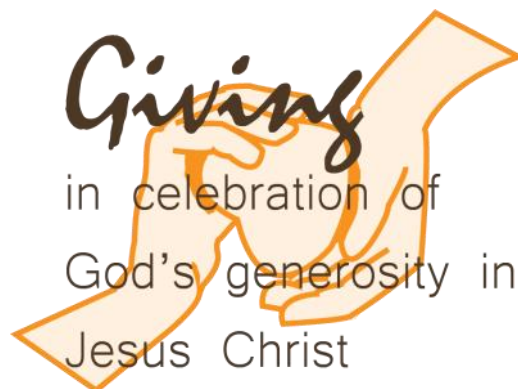
Charitable contributions and IRA's—Those of us fortunate enough to have Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA's) for which we have put pre-tax money away to use eventually find out that if you don't pull it out, eventually the government sets up withdrawals under a Required Minimum Withdrawal (RMD). Since the most recent tax law change has meant that itemizing deductions for many is no longer advantageous, charitable deductions no longer have the same allure tax wise. But for many people contributing their IRA withdrawals can have a significant tax advantage. Anybody considering that as a way to contribute should check with a tax professional or financial advisor to see if they qualify.

This is not meant to be an all-inclusive list. Everybody's situation can be somewhat different. Some hourly front line workers, for instance, have found their work hours have increased due to the pandemic such that they may have seen a 30-40% increase in pay.

Lastly, our church leadership has indicated that this debt retirement campaign, if successful, will be able to free up finances that can go toward outreach and helping those in need. I would say we need to hold them at their word, meaning that if we just put those financial resources into glorifying our own edifice, then we will have accomplished very little. We should plan to keep up and maintain what we have, but I understand that there are already plans in place to do that. I have some suggestions for how we can spend this newly found money and hopefully others will as well. I leave you with a famous quote from our founder, John Wesley:

"Do all the good you can,
By all means you can,
In all the ways that you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times that you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can"

Dick Bender



Day 3

As we learn through study we are called to: give generously, save wisely and to live appropriately. As we learn through life experience, it is ok to restart and rededicate ourselves to these principles. I am prayerfully rededicating myself to these principles and restarting actions to live those out.

Blessings,
Lesa Bellin

Day 4

I pray that as we reflect on all of the gifts we have received from our Heavenly Father we will be reminded that we are responsible for being a good steward of these gifts, faithfully using them and being dependable in our use of them as we fulfill the purposes for which God intended.

Ann Morrison

Day 5

About 15 years ago or so I begged my husband to take the Dave Ramsey Financial Peace course. We had a good amount of debt and it was weighing heavily on my heart. It just added to all the other chaos in my life that made me feel out of control. He kept saying no. He figured it was just like all the other advice, scams, and schemes everyone was offering. But eventually Dave, God, and I wore him down and in the end he relented. Of course, you know what they say, "Be careful what you wish for." Now he watches our expenditures like a hawk and has taught the course more times than I can count. Dave's goal isn't to make you wealthy for the sake of having all the "things" you want or so you can keep up with appearances. Dave wants you to build wealth so that you can use your resources to grow *God's* kingdom. Dave's number one rule, even while you still have debt, is to pay God first. Once you have control of your money, you are able to give even more. This is why Dave's methods are so popular. It's the philosophy behind all his exercises. We did pay off all of our debt and we do give more generously to God's work. I'm not trying to give a plug to Dave Ramsey, although I do consider his course one of the many and true blessings God has given us, but as a testament that once you give God control of your money you then have the opportunity to bless others more abundantly.

April Patterson

Day 6

The Bible warns us not to be a slave to the lender, but all of us fall into that trap almost daily. I know I do. Paying off debt is freeing, and aren't we ready as a congregation to be free? Free to give to our church family and community in a way we haven't been able to do for some time? Imagine the changes we will make in the lives of those we serve? It's going to take time and diligence, but Proverbs 21:5 states, "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty."

I know the generosity of the people of SUMC. I have seen it firsthand when I was on staff. I also know personally that I could do more. I know I can plan and work harder for the prosperity of our church. Won't you join me?

In God's Peace and Prosperity,

Joy Eder

Day 7

I don't recall the exact date when I first attended SUMC with my two children, one age 10 and the other 5. As a single parent, one who was sharing custody, I wasn't sure what to expect. That 10-year-old is now 50; so I'm guessing it was nearly 40 years ago. Money was definitely tight back then. I couldn't even afford to buy the brand of jeans my son wanted so that he could have ones like the other 4th graders in his new school had. But we did have a roof over our head as we moved from the north side of Indy to the south side to be near my new teaching job, one I felt so blessed to have considering I had not even applied for that job. It was that job that brought me to the south side. What actually got me to SUMC was that I saw the pastor on TV talking about the new court-ordered busing that was to begin that fall. As a teacher in one of the schools to be involved in that order, I was soon to go through desegregation training.

As far as giving to church, there was no way I felt I could afford to tithe. I recall sitting at the kitchen table with my bills in front of me...along with a little card from SUMC which showed what a tithe versus a half tithe versus a quarter tithe, etc. would look like. For example, it showed different salaries and how much each of the above would be. I was thrilled with my new \$11,000 annual salary would do! I started to think I could at least do one of those. Once I began that journey, I was eventually able to move up to the full tithe. That was one of the smartest moves I had ever made financially. The other was to be debt free. Of course, the Dave Ramsey course offered at SUMC helped with that. Once I began to focus on what would be possible if I were debt free, my financial status began to turn around. It led to being debt free even of my mortgage!

Southport UMC offers so much to those within our walls and outside those walls. We do have a debt. That's a fact! I can only imagine what it would be like if we could become focused on committing ourselves to eliminating that debt. The freedom I felt once I was debt free was amazing. We can do this!

Loving and merciful Heavenly Father, give us your wisdom and the vision to see ourselves ridding our church's debt. Show each of us what we can do to make that possible and to keep our church debt free so that we can serve and love others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Billie Huntman

Day 8

I feel so blessed to be a part of the community of faith known as Southport United Methodist Church. Back in 1985, after moving to Indianapolis from Evansville, I met Carolyn Stumpf through work. When I told her we were looking for a new church home, she suggested that we visit SUMC. From our first visit, we knew SUMC was the right place for our family. At the time, our sons were seven and two.

SUMC has always been a place that welcomes and supports new people. We found wonderful worship and study opportunities. We found loving adults who helped to guide our sons through the tough years of middle and high school, who mentored them and loved them. We found friends who helped us get through the loss of beloved family members. We found Christian brothers and sisters who serve the Lord with joy. We found a community that follows Jesus' command to, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and to "Love your neighbor as yourself." Over the years, we have seen SUMC's love for God and for our neighbors. We know the future holds wonderful opportunities for this community to continue following Jesus.

Lord God, I thank you for the many blessings you have given to our community of faith. I pray that you will continue to show us how to love you and how to love our neighbors. I pray that you will show us how to live and love generously. Amen.

Connie Klipsch

Day 9

Eternal God, we the congregation of SUMC, endeavor now to pay off the mortgage on this building that is a house of salvation and grace, where Christians gather together to worship you in spirit and truth to learn of you, and to grow together in love.

We dedicate our efforts to you and work towards this goal of being debt-free in your name.

Amen.

Day 10

Prayer

Dear Lord

All of my life I have been richly blessed. I have always had a loving family, a home, food, clothing and many things. I also have many good Christian friends at our church. I have been blessed over and over with many resources. Many people of our community and the world are not as fortunate. They are poor, hungry, homeless, feel abandoned, and are searching for hope. Inspire me Lord to share with others. We are called as disciples of Jesus Christ to give from our abundance to those who go without. Inspire me to give my time, my spiritual gifts, and my financial support to this church so that it can eliminate debt and continue to provide love, hope, and help to the needy of our community and world.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord

Amen

Gary Davis

Day 11

Addressing giving and money, I have some quotes from a recent study by Max Lucado from his book Life Lesson from James. He said the following:

"Anxiety over money---keeping it, growing it, and protecting it ----can drive us far from our only true security in Christ... We are [then] on our way to spiritual bankruptcy."

As an older generation adult, I have strong feelings about protecting my treasures. But, I also see where my assets can help serve others NOW.

So, helping with the reduction of our debt at church is one way to gather money from all to do greater ministry opportunities with more funds.

In 1 Timothy 6:

v. 17 says, "Command... the rich... to put their hope not in wealth, but in God..."

v. 18 says, "Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share."

So let's all share in the joy of being able to share our assets and then be generous as a church in our good deeds.

Sandy Tilton

Day 12

Mark 4:19, "...but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."

My life is full of influencers and I guess yours is too. Choose any hour of the day and pay attention to how others will try to entice you with whatever they are trying to sell. Pay attention to the shiny, the pretty, the powerful, the popular and the new, both possessions and ideas, that are available.

I must guard against thinking that my possessions define me. When that happens I give a foothold to greed. Possessions are temporary and their popularity will fade. Only God's love lasts forever and never changes.

Think about who is influencing your money decisions. How can you let God be your influencer?

Dear Jesus, help me to be content with what I have. Show me how to filter the messages I hear each day and remain focused on You. Everything I have, including my wealth, is a gift from You. Help me to use it well so I might honor You in every area of my life.

Maggie Lucas

Day 13

Dave Ramsey has a section in his book Financial Peace titled – “To Give or Not to Give”

He states, in essence, no farmer has ever grown a crop unless he planted some seed. Personal growth requires that you give money away. The institution (our church) will survive if you don't give, but you will have missed an opportunity to benefit. If you feel as if you don't have enough to give, you can start by giving small amounts and by giving of your time. You can give something.

Somehow, giving reminds us that the world does not revolve around us and that no matter what our financial status is, someone else is always in a much worse situation than we are in. Good things that cannot be calculated or quantified are set in motion in our life and in our finances when we give.

You need to plant some seeds in self-growth, and you can do this only by giving.

Dave offers several scriptures that address giving:

Genesis 14:18-20	Matthew 23:23
Leviticus 27:30	Luke 11:42
Numbers 18:26	Luke 18:12
Deuteronomy 14:22	1 Corinthians 9:7
1 Chronicles 26:20	Hebrews 7:8
Malachi 3:7-12	

Our favorite verse is Luke 6:38:
Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.

This tells us, we will be blessed by our giving.

Margaret & Walt Trammell



Day 14

Southport United Methodist Church's Steadfast Love

Two definitions of steadfast are “firmly fixed in place” and “constant.” SUMC has been in the community of Southport over 172 years. Based on Wikipedia, the community of Southport was founded in 1828, so I think it is safe to say that SUMC could be considered a steadfast church in this community.

Love is much harder to find a simple definition. But for me, my understanding of love is based on two verses, John 3:16 -17. While the 16th verse is well known, I believe that the 17th verse is just as important: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

I am so thankful and blessed that God has been steadfast in his love of me! Ron and I have been at SUMC for about 13 years. This community of faith welcomed us the first day we walked in for a church service. This community has also supported us spiritually and allowed us to grow through learning. We have been able to serve in the SUMC community in ministries both inside and outside this building.

I believe another part of our response to God's steadfast love is the giving of money that he has provided and blessed us with. God uses these funds to allow SUMC to share God's love and introduce others to his son, Jesus. He uses our gifts of money not only to support this mission today, but will also use it in the future to continue to share his love with future generations.

While we have always given financially to SUMC, the “What if” campaign is asking us to give more. Ron and I are prayerfully considering how God is calling us to respond.

If you are like me, this might be slightly outside your comfort zone. But I know, oh how I truly know, how thankful I am for God's gift of Jesus in my life. He loved me so much that he sent Jesus to save me. He has also provided for me in many ways, at many times, when I was not sure what to do or what direction to go.

Please join me in prayer, remembering God's love and his steadfastness in your life, thanking him for how SUMC has impacted your life and asking him for guidance on how to support SUMC in this desire to better serve our community and to teach others about God's steadfast love.

Peggy Boyll

Day 15

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:1-2

These are some of my favorite verses in the Bible because I think they perfectly encapsulate the basics of the Christian life. The way the verses were originally written makes it clear that the main command is "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Basically - the command is to live the life that God is calling us to live. Everything else in these verses supports that main theme. The passage starts by referring to the great heroes of the faith, listed in the previous chapter of Hebrews. The example of these people gives us the motivation to follow God. If you are like me, there are many times when things seem too difficult or I get discouraged. Of course, there are plenty of times when I fail to do the right thing, but when I do succeed, it is often because of the inspiration I have received from other people. Some of those are the people listed in the Bible. Others are people I have known in my own life, including folks at SUMC. That is part of the importance of the church community - we can provide encouragement to each other by living our life and faith together.

This passage also tells us how to run the race. Specifically, it tells us to lay aside those things that are holding us back - and it references both "weight" and "sin." "Sin" is easier to define, though it is hard to avoid. But I am intrigued by the word "weight." It seems to be different than "sin," so maybe it refers to things that aren't necessarily wrong, but are still interfering with our ability to serve God. Perhaps in the life of the church, our load of debt might be an example of this. It was taken on for good reasons, but at the current moment, it is holding us back from ministry opportunities that we might otherwise be able to pursue. Getting rid of this "weight" may enable us to run our race more effectively.

Finally, the passage tells us the purpose of our race. We are to fix our eyes on Jesus, the "author and perfecter of our faith." The goal of our lives is not personal acclaim or comfort. It is not even the pursuit of good works or avoiding sin (although those are certainly good things). The goal of the race is to pursue a relationship with Jesus himself, and to help others to do the same. So, let's keep our eyes on the prize and do the work that is necessary to run the race as well as we can, both in our individual lives and as a church body.

Chris Hiller

Day 16

Our help is in the Name of the Lord, who has made heaven and earth.

We believe that God has ordained SUMC to minister to Southport, Indiana and to the world.

We pray that the hand of the Lord will be upon us and that he will prosper us by his grace, so that we may finish the work of paying off our mortgage.

We pray joyfully today to transform our bond of indebtedness into the incense of humble gratitude.

Amen.

Day 17

In the Bible, people living in community is emphasized multiple times. We are not meant to be alone. Coming to a new church was very scary. When my girls and I came to SUMC in August 2010, we were welcomed with open arms. Everyone here was both warm and helpful, inviting the girls to children's church while I attended service.

Thereafter, we became involved in many different activities and groups – IHN, Bible studies, Ronald McDonald House, Leadership Team, Youth Group and God's Workers. Support, love, and fellowship have always been steadfast at SUMC.

Being a single mom has been difficult, but the SUMC community have been mentors to the girls and I in our faith and our lives. I know our journey to, and involvement with, SUMC has been God-driven.

This year has been particularly difficult due to the limitations COVID has created. It has made me realize even more so that it is a blessing to have a place to worship and commune with our church family. While it is merely a building, it is also a place to go for worship, fellowship, planning/implementation, growth and so much more.

People, like me, seek out new places to worship for various reasons and it's important that we as the SUMC community support and help in the care and sustainment of our church so we can continue to 'be the church' for our community.

Bev Riddle

Day 18

ALL GOOD GIFTS

One of my favorite musicals is “Godspell,” based on Joseph’s story from Genesis. The song “All Good Gifts” is a beautiful reminder that all we have comes from God. It took a long while for me to understand that we cannot take credit for our blessings. They come from heaven above and not from our own doing. God is the giver of anything that is good: our resources, our talents, our passion for life, our daily needs, and our purpose in life.

It was more difficult to understand that if all good things come from God, what about the challenges, struggles and all that we would call not good, even bad. Joseph told his brothers, “What you intended for evil, God meant for good” in Genesis 50:20. Every situation, no matter how difficult, is a gift and designed to bring us good. Read these lyrics from “Godspell:”

We plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land.
But it is fed and watered by God’s almighty hand...
He sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain...
The breezes and the sunshine, and soft refreshing rain...

We thank thee then, O Father, for all things bright and good,
The seedtime and the harvest, our life, our health, our food,
No gifts have we to offer for all thy love imparts
But that which thou desirest, our humble thankful hearts!

All good gifts around us
Are sent from Heaven above...
So thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord for all His love...
I really wanna thank you, Lord!

Gracious God,
We thank you for ALL gifts. Encourage us and show us how we may use them to serve others in ways that are pleasing to you. Amen

Sherry Davis

Day 19

The Heart of a Cheerful Giver

Texts:

1. “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7

2. 1 Chronicles Chapter 29

Devotional:

I’m sure many of us have heard the phrase “God loves a cheerful giver” at some point in our lives, but often it is difficult to have a right attitude toward giving. At times, I have found that the terms ‘reluctant’, ‘annoyed’ or ‘guilty’ come closer to describing how I’ve felt about the topic of giving. Yet, clearly, this is not our Lord’s intention for his children. How, then, does one become a *cheerful* giver, one who gives not “reluctantly or under compulsion” but rather out of a grateful heart? Perhaps King David has some wisdom to share with us.

David, often described as “a man after God’s own heart”, had a life-long desire to “build a house for the Name of the Lord my God.” (1 Chronicles 22:7) However, at several points in 1 Chronicles, David shared that God told him this was not his plan. Instead, it would be his son, Solomon, who would build the temple that would be God’s ‘resting place’ on Earth. In Chapter 29, late in life, we find David in the process of transferring the office of King from himself to Solomon. While doing so, he again addresses the topic of building the temple, and tells the Israelites that young King Solomon will need their support. He then gives all of his personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple, in the process inspiring the rest of the Israelites to do the same. Verse 9 says:

“The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly.”

Not only was a huge sum of money collected to support Solomon in the work of building a temple for the Lord, but it was given ‘freely and wholeheartedly’ - one might say, ‘with a cheerful heart’. How were David - and the Israelites - able to have such cheerful hearts while giving so sacrificially?

As we read further, in v 14, David begins a prayer of praise to God for this experience, and then says the following words:

“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand....as for this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you”

David - and by extension, the Israelites, understood that all of their resources were originally from God. Their time, their possessions, their land, their money - all of it had come to them as a gift, a blessing from God. Even the money they had earned by working was theirs only because God had blessed them with good health and skills that enabled them to work.

When we, like David and the Israelites, understand that all of our blessings - financial and otherwise - ultimately have their source in God, we are freed up to behave generously. We understand that we are not owners but rather *stewards* or *caretakers* of our resources, and that they have been given to us to bless others. Furthermore, as we use our resources to bless others generously, we are blessed by participating in God’s holy work - the working out of his plans in the lives of those around us.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for all the ways you have blessed us. Please give us hearts that are cheerful to give, and grant us the ability to understand that all that we have - and all that we are - are gifts from you. In your name we pray, Amen

Dana-Lynn Hiller

Day 20

I grew up in the Methodist church. I married a good Baptist girl. So in the early 1980s, as a young husband, young father, and a self-described good person, I expected that I would attend church with my family.

When I first started attending SUMC, I did it so that I could simply “check the box: Yes we go to church.” Something pretty cool happened along the way though. Probably not to your surprise, and without any great fanfare or fuss, the people of SUMC accepted us unconditionally and with love into the church family. Through the years, that love rubbed off on me. That love helped me to be more receptive to God’s love.

Consequently, SUMC has become more and more a part of my identity. At SUMC I learned to pay more attention to the Bible, and became more interested in the Bible. I’ve learned about the significance of the Old Testament prophecies that predicted the coming of our Messiah Jesus. I’ve gained a better understanding of the tricky parables taught by Jesus. Above all, I’ve learned that God IS love and learned that to be more loving is what God wants of me. SUMC has helped me to be more loving and kind.

I’ve learned how to pray. When the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord teach us to pray like you pray,” Jesus taught them (and us) the Lord’s Prayer. Over the years at SUMC, I’ve learned the significance of and appreciate the instruction from Jesus regarding, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” I’ve learned to ask God to show me His will, lead me to love, and guide me in my actions.

One of my most significant moments of clarity in receiving God’s will was during a prayer vigil regarding church tithing, gifts, and financial commitment. As a young working parent, it is so very easy to justify prioritizing family needs and daily budget demands before contributing to the church. However, during a budget campaign in the 1990’s to fund the construction of the west education wing, the fund-raising team insisted that we consider our commitment to that effort after, and only after, we sought God’s direction through prayer. I can distinctly remember God’s guidance regarding this time of tough decisions. Through prayer, I could actually feel and hear God leading me to commit to give a significant amount (to us) of money to the capital campaign. My wife Connie was also hearing God say that we should increase our weekly giving. We turned our decision over to God and did both. We believe from that moment forward that the monetary contributions that we make to SUMC are truly part of God’s will for our lives.

As we all contemplate our personal gifts and what we can afford to dedicate to the “What If” Campaign please, please pray about it. I’m very optimistic that together we can pay off this debt and realize even more of God’s will through SUMC.

Together we can all “Check the box: We paid off our church debt.”

Peace and love,
John Klipsch

Day 21

Father,
we praise you for the generosity of our members,
families, and friends, who continue to give of
themselves in service to this congregation.

We are especially thankful for the faithful prayers of
all your people that will go with us as we work
towards paying off our mortgage.

We are committed to the "What If" journey, for our
children, for our church, and for our community.

We thank you for all you do for us Father.
Amen

Day 22

We offer to you ourselves and our church:
brick and mortar, wood and nails,
offerings from our labor,
our hands to do your will,
and most especially
our hearts that are ready to serve.

Accept all these for the sake of him
who gave himself for us,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Day 23

Dear Fellow SUMC members,

I am a self-proclaimed procrastinator so of course I waited to the last minute to send in my piece for the What If Campaign. I had some ideas in my mind and heart about what I wanted to say, and I never took the time to put it into words. Knowing I was struggling a little and procrastinating, God in His all loving and all wise way, helped me one more time. My daily devotional, on the day I was to submit something for the What If Campaign, was entitled Practical Financial Wisdom. It gave beautiful insight and some great advice about how to spend the money we have been entrusted. I would like to share some of these:

Acknowledge everything we have comes from God! He has given us the physical and/or mental capacities to earn money. He has opened the doors for opportunity. Thank Him!

We have been entrusted with God's money. Take this seriously. We will be held accountable with what we do with it. God expects us to be good stewards.

God has blessed us so we can be a blessing to others. Choose to be a conduit to allow his resources to overflow to others.

Prayerfully set financial goals and ask Christ to help you prioritize your spending. Be willing to let spiritual needs trump temporal wants.

These were borrowed from Julie Rayburn in Be Still and Know.

What I truly liked about this devotional was the reminder that everything we have comes from God. It is his resources we are entrusted with and He always provides. When I have wondered how I would make it to the next paycheck or pay all of the bills that month, He has provided a means. Sometimes it's telling me to buckle down more and other times it is an unexpected check that arrives at that perfect time.

God has blessed me in so many ways, and I want to be able to share those blessings with as many people as possible. Through the What If Campaign, I feel this church with its mission will be able to reach out beyond our doors and help the community, the city and the world because of the financial resources that will be available to help.

I pray everyone will prayerfully consider how to be involved with this part of discipleship.

Blessings to all,
Karen Decatur

Day 24

Journey to Tithing

I started attending this church when I was about 3 weeks old. I was baptized here at age 11 weeks old. I was confirmed at this church at 13 years old. I was raised in this church and was taught at an early age to give an offering to the church regularly. I met my wife, Sandy, when we were in college in Terre Haute back in 1983. Eventually, we were married right here in this sanctuary, on August 22, 1987, and have continued to attend since then.

I started giving offerings to the church when I was very young. My parents always gave my brother and sister and I a nickel or dime to place in the Sunday school offering each Sunday. On our birthday, we would get our regular offering plus a number of pennies to match our age to put in the offering as well. Once Sandy and I were married, we developed a budget to determine how we would spend our money. One line item on that budget was "church offering," just like my parents had taught me. We were young, we earned decent salaries, but we were certainly not rich by our standards. We had college loans, and had just purchased a house, so we had to be careful with our spending. Based on that, we started off budgeting something like \$50-\$100 per month for our church offering. Each year, we would increase that amount, and we felt pretty good about our offering. When thinking about our pledge each year, I would remember what my parents told me years ago, "Any gift that you give to the church will be returned to you in a greater amount than what you originally gave" or better yet "you cannot out give the Lord." It seemed to me that each year that we increased our offerings, we were blessed with a new job, a significant raise, or some other adjustment that allowed us to make that gift without much pain. My parents were right. You cannot out give the Lord.

Well, this process was repeated for many years, and at some point, I began to think about tithing. Then, in December of 2000, my grandmother died. I was the one that was assigned to go through all of her paperwork to determine what we needed to keep and what could be thrown away. I was amazed at the things that she had kept. One of those amazing finds was the graduation certificates for both of my grandparents from Bible College in 1939, and the certificate of ordination for my grandfather. I had not known that they had attended seminary together, or that he was ordained. Another item that she kept was all of the pay stubs from my grandfather who had died 26 years earlier, in 1974. As I looked at those pay stubs, I found that on each and every one, my grandfather had calculated his tithe, to insure that he paid God first.

This seemed to be on my mind a lot, so as the next pledge campaign approached, I started doing some research to determine the exact definition of tithing. As a logical thinker, I wanted to know the specifics before I committed myself. I had questions such as:

Is a tithe 10% of your gross wages or net wages?

How do you account for gifts?

What about tax refunds?

What about earnings in your 401k, etc.

I looked up information in this regard on the internet, and found most of the answers that I was looking for, but I still had some questions. I set up a meeting with Ed Beedle, the associate pastor here at that time, and we discussed these things to my satisfaction. So, in late 2002, during the 2003 pledge campaign, Sandy and I decided to start tithing. Almost immediately after that, we received the most frightful news of our lives. Sandy was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 37.

Honestly, I do not remember praying much about the tithing or our financial situation after the diagnosis. I do remember though praying a lot for Sandy's recovery. She went through two life threatening complications as a part of her treatment and reconstruction, over and above the cancer itself. In retrospect, these things do not seem to be purely coincidental. I believe that God intended for my grandmother to save those pay stubs for me to see. That gave Sandy and me that last nudge that we needed to start tithing. I believe that God used the timing of this tithing discussion and Sandy's illness to shift my focus away from the analysis, and toward faith that God would take care of Sandy, as well as our finances.

Sandy is living proof that God did take care of her, and I can confirm to you that God did not allow her illness to bankrupt us. We have tried to stay faithful to God and we continue to tithe today. We have also made offering commitments to the past capital stewardship campaigns and plan to do so again this year. God has blessed my family and me in many ways and we intend to stay faithful to him through our tithes and offerings.

May God bless you all.

Doug Lewis

Day 25

Dear Lord,

Thank you for what you have been doing for me. I'm coming to you today to help guide me to make good choices with my finances so that I may be able to help reduce the debt at my church to deliver your grace and hope to others within our community. Please open new doors of opportunities and blessings in my life.

In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen

Sandy Lewis

Day 26

We, the people of this congregation, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, grateful for our heritage, aware of the sacrifices of our mothers and fathers in the faith, and confessing that apart from you our effort will not succeed, dedicate ourselves anew to the worship and service of almighty God by doing all in our power to eliminate the debt on our building so that we may better serve Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Day 27

Almighty God,

Our prayers rise before you in thanksgiving for all that you have done among us – for your blessings of property, for this building, for our faith in your giving us a purpose and mission to pay off the debt on this building.

Fill us constantly with faith and inspiration so that we might follow your lead all our days, and continue to be visionaries in spreading our mission beyond ourselves for the sake of your holy kingdom.

We ask this in Jesus name.
Amen

Day 28

Oh Lord, You have dealt bountifully with me (Psalm 13:6) and I am thankful that You trust me as a steward of that bounty.

What I do today is not for today only, but for others in the future as well. Please help me discern Your "What If" plan for my life and this congregation so we may impact future generations.

I pray this in the name of my savior Jesus.

Amen

Phil Sell

