

Igniting Stewardship

by Tom Wilkinson, Vice President, Development

If you've been watching television during this Advent season chances are good that you've seen one of the "*open hearts, open minds, open doors*" spots from the Igniting Ministry team, the welcoming and television ministry of the United Methodist Church. The spots air on national cable networks during Advent, Lent and the back-to-school season in late summer and early fall. The spots invite people in a deeply beautiful and meaningful way to visit a local United Methodist Church, where they are promised hospitality, welcome, friendship, understanding and peace from fellow faith-journeying travelers.

"What's that got to do with stewardship?" you might ask. I believe it has *everything* to do with stewardship. Congregations that practice healthy stewardship cannot help but be welcoming to newcomers, because a warm welcome is the first step toward involvement. Involvement leads to ownership, and ownership leads to commitment. Commitment leads to financial support – all of which leads to joyful stewardship of all that we are and all that we have, honoring God who has given us everything.

As we enter 2004, the Florida United Methodist Foundation encourages congregations to integrate stewardship into the everyday life of the church, to transform stewardship from a once-a-year campaign to an everyday faith discipline. Let us ignite our hearts and minds to ensure that our doors will always be open.

There are many ways to make a lasting, legacy gift to your church, to ensure that our doors will be open for new generations of people seeking God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. The simplest way is to make a bequest from your will or living trust. Other options, like Charitable Gift Annuities and related life income arrangements mean donors can make a gift to the church and receive an attractive guaranteed annuity payment for life – often at rates substantially higher than available in the market. Whatever the giving mechanism, regardless of whether the gift is made today or whether the church receives the gift sometime in the future, one fact remains: when we give joyously and generously, responding to God's amazing grace, we are blessed far beyond measure.

The Florida United Methodist Foundation is available to help. For more information or to schedule a confidential, no-cost, no-obligation consultation on how you can make a planned gift to your church, please call, click or write us at 800-282-8011, extension 106, www.fumf.org, or P.O. Box 3767, Lakeland, FL 33802.