

Be Prepared

*by Tom Wilkinson, Vice President, Development
The Florida United Methodist Foundation
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My scouting career ended in the late sixties when I was a Cub Scout, but one of my most prized possessions is the Pinewood Derby racecar that my dad and I built together. It now sits in a place of honor on the curio shelf in our living room, many years later, still gleaming bright red, a cherished memory from another time. Even though I didn't make it to the Boy Scouts, their motto, "be prepared," still resonates.

And now is the time of year to think about preparation as we enter the Advent season, preparing for God's audacious entry into human existence in the person of Jesus Christ. How do we prepare, how do we make ourselves ready? In our house we have tried to make Advent more than just those four Sundays when we sing *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. We light the candles on the Advent wreath, observe the Advent calendar, and try to make the journey toward Christmas as important as the destination itself.

Preparation is equally important in our stewardship lives. I recently had the privilege to co-lead a workshop at Fulford United Methodist Church in Miami with the Rev. Marta Burke, who is the pastor of that congregation. I talked about planned giving, especially how important it is for people to have a will and how faithful Christians can make a legacy gift to their church at life's end. Marta talked about end-of-life issues, and asked each person present to write either an epitaph or the opening paragraph of his or her own obituary. Talk about a daunting task! But it got me to thinking. How do I want to be remembered? What legacy do I want to leave?

One simple way to leave a legacy is to make a bequest to your church through your will or estate plan. It is especially fitting for faithful givers to make a gift to their church not only during their lifetime but also at the end of their life. A faithful tither can earmark ten percent of his or her estate to go to his or her church, as a lasting testament of a life of stewardship. Other planned giving options can allow the donor to make a gift to the church while retaining rights to the income that gift generates, thus benefiting not only the church but also the donor and his or her family as well.

Advent is all about the future. It is about looking ahead and anticipating the kingdom of God in all its fullness. Faithful stewards can help ensure that the kingdom will come for our children and grandchildren. Make a will. Make a gift. Be prepared.

As the stewardship voice of the Florida Conference, the Foundation is ready to help you, your family and your church with anything related to stewardship. Please call, click or write us at 1-800-282-8011, extension 106; www.fumf.org; or PO Box 3767, Lakeland, FL 33802.