

Storytelling and stewardship

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There are lessons you can borrow from the non-profit world. The non-profit world is largely your competition for stewardship dollars. But you've got two things they don't:

- Unprecedented time with the donors
- Theology

I will leave the theology up to actual theologians.



Tell me about your church

10 minutes in groups

What is your church known for?

What are your major initiatives?

Be prepared to share one or two words that describe your church in the chat.

What would be missing from your community if your church closed tomorrow?

Why I almost left my church
– and why I went back



The Best Dog Ever



Over the River and through the Woods



Our church is known for...

- Music and the arts
- Kentucky Refugee Ministries and STITCH
- Preschool
- Youth Program
- Connected congregation that cares for each other
- Church partnership in Nicaragua

The mission

Sharing Hope from the Heart of the Highlands

Mission Statement

Highland Presbyterian Church is a community of believers inspired by the love of Jesus Christ and biblical teachings. We believe we are called to guide our children, support our neighbors, comfort the troubled, soothe the suffering and bless the dying.

We give, we receive, we serve,
we teach, we question, we learn,
we sing, we laugh, we pray.

We strive to use our time and talents to serve God, one another, and the world, sharing hope from the heart of the Highlands.

What are some vision statements/mission statements that your churches have?

What are recent stewardship themes?

Do the two support each other?



The storytellers

- **A youth.** He stood in the pulpit and talked about what the church meant to him, and held pledge cards from about 20 other youth.
- **A young family.** All 5 stood in the pulpit and the mother talked about what the church meant to them – and cried. This was a family that had long attended our congregation, and so had the parents of the mother. You might not think this would be a good fit for this – but remember this: at any point in their lives, this family could have walked away. Why did they stay? What keeps them coming back?
- **A choir member.** This member shared what the choir had meant to them and why the church meant so much to them. Most of the people who were in worship would understand that the church had good music – but sometimes, people who are in the choir consider their singing to be their only needed contribution. What I'm looking for in that presentation is for the choir member to knock down that assumption.

Other possibilities

- While you can't ask someone from AA to speak in church – it's, you know, alcoholics ANONYMOUS – you could ask a representative from the group to give a brief, anonymous report of the number of people who typically attend and a note of thanks about how appreciative they are for the space. How to use that? In your newsletter or bulletin.
- A brief video greeting from Nicaragua in which they thank the church for the support they've received. Someone from your congregation introduces the video.
- Someone older in the congregation to talk about the love and care they've felt from the congregation as they've aged (or another appropriate topic).

Elements of a story

- Their name and how long they've been at the church.
- Why did they first start coming? How did they discover the church?
- Talk about a particular time when the church was very present for them.
 - *looking more for how they FEEL than exactly what happened*
- What do they participate in now and why?
- Why would they encourage people to support the church through a pledge or donation?
- Ask them to speak to your theme – in our case, it would be hope.

Groups and silos: how to reach everyone



Sunday worship is how most people think of church. But you're more than that one hour per week timeframe.



Groups in churches

- Men's fellowship
- Presbyterian Women
- Youth and their parents
- Food pantry volunteers
- Yoga
- Older Adults Group

Other groups

- **Sporadic attendees** – people who travel for work often, attend kids' sporting events, or people who simply are not every week worshippers. These may be families; they may have good intentions but simply are not tuned in.
- **Snowbirds** – do they miss the pledge season because they haven't returned from Arizona or Florida or... wherever?
- **Youth/Youth parents** – if youth group is on a Sunday night, as it is many places, you may find that the youth and their parents are not particularly connected with the rest of the church.
- **Choir** – I've found in my own church that yes, they are present on Sunday morning, but the feelings may be different. As I mentioned, some feel that their music is their gift, and don't regularly pledge.
- **School parents** – in our church, the school is entirely separate. In your congregation, things may be different, so I raise this to give you something to think about.
- **Elderly**, not attending but still part of the congregation

*What are some of the
groups in your churches?*

Share in the chat.



Silos and themes: pay
attention to the intersection





Silos

*Who will give
the message*

Theme

*What you want
them to say*

*The right person says the right
thing to the right group*

What's the right thing?

- Differs for every person.
- Someone who they relate to.
- Someone sincere.
- Fits the general theme/mission of the church.
 - The last one is a goal, and not mandatory. But generally speaking, you want to keep repeating the message that “our church is full of hope” or “our church loves Jesus” often enough that it becomes the identity, and people embrace it.

*Check in: are you getting
what you need here
today?*



Stories from churches



Forest Hill Presbyterian Church
Cleveland, OH

<https://www.fhcpresb.org/social-justice-outreach/stewardship-2015/stewardship-stories/>



**LaDon Headen: *Forest Hill Church – A “Doing Church”
Where Relationships Are Formed***

Shannon and LaDon Headen became acquainted with Forest Hill Presbyterian in 2013 after attending a friend’s wedding here. Shannon and their daughter Lotus attended for two weeks, LaDon joined them on the third, and they along with their two other children Lyric and Zen, have been coming ever since. Shannon is now the Director of Youth Ministries, and LaDon serves on the Nominating Committee, works the soundboard during worship services, and has taught Hip Hop classes as part of Black History Month programming.



Member LaDon
Headen

What stood out about Forest Hill to both LaDon and Shannon was its outreach – that it, as LaDon said, “did help other people, did more than just talk about what we should do and actually put things into action. This is a church that is actually doing, a doing church.”

What keeps LaDon coming back to Forest Hill also are the connections that he has made and relationships that he has formed that he would not have made in his everyday life. “And in doing that,” LaDon reflected, “I’ve gotten to know people and stories and events. And the talents and time that some of these people have given have enriched my life and made my life better.”

LaDon gave the example of how fellow member Jacob Stauffer became a role model for his eight-year-old son Zen. Jacob graduated from Villa Angela-St. Joseph in 2016 and played on the basketball team. Zen, while attending a game, observed the discipline of the student athletes and how they handled themselves both on and off the court. He was quite impressed with the players and grew in admiration, specifically for Jacob. LaDon said, “And now Jacob has this admirer, this fan that he never had before. But in addition, my son had another person that he could view as a role model.”

Pantry Guests: *Forest Hill Church – Being Part of the Kingdom of God (Abundance Pantry Part 2)*

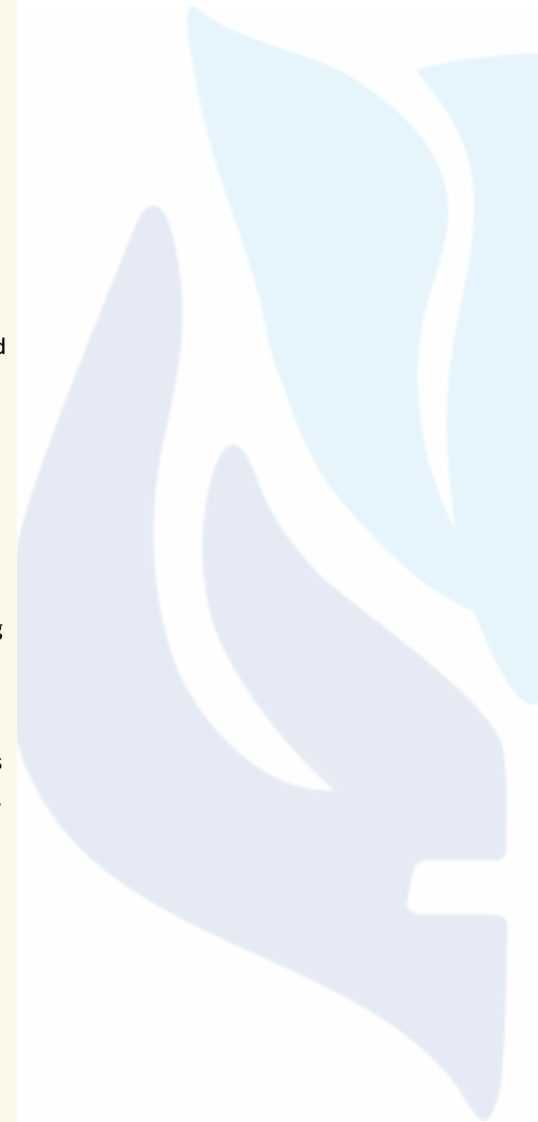
“Everybody has a story,” Paul Jennings said, referring to guests of the Abundance Food Pantry as he discussed his role in Forest Hill Church’s weekly program. Two guests who were kind enough to sit down and share their stories were John and Rebecca.

John was homeless for nine years and had stayed at 2100 Lakeside Men’s Shelter before securing an apartment in the Coventry area. He heard about Abundance Pantry by word of mouth. **Rebecca** lost her job when the golf club she was managing went into foreclosure and suddenly shut down the summer of 2016. She was directed to Forest Hill through the United Way 211 Help Line. Both have visited the Pantry for over a year.

While **John** is grateful for the food he receives, he also greatly appreciates how he and other guests are treated with respect, tolerance, patience, and love. He talked about the “natural order” of God’s love from one person to another. “It makes me want to follow that order, ‘cause when you take the time to do something for someone you don’t even know simply because of the love of Christ it’s overwhelming to me.” John indeed continues this order of love himself; he shops for his brother, who has medical issues, and picks up baby food for a woman in his building.

Rebecca is a single mom of two including a daughter with special needs who requires hospitalization. “Money’s tight right now trying to get by and take good care of them. I don’t come as much when the kids are at school. But, in the summer, honestly, I wouldn’t financially make it through.” Rebecca also talked about her first visit to the Pantry. “I was embarrassed because I’d never been in a situation like that and I was crying...She [volunteer Rosanna Sprague] was so kind and she just made me feel so comfortable, and that there was nothing to be ashamed of and that they’re there to help. She’s just, they’re all wonderful.”

The Abundance Pantry not only provides food for the body but also respite from the challenges of everyday life. John may have summed it up best when reflecting on the emotional benefits of the Pantry Lunch, held every fourth Thursday for its guests. “It’s a blessing because it gives them a sense of, what’s the word, normality? When you’re just being normal...just being part of the Kingdom of God.”



First Presbyterian Church
Delray Beach, Florida





Marie's Story

Marie Buss just celebrated her 95th birthday. Marie's family lived pretty far from church growing up, so it wasn't until later in her childhood when her brother started attending a church closer to home that she started attending regularly.

In 1992, when Hurricane Andrew stormed through Miami and Florida, Marie and her husband decided to wait it out with their son in his home. When they returned to their condo the back of it was missing. This was an unsettling time for Marie, one she remembers well. She and her husband decided to move out of Miami, which meant finding a new church home.

After visiting a number of congregations, they found their place at First Presbyterian. "I wanted a place that was welcoming, and I wanted to do something. I wanted to be able to make a difference." Marie wasn't interested in simply sitting and listening to someone else. "I finish a puzzle and I look at it and then think – what good did that do? It didn't help anyone, but sometimes you do have to unwind," she admitted.

When Marie started attending First, she quickly joined a small group of ladies with a "big official name" that she couldn't possibly remember. The group worked to make Christmas items for a bazaar and eventually started calling themselves Holly House. Marie is delighted to see that the group has grown and now there are even men who help set up the bazaar and sell things. Marie hasn't been able to attend for a couple of years for physical health reasons, but she still considers herself part of the group, and she is grateful for having found the group after living through Hurricane Andrew. She is also grateful that Holly House allows her to continue her calling to serve others. "Even though I can't attend; I still crochet sweaters that go to Hungary and migrant workers on the other coast. People in wheelchairs in nursing homes sit all day. Their legs get cold, and I make lap blankets for them."

Being at First helps Marie maintain her connection and closeness to God and her way to serve. "I have never expressed myself to anyone about how I feel about God. I experience God as a friend," she shared. "If you don't believe in God, how can you live a life? There are many days if it wasn't for God, I don't know how I would have existed. Problems and concerns that develop as you mature, get married, raise children - there are more and more opportunities for problems and my solution is to go to God. I don't get a bulletin from God or flashing lights, but it comes within me. All of a sudden, I realize I could do this or that. God is at work helping me think better."

Marie reads her bible daily and prays. She continues to serve by taking prayer requests from others. "I can pray in the moment," she said. "When someone says something to me, I can pray immediately. I don't need to go to a corner. I can pause, block everything out, and pray, wherever it is needed."





Pregi's Story

Pregi Febriani grew up in Indonesia and came to the U.S. for her bachelor's and master's degree in hospitality. She knew when she arrived in the U.S. that she wanted to find a community. "I was looking for a church family because I didn't have family in the U.S. The way I was raised, you always have God, and you can just pray, as simple as that, but I knew I also needed a community."

After moving to Florida with a friend, Pregi began sitting on the back row of congregations in search for the one she would call her home. "I am very introverted so if the church is too small everyone will know I am new, and if the church is too big it might not feel like a family. I would sit in the back and get a feel for the churches."

First Presbyterian was similar to her church back home. "The people greeted me and made me feel welcomed, but they didn't overwhelm me."

Even when Pregi works late nights at the hotel and restaurant, she still tries to get up and go to church. "My parents say that an hour at church can make your whole week different. You can read the Bible and pray but coming to church is a way to give yourself a break and be in community."

After her children were born, she appreciated that the church provided ways for families to gather. Now, as her children are aging, she values Dr. Hood's weekly prayers and meditation books. "Sometimes I feel like I pray the way I teach my children to pray. I just say, 'God thank you for this day, I hope it is good.' Dr. Hood's prayers and messages are educational and inspirational, and I like to have his book with me. I spend a lot of time in the car rider line at school to pick up my children. I can pull the book out and just read one paragraph again and again for inspiration. That is what I need sometimes. Other times, I can read pages; but God always finds a way to give me what I need at that time."

Pregi is grateful that she and her family call First Presbyterian their family here in the U.S.



When and where to share the stories



How to share stories



- From the Pulpit
- Website
- Newsletter
- Social Media
- Broadcast
- Podcast
- *and whatever else you have!*

From the pulpit

During your stewardship season, you want to have someone in the pulpit making the case for stewardship every week.

If pledge Sunday is November 5 – which is my birthday – start sharing stories each Sunday in October.

Wherever you share video

Share a link to your stewardship campaign pledge page in the description of the video.

The House Next Door: Gateway Presbyterian Church



Presbyterian Foundation
76 subscribers

Analytics

Edit video

👍 32



➦ Share

✂️ Clip

≡+ Save



1,743 views Jan 25, 2023 [GATEWAY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH](#)

What should a church do with property it no longer needs? Gateway Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, decided to use the manse that belongs to the church as housing for refugees moving to the area from Afghanistan. This beautiful act of hospitality is a new way to use existing property. Find out more in this short but powerful video.

Please note: We have no control over any ads placed on these videos by YouTube.

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Website

Build a landing page for stewardship for that year on your website. Share the link liberally.

Put *EVERYTHING* related to stewardship on that page, including HOW TO PLEDGE.

Put the stories on that page, too.

Newsletter

If your newsletter is monthly, you can put a special insert into it with all of the stories.

If it's weekly, share a story each week.

Social media

Whatever you've got, use it!

- If you broadcast your worship onto Facebook, post a link in the comments to your pledge page when the minute for mission is being given.
- If you have both a group and a page, share to BOTH.
- On Instagram, post the photo of the person sharing the story and put the link in the bio.

Make it easy

A very wise pastor I know – Rev. Matt Nickel, who was an associate at my church – would take content and gradually whittle it down for the platform.

- Newsletter article is the longest.
- Trim it down for the church bulletin.
- Trim it down for Facebook.
- Trim it down for Twitter.

For Twitter, all you want to do is pique their interest enough to go to your website.

Podcast

- If your church has a podcast, good for you! (We don't, but I think it would be great if we did.)
- If you just use the podcast to share the sermon, there's no reason you can use that same podcast to share a story from a member of your congregation.
- Have the pastor introduce them, the person shares their story, pastor thanks them, reminds people it's stewardship season, and pastor does the sermon. Use every medium you've got!

Don't forget the in-person options

- Have a youth parent speak to other youth parents
- Have a choir member speak to other choir members
- Heck, have attorneys speak to other attorneys

Think about the groups, and then the friendships and relationships in your church. This is less about storytelling and more about the ask.



WHO

**What
they
say**

*What am I leaving out?
Where else could you
share these stories?*



*What about this strikes you
as difficult?*

*What kinds of objections do
you anticipate?*



Let's talk video

Yes, absolutely use a pro if you have the budget or a willing volunteer. (The rest of us are jealous!)

You can make it really simple but still effective.

While it's tempting to cut out your already recorded worship service, if the subject isn't close to the camera, it won't work very well. To see the emotion, a closer up, more personal video works better.

What you want to create

- Engaging
- Personal
- If possible, unscripted (depending on their comfort level) – from the heart
- SHORT

How to get there:

- Film with them at church
- Ask them to film a video selfie-style at home

How to adapt this concept

Hi, I'm here with member Carol Smith. Carol was just telling me the other day that she's completed her pledge for 2024, and I'm so grateful for that.

What really moved me was the story that Carol told me about how the church has given her hope over the years.

Carol, can you tell the story again?

<Carol shares her story>

Thank you so much, Carol. You are a deeply valued member of our congregation, and God loves you. Thank you for sharing this wonderful story. It tells a message of hope that I'm excited to share.

Wrap up:

What was missing?

What questions do you still have?

How do you get all this done?



What are some of the numbers you can collect in your congregation?



Numbers that tell stories

1,544

items to Portland Avenue
Food Pantry



Numbers that tell stories

312

people attended 12-step
meetings in our church



Numbers that tell stories

52

Bible verses and uplifting
quotes placed on our sign



Numbers that tell stories



12,057

hours volunteered by our
congregation in our
community



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