

# CASE STUDY

## Scrap Your Boring Annual Campaign

How Three Churches  
Increased Ministry Impact by  
Building Cultures of Generosity





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## SUMMARY

Three pastors reflect on their experiences working with Horizons Stewardship as a guide through a fully integrated annual campaign effort that combined contextually relevant strategies with best practices that resulted in both spiritual growth and increased generosity.

This case study summarizes each church's experience in:

- Identifying their need to re-imagine annual ministry funding
- Developing a vision for generosity
- Evaluating the value of outside counsel
- Working with outside counsel
- Measuring the results
- Advice for Ministry Leaders

## PASTORS AND CHURCHES FEATURED

**Rev. Dr. Russ Peterman**

**University Christian Church (Fort Worth, Texas)**

*Average Weekly Attendance: 1,100*

**Pastor Annette Stiles Pendergrass**

**Suntree United Methodist Church (Melbourne, Florida)**

*Average Weekly Attendance: 750*

**The Rev. Richard Weinberg**

**St. Margaret's Episcopal Church (Washington, DC)**

*Average Weekly Attendance: 150*



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## HOW THREE CHURCHES INCREASED MINISTRY IMPACT BY BUILDING CULTURES OF GENEROSITY

Many churches approach annual campaigns in the same way every year, without much thought or creativity. As the time on the calendar rolls around every twelve months, last year's tired campaign is dusted off, a few tweaks are made, and then it's launched. Each year, the goal is just to get through it, ensure the budget is fully funded, and move on.

Increasing competition for the hearts, minds, and giving of church members, and the persistent decline in giving to religion is creating an urgent need for church leaders to rethink their approach to ministry funding, church finances, and budgeting.

These three churches decided to take a different approach and used a guided strategy called Pathways to Generosity to move the focus from the church's need to receive financial resources onto the need of their givers to grow spiritually. This decision to shift from fundraising to disciple making not only provided significantly more resources to impact in their mission fields, it also deepened the spiritual engagement of their givers.

### RE-IMAGINING THE ANNUAL CAMPAIGN

“Our congregation hadn't participated in a strategist-led approach to ministry funding since 2000,” says Dr. Peterman. “During a leadership retreat in 2019, Dr. Clif Christopher, founder of Horizons, came to speak to our Board. One of the things he shared was that many leaders tend to think about stewardship only in terms of managing money. But stewardship is deeply embedded into the life of a Christian because it is grounded in our understanding of the Lordship of Christ.”

“We walked away from that experience recognizing that we needed to think bigger when it came to stewardship and generosity, and it needed to involve the entire congregation through some type of discipleship initiative,” says Dr. Peterman.



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Pastor Annette says, “Our church has historically been a church that had enough to operate at desired levels. The result was that money was rarely talked about.”

“One of the first things I observed upon arrival was that this church had always been satisfied in their ability to just get by. With some stressful transitions, the church had been struggling to keep up with the debt service, pay its apportionments, and fund ministry,” says Pastor Annette.

Pastor Weinberg says, “Being new to my role, I knew we needed to approach our annual campaign differently. Our ability to successfully inspire people to give was going to give us the capacity to deliver on our current and future ministry opportunities.”

## DEVELOPING A VISION FOR GENEROSITY

“Horizons helped us understand we needed to expand our thinking beyond stewardship as a tactical approach to budgeting and begin to see it as a spiritual journey that results in generous disciples,” says Dr. Peterman. “This was very new for us.”

Pastor Annette says, “Our strategy had been to bring operations in alignment with actual giving. But that was only going to get the church so far down the road because you can only cut so deep before you prevent the work of the church from happening.” She continues, “We needed to raise our income rather than just trust in our ability to control expenses.”

“Our parish had arguably reached one of the lowest points in its 125-year history. Giving was down with no clear path to replace those giving dollars or households,” says Pastor Weinberg. “If we were going to live into our ministry potential, I knew the parish needed a new approach to stewardship and generosity.”



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## CHOOSING TO WORK WITH HORIZONS

Dr. Peterman says, “The Board already had so much trust in Dr. Christopher and Terry that moving forward with Horizons was an obvious next step for them.”

“That is not to say this was an easy decision necessarily. We knew we had to adopt a more strategic and relevant approach to ministry funding. But talking about money was difficult for our congregation. I suspect we are not the only ones for which this is true,” says Dr. Peterman.

Pastor Annette says, “The first time I brought up working with outside counsel, the finance committee immediately shot it down. It was all gloom and doom based on past experiences and perception of whether or not the church could afford it.” She continues, “But after showing them that current strategies of cost containment weren’t enough, I was able to build consensus to work with Horizons.”

“Horizons came highly recommended by my pastor network. None of my trusted advisors suggested I look anywhere else, and after Horizons met with my finance team and addressed their questions, everyone was on board,” says Pastor Annette.

Pastor Weinberg says, “Horizons came as a referral from a trusted ministry advisor. I was already talking to some other groups about a future capital campaign. But Horizons showed me how an intentional effort around generosity could rally the church behind a ministry vision that would solve some short-term goals that were most urgent.”

## WORKING WITH HORIZONS

“Horizons helped us incorporate disciplined thinking into ideas and tactics that were relevant for our church,” says Dr. Peterman. “It was a learning experience for everyone involved—including me, and since we had invested in Horizons, we committed to following through on what they asked us to do.”



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Pastor Annette says, “Horizons began with an assessment and then led us through an intentional process around annual giving. We learned we had been doing a lot of right things. But we had always tied outcomes to the budget instead of the discipleship process. This was a culture shift.”

“We appreciated that Horizons came with a clear plan. That allowed us to get started quickly and adapt a proven process to our setting,” says Pastor Weinberg. “It was very practical, which is what our church needed.”

## MEASURING THE RESULTS

“The results were beyond anything we might have anticipated. We experienced a 20 percent increase in giving and households participating. On top of that, 82 households completed estimates of giving for the first time,” says Dr. Peterman.

Dr. Peterman continues, “But more important than that, our church shifted in its thinking about generosity and stewardship. When you think in terms of funding the budget, stewardship is about a transaction. When you address the spiritual growth dimension of money, you achieve more generous disciples.”

“The results speak for themselves. We had 100 additional estimates of giving over the previous year,” says Pastor Annette. “Now we are positioned to address our debt service head-on without fear of diminishing our annual giving because our estimates of giving increased by 24.5 percent.”

Pastor Weinberg says, “Our parish ended our most recent budget year with a surplus for the first time in recent years. We were expecting a difficult financial year because of the loss of donors who gave 14 percent of our annual giving. With the guidance of Horizons Stewardship, not only did we make up this amount, we grew by an additional 13 percent.”



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“This generous result was made possible through 28 new households and because 76 percent increased their estimate of giving over the previous year,” says Pastor Weinberg. “This was truly a great experience.”

## ADVICE FOR OTHER MINISTRY LEADERS

“Shifting from a focus on membership to discipleship and from stewardship to generosity will change the culture of your church forever,” says Dr. Peterman.

Pastor Annette says, “Develop a vision for where you want to go. Don’t be afraid to challenge your leaders to grow in new ways, and be patient. Changing your culture is about transformation, not transactions.”

“Don’t overthink it. Just go for it. Creating a culture of generosity in your church is the right decision,” says Pastor Weinberg.

## NEXT STEPS

Your church can turn a fundraising event like a traditional annual campaign into discipleship and spiritual growth opportunities with the right partner and guide. As a result, you can not only fund more ministry but also make more disciples. The work of church leaders is never easy, but the work of the church is more important than ever.

Funding ministry is going to look very different moving forward. No pastor or church leadership team should feel like they have to do it alone. Horizons has guided thousands of churches across the country to raise billions of dollars that increased their capacity for mission impact. Their International Coaching Federation trained coaches and experienced consultants can help you develop a generosity strategy that will forever shift your future and ministry potential.



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## ABOUT HORIZONS STEWARDSHIP

**Horizons Stewardship** helps church and faith-based nonprofit leaders make disciples and fund ministry through a collaborative framework that is tailored to the unique culture of the church, aligned with leadership's vision, and implemented through coaching, planning, technology, and analytics to ensure the church lives into its full ministry potential and impact.

After more than two decades working with thousands of churches to raise billions of dollars for ministry projects, Horizons has refined a deeply integrated, spiritually focused approach that consistently results in more ministry funding and more effective disciple-making strategies.

Churches who partner with Horizons, on average, experience a **16 percent increase in giving within the first 12 months**. Visit [nextlevelgenerosity.com](https://nextlevelgenerosity.com) to discover a proven, effective process that will empower you to move forward with clarity and confidence.