



WESTWOOD

The Spire • October 2015

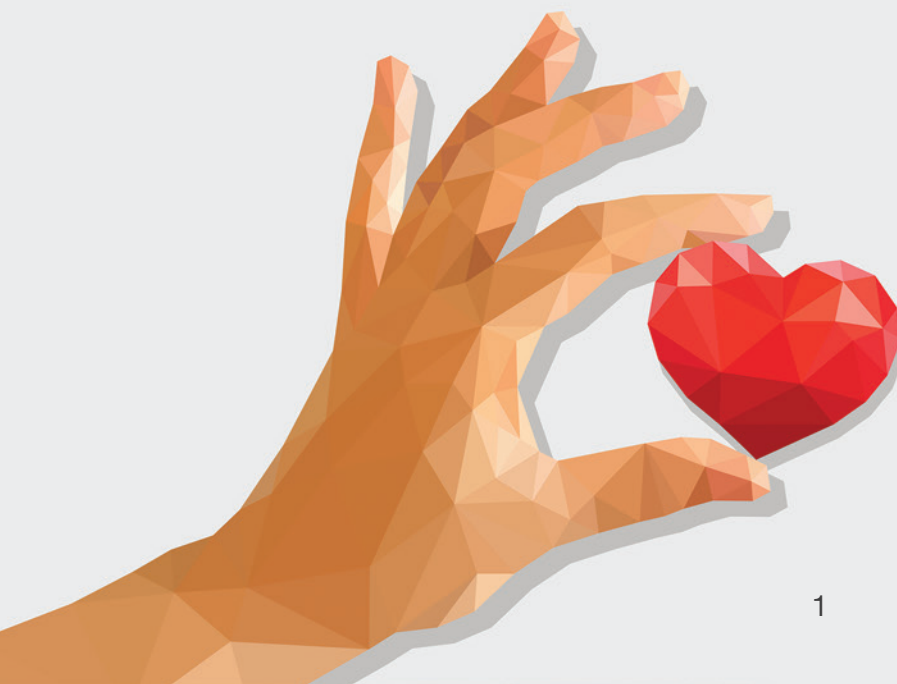


OPEN **HANDS**

OPEN **HEARTS**

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OPEN HANDS, OPEN HEARTS

Summer television is always a strange creature. The few network programs I enjoy are on hiatus, and I have found that I can only handle just so many cable shows. Too many plot lines and characters to remember in their “mini-seasons” becomes maddening. While I am not usually a fan of reality TV, I will confess an indulgence that several in my household are willing to watch every week in the annual summer limited run – “American Ninja Warrior.”

The name is a misnomer; there is no violence involved unless a competitor happens to injure themselves. For those who have never seen this, it is an obstacle course on steroids that defies my imagination how any mere mortal is able to complete these tasks. The upper body strength, agility, speed, and overall “fearless nature” is something that I honestly do not understand. These men and women are so committed to this event that many have set work aside in order to train and possibly get their hands on what seems to be an illusive financial reward, if they are the last one left.

It seems that those persons who have expertise in rock climbing are particularly well-suited to the task because of their upper body and grip strength. There are many who have upper body strength galore, but their grip fails them, causing them to plummet into the water tanks below many of the obstacles. A tight grip seems to be something we value – it can save us from disaster.

At the same time, a tight fist or tight grip is also symbolic of our collective weakness. Sometimes, we hold on to things for which our response should really be to “let go”. Sometimes our “tight-fistedness” becomes oppressive, because we believe we need to keep things in check, not allowing for change, especially for persons over which we might have some control. A tight fist or grip can also represent our being closed off from others – the absolute opposite of the open hand.

This issue of The Spire magazine is focusing on the theme of “Open Hands, Open Hearts” - especially how we can be generous people. Part of our journey as followers of Jesus is to be people who are extraordinarily generous – in our desire to help, our willingness to share gifts and talents, and our ability to share of our financial resources to support the mission and ministry of the congregation. As you read through this issue, I hope you will join me in considering how we at Westwood UMC can be just the opposite of tight-fisted. Imagine what we can do if we practice “open hands, open hearts” through extravagant generosity. Can you imagine what a difference we can make?



PASTOR JOHN WOODALL has been serving United Methodist Congregations for twenty-five years in a number of capacities; Youth Minister, Education Minister, Minister of Evangelism, and now Senior Pastor. He is a graduate of the University of Southern California and Fuller Theological Seminary, and he and his spouse, Linda, have three young adult children (Mark, Elizabeth, Peter). When not at church, you might find him working in the garden, trying out new recipes, attending concerts, reading a good book, working a crossword, or sitting at the piano.



The way we hold our beliefs can be as important as *what* we believe. Many times the subject of faith is at the center of debate. What is equally significant, though often neglected, is the posture of our faith.

I have been studying the history of Methodism recently, and one of the things that has impressed me is the emphasis on both the head and the heart. Methodists are traditionally both a thinking people (head) and a feeling people (heart). This has been a source of spiritual vitality for centuries.

In addition to those historical categories, many have thoughtfully added ‘hands’ to round out the picture, because our Christian faith calls us to do good and to serve others. We symbolize this by talking about head-hands-heart as a holistic and integrated life of faith. What we think, what we believe, and what we do are all related and deeply influence each other.

I am often discouraged as I watch the ongoing ‘culture wars’ that dominate our news and political climate in this country. More striking than *what* certain groups believe is the *way* that they hold those beliefs.

I ask myself, “Do we hold our convictions with an open hand toward our neighbor or with a clenched fist? An open hand signifies that we give and receive to the world around us – a closed fist indicates that we are gripping tightly, afraid to lose what little we have.”

Over my years of pastoral ministry, I have noticed that our posture of faith is often expressed in our attitude about giving. There is something very powerful about our relationship to money and our posture of faith. For some people supporting the ministry of the church is an opportunity, for others an obligation. Some see it as a partnership and responsibility, while others talk about it as ‘doing my part’ or a part of membership.

Have you ever thought about giving as an act of worship? *It feels a little daring just saying that.* Try saying the following sentence aloud, and see what thoughts come to your mind or what emotions come to your heart:

“*I give as an act of worship.*”

It puts a whole different spin on it and adds a level of intensity to the idea.

In the same way that we have an open mind to new ideas during a sermon, and we have an open heart while singing hymns and praying together...in that same way, we give as an act of worship to thank God for what we have and contribute to the greater good as we serve the world together.

Our hands are open as we pack meals together at Stop Hunger Now events and as we cook breakfast for P.A.T.H. folks. We have open hands as we make crafts together at the Advent Workshop and as we pass the peace of Christ to each other during the worship service. We live out the life of faith together with open minds, open hearts, and open hands. This is how we posture ourselves toward the world around us – but it is also how we position ourselves in a life of worship.



In the same way we don’t hold our beliefs in a tightly clenched fist but with a spirit of openness and exchange, we give of our time, talent, and treasure to serve the world around us. It is an act of worship.

Are we called to generosity? Yes, it is a calling.

Is it a privilege to do so? Yes, it is an honor to serve and give.

Is it a responsibility? Yes, scripture assures us that as we are blessed, we are to be a blessing.

Is it an opportunity? We can surely do more together than individually.

All of these are well established. The aspect we can not afford to overlook, however, is that living this way and giving this way is also an act of worship! It is part of the way that we proclaim a message of hope and trust as well as give thanks for the good things that God has given us.



PASTOR BO SANDERS is Minister of Children, Youth, & Families at Westwood UMC. He is in the process of completing a Ph.D. in Practical Theology at Claremont School of Theology with a passion for Sociology of Religion, Postcolonial Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Comparative Theology. He is a pastor, coffee shop theologian, tattoo evangelist, and soccer fan.

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A CHURCH for ALL SEASONS of LIFE

Josh, Emily, and Nora Musil-Church

Just over a decade ago, a young grad student by the name of Emily Musil stumbled upon Westwood United Methodist Church. While pursuing a Ph.D. in History at UCLA, she was drawn to the fiery preaching of Sharon Rhodes-Wickett. But, with degree completed and job prospects ahead, Emily left Los Angeles to take a teaching job back East.



She returned a few years later...this time supporting the film career of her new husband, Josh. Promptly, Emily introduced him to Westwood UMC. Josh, the son of a pastor, was curious about a church with such a long legacy of social justice. Soon, they were active members in the young adult small group that met with the Spearmans at the Selby Parsonage. They found real community in a large city giving them a sense of “home” even amongst such a transient population. They were faithful supporters of the Sanctuary worship gathering connecting with John Woodall. Josh and Emily Musil-Church became official members of Westwood in September 2014, supporting our community with their prayers, presence, gifts, and service.

Sadly, career and family called them away once again when Emily became a history professor at Lafayette College in 2009, transplanting them cross-country again to Pennsylvania.

However, Providence would work in our favor yet again, as Josh’s film career would pull them back to our warm embrace in January of 2013. They returned to Los Angeles, but with a new addition, Nora, adding spunk and the best dance moves ever to their family. This time, however, they reconnected to Westwood through The Loft. The new gathering, that was nothing more than a conversational idea when they departed, had become a vibrant reality in their return. As parents of a now 3 year-old, they desired to find a place they could be in sync with as a family, building a community for their daughter like they had known for themselves. Discovering a growing cohort of young parents was a boon.

One family having three different stints in LA in over a decade, each time reconnecting to our church, but every time through a different door. As the seasons of life evolve, the communities we inhabit draw us for different reasons, in different modes, for different opportunities.

First, as a student, then as a young couple, and now as growing parents, Josh and Emily reestablished themselves within our faith family because of the variety of ways Westwood UMC connects with their evolving life. One-size-fits-all has never worked for the church. In a diverse place like LA, we are proud to have multiple doorways for a variety of connecting points.

Though the reasons have shifted, the commitment to the community has not. The Musil-Church’s have continued to support the ministries of Westwood UMC. However, the nature of that support has shifted as well. Emily jokes of what it was like to give as a starving grad student, scraping for every penny and eating Top Ramen.



At that time, she gave in faithful attendance and acts of service as an offering of her time and self. She was able to give extravagantly of the excess of what she had.

Today, she and Josh have almost every thing but time. Two working parents in demanding West LA jobs with a lightening bolt three year old... they are busy. This week, they announced they are expecting baby #2 in January...a boy. As comedian Jim Gaffigan puts it, “It’s like you are drowning, and someone hands you a baby.” Now, Josh and Emily support the church more so financially, giving to the mission and ministry of Westwood.

This act of financial giving has become a mode of worship for both of them. Each week, they actually write and deliver a check to the offering plate. It has grown to become an act of cultural defiance. From the thousands of advertisements that bombard us to the opulence that surrounds us, it is easy to become confused and jaded with the life God has given us. Their act of tangibly giving to the church is guerrilla resistance to the temptation to believe you are what you have. Their offering is an effort to place value on higher things and place treasure where their heart is.

Westwood is far from done in our commitment to continually open new doors for those seeking a church home. The recent shift in the Loft’s start time is no small example of hospitality for those overcoming entry obstacles. In regards to the 10am start time, Emily shared, “Josh and I exist in a world where there are very few things actually set-up for families. When you are in a work-centered environment (not just our office, but our culture), people are very rarely thinking ‘what works best for families (and young children)’.

For instance, I leave work way before anyone else to pick up my daughter, and there is this nagging sense of suspicion about commitment or responsibility.”



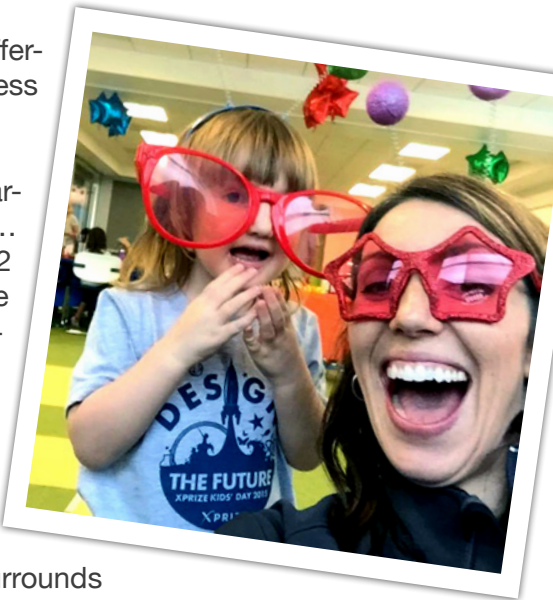
There is great gratitude on their part for a church that would be willing to make changes to accommodate young families. There is a wonderful sense of hospitality generated by those who have been willing to burden their schedule to make room for others.

More than anything, Emily and Josh support and praise Westwood for being a safe place to figure things out as they move through the various phases of life. There are so few places or relationships that are around for the long haul. If you are lucky, you have your family as a constant. To discover a church that can be with you for the marathon of life in all its assorted chapters and forms is a wonderful blessing. Particularly, in a city like LA where just finding and keeping one real friend can be daunting, discovering a whole host of them is an act of God.



PASTOR CHRIS SPEARMAN is Minister of Adult Programs at Westwood UMC where he facilitates educational environments, connection opportunities, and ways to unlock the life God dreams for us. He is a highly energetic, slightly disorganized, covertly competitive, and musical worshiper seeking to become all God has created him to be, and he loves the wildly unpredictable journey of pursuing God. Chris is a proud and growing husband to Paige, an exuberant father and jungle gym to sons Asher and Caleb and daughter Eden.

 [chrisdrakesp](#)  [chris.spearman.14](#)



BETTE on the STREET

To give us glimpse into the lives of Westwood supporters, Bette Caldwell hit the streets (via email) to ask people, ***“Why do you contribute financially to the ministries of Westwood, and how has your life been impacted in the process?”***



Reg and Penny Gipson

Why do we give to Westwood United Methodist Church, and how does our giving impact us? Of course, we give as part of our worship as well as to be in ministry and mission. This led us to ask additional questions - why is it important that we worship and that we are in ministry and mission? Because it is through worship that we connect with God and with each other and are reminded there is more to life than working, selling, and buying. It is through ministry and mission that we get to know each other in a deeper way and help each other.

Why should we care about knowing and helping each other? Because we are called by God to be brothers and sisters of each other and to be friends. And that's what brothers, sisters, and friends do: they know each other, care about each other, and help each other. And, we have found this to be true at Westwood United Methodist Church (with appreciation to Dr. Scott Bartchy and his recent leadership at Follow-Up).



BETTE CALDWELL recently retired from Los Angeles City Schools after 50+ years as a teacher, counselor, and administrator. She joined Westwood United Methodist Church in 1964 and has been active in numerous ways - Editor of the Spire, Youth Council member and chairman, Sunday School teacher, co-leader of the Confirmation Classes, member of Administrative Council, Stephen Minister and Leader, and Chancel Choir member. Bette enjoys photography, traveling, and spending time with her 4-legged friends: one dog and three cats.

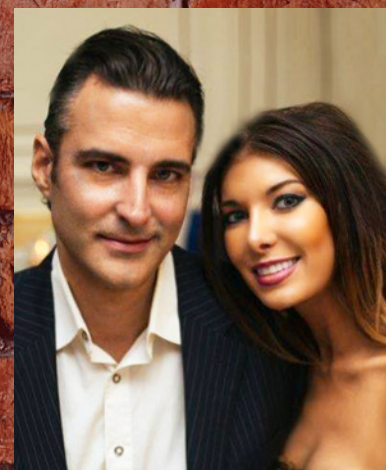


Alison McKee

I grew up in the church, so giving was a principle that was instilled in me at an early age. I didn't know what it meant as a young child; I just participated out of habit. As an adult, the act of giving monetarily to the church is so much more meaningful to me. For a while, I was without a church home, and I spent years visiting various places trying to find a church where I would be edified and welcomed. After years of searching, I finally found that at Westwood United Methodist Church. This church provides me with a community, a sense of belonging, and a place to freely pose questions that I wouldn't dream to ask in a traditional church. I believe in the Loft's mission and purpose, and I have an obligation to myself and to the people within this community to support the Loft in any way I can. Giving is just a small token of my appreciation for what the Loft has given to me.

Jane Crail

When I joined Westwood UMC, I vowed to support the church through my prayers, my presence, my gifts, and my service. This vow is what guides me to faithfully execute my church financial responsibilities. They are a priority of my monthly budget and are among the first paid of my obligations. These funds are needed regularly to support staff salaries, Sanctuary and Loft gatherings, spiritual growth classes, and all that is available to our congregation and young people. I realize, as well, the need for additional financial giving for the many missions that Westwood UMC supports: Sierra Service Project, Stop Hunger Now, PATH, Food Bag Ministry, Imagine No Malaria, UMCOR, and others. When additional donations are needed, I do what I can to help with the funding. Westwood UMC is unique in all that it provides for its growing congregation and membership and for our local and international communities. I am so proud to be a member and a financial contributor.



Ty and Bridget London

We believe that giving back, in whatever way one can afford, is necessary to being part of a church community. This keeps our hearts open and connected to God. We have been blessed with more than we need and feel it is important to give back both in time, volunteering, and financial support. Our family has set up a charitable foundation and focused on causes that fall in line with our Christian mission statement. At the forefront of that mission statement is giving to God, through our church, and supporting our Westwood UMC family. We feel strongly that everyone should set aside a percentage of their income, give to the less fortunate, give to God, give to help our church community thrive and grow, and make that a regular habit. We all have a responsibility to give back and to contribute cheerfully. The enjoyment we personally get from giving can never be measured in dollars. When we give with an open heart, we are recipients of more than we could ever repay.

G₂ E₁ N₁ E₁ R₁ O₁ S₁ I₁ T₁ Y₄

For some reason, “The Little Drummer Boy” comes to mind when I think of generosity. I can see a child, the youngest in the family, hauling his little drum to the manger. After considering possible gifts for the newborn child - if only he had the wealth of a king or even an extra lamb - he played his drum. Jesus took the boy’s drumming as a blessing, one that brought a smile to his face. He already knew that the boy had given all he had. From there, the parable of the widow’s mite comes to mind. As Jesus explained to his disciples, she gave only two small coins, but God knew her as a generous giver who had donated all she had.

Do we have to give up everything to please God? Can’t we keep something for ourselves?

Let’s see what happens in the familiar tale of the loaves and fishes. As the two fish and five loaves of bread somehow expanded to feed 5000 persons – with 12 baskets of bread left over – the usual explanation, one I’d heard since childhood, spoke of a great generosity that spread among the guests. People reached into their bags and wallets pulling out the ancients’ equivalent of fried chicken, ribs, cole slaw, and potato salad. Those who had given all their food had more to share, even though common sense would dictate hoarding scarce resources and pretending they didn’t have a crumb. From the looks of it, though, the givers found themselves greatly enriched by trusting God.

Believe me, I’ve been there – afraid to trust God’s promises - and wouldn’t be surprised to see nods and hear a few “uh-huhs” from those around me. Many of us succumb to the notion that if we don’t have funds on hand for the kids’ education, enough for retirement, or enough for the occasional European trip, we are poor. Yet, take a look at South Sudan, Syria, and Haiti. Paul Jeffery’s photos on Kairos.com will give you an idea of real poverty – and the surprising view of people extending joy and hospitality in spite of it.

It may be hard to believe, but sharing is universal. Hospitality comes naturally to so many, in such unexpected circumstances, that we can only marvel at the resilience of neighbors who endure the consequences of failed diplomacy, lack of food, water, and basic health care.

Earlier this summer, a French couple and their son were stranded in the middle of Death Valley. They didn’t have any way of contacting help and were almost out of water. The two adults didn’t hesitate. Every drop of water went to their son. They had none, despite the burning heat. Their young son survived, but the couple did not. Isn’t that the ultimate generosity, dying so someone else can live? It’s humbling to see parents, first responders, teachers, and even strangers rushing in and giving their lives for others.

While we are not asked to sacrifice ourselves in the name of simple stewardship, it is worth thinking of those who give without considering the consequences. As we offer our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness, what might we accomplish if we took those promises outside our church, fleshed them out, and made them come true in the wider world? *What can we give to make the world a better place?*



Jan Gonder retired from a career teaching English as a second language in Los Angeles Unified Schools. She also worked as a District-level advisor and school-level coordinator - all at the high school level. Now, she is preparing for a second career in selling hand-made jewelry. She has enjoyed many of Westwood Church’s opportunities - Chancel Choir, hand-bells, Stephen Ministry, United Methodist Women, and the classes offered after church and in the evenings.

Fall FESTIVAL

**Sunday, October 18th (12-2pm)
Westwood UMC Campus**

Bring your family and invite your friends for a **FREE, fun-filled event** including chili cook-off, bounce house, games, prizes, & face painting.

INVITE YOUR FRIENDS!



THE GENEROSITY OF WESTWOOD:

How Our Money is Impacting the World

How **PLANNED GIVING** Can Help

You and **WESTWOOD UMC**

When we think of giving to our church, we usually think of what we can give today. This includes our pledge, fundraisers, and special giving to support missions and other ministries. Yet, equally important is what we plan to give in the future. This is planned giving, and it has many benefits for both the donor and the church. It is a way to integrate your personal, financial, and estate planning goals by making charitable gifts. Below are some common types of planned gifts for you to consider:

A **Bequest** is a gift made through your will or trust. It is the simplest type of planned gift and one of the easiest to implement. It is also the most common gift used to establish endowments and long-term funds for the ministry of the church. By simply including a fixed dollar amount or percentage of your net estate in your will or trust, you can significantly impact the future ministry of your church after your lifetime.

A **Charitable Gift Annuity** is a gift of cash or appreciated stock in exchange for fixed interest payments for one or two lives. Upon your death, the beneficiary (Westwood UMC) receives the remainder of the gift. This type of planned gift works well for those who want to make a gift to the church and desire fixed income for retirement. The California-Pacific United Methodist Foundation is able to offer charitable gift annuities for this purpose.

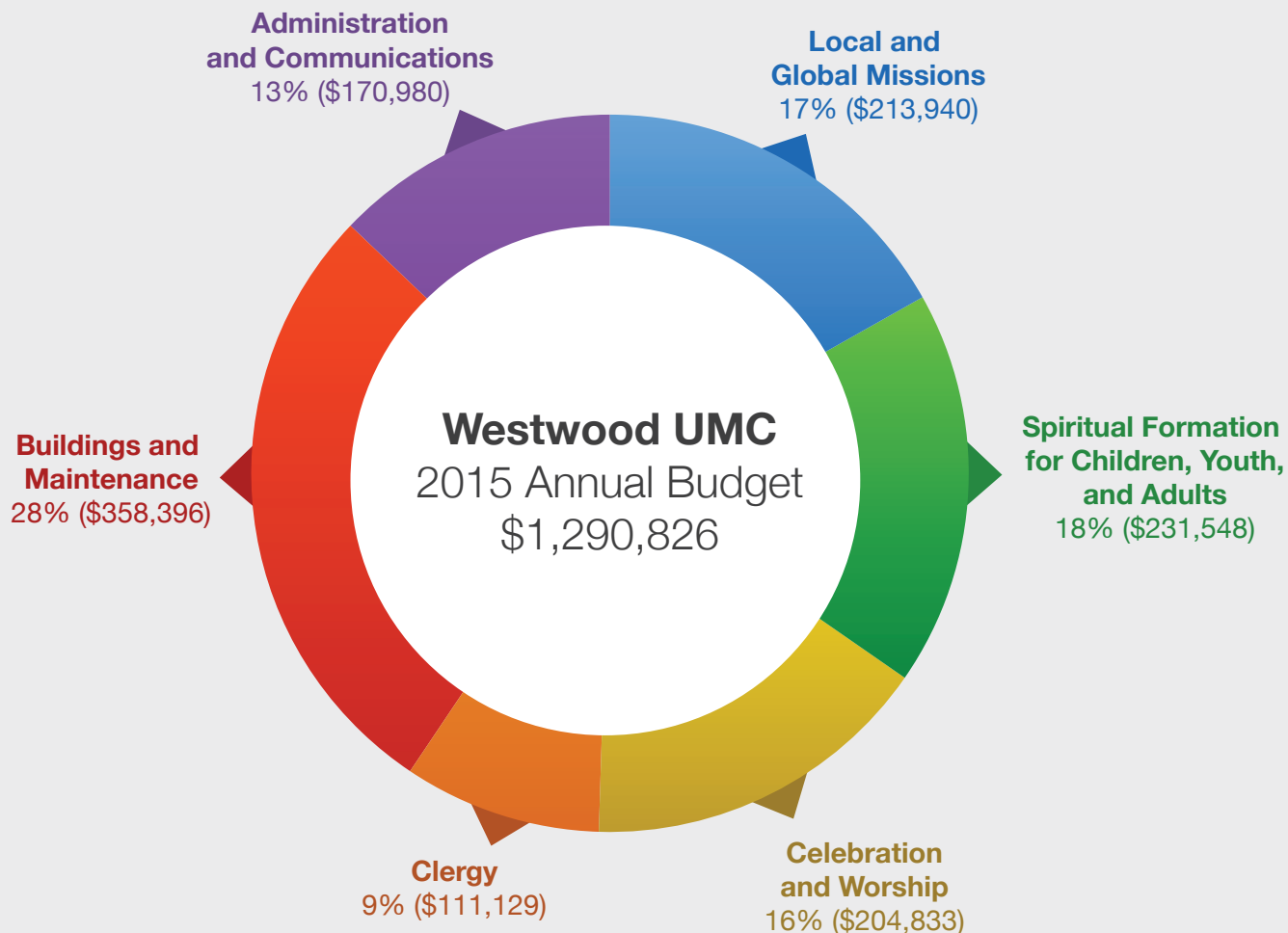
The creation of **Charitable Remainder Trust** allows you to transfer cash or appreciated stock to fund a trust that makes payments for your lifetime or a number of specified years. When the trust terminates, the remainder is passed on to the church. This type of gift allows you to sell assets without paying capital gains taxes, produces income for retirement, and provides a charitable gift. The California-Pacific United Methodist Foundation can assist in administering a CRT.

The Spire Fund

Over 25 years ago, members of Westwood UMC shared a vision for providing stability for the church far into the future. This dream resulted in the Spire Fund, an endowment that belongs solely to the congregation and has been providing additional financial support for the mission and ministry of the church. The initial gifts, with careful management, have resulted in an endowment which now exceeds \$3 million. Gifts which are given to the Spire Fund have been directed toward maintenance, music, and the general fund of the church. When gifts are given to the portfolio, the principal gift is protected in perpetuity with the interest made available to make a difference for this dynamic church.

Taking Your Next Step

There are a variety of ways to give to Westwood UMC through planned giving, and we would be happy to assist you. If you are interested in any of these options, please contact Pastor John Woodall at 310.474.4511 or john@westwoodumc.org or Greg Batson at gregbatson@copumf.org or 626.568.7347.



Local and Global Missions: 17% (\$213,940)

UMC Apportionments: \$174,690

Together, through our connected United Methodist congregations, we accomplish what no single church, district, or annual conference ever could hope to do alone. Funds from Westwood UMC support the:

- World Service Fund
- Ministerial Education Fund
- Black College Fund
- Interdenominational Cooperation Fund
- Africa University Fund
- General Administration Fund

Westwood Directed Funds: \$38,980

Beyond what we contribute toward the work of the greater United Methodist mission through our apportionments, we also provide financial support to a number of local and global efforts including:

- Wesley Foundation
- Sierra Service Project
- Scattered for Service
- Imagine No Malaria
- P.A.T.H.
- Loaves and Fishes
- Paul Jeffrey
- One Great Hour of Sharing
- Stop Hunger Now
- Habitat for Humanity
- Medecines sans Frontieres
- Heifer Project International
- And many more!



REV. GREG BATSON currently serves as President/CEO of the California-Pacific United Methodist Foundation in Pasadena, CA. After an 11 year career as a corporate banker in New York City, he decided to follow his call to ordained ministry and received his M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary in 2000, and then moved to Southern California with his family to begin his ministry. Rev. Batson is married to Tania Batson, and they have three sons: Thomas, Daniel, and Wesley.



The Loft to Host UMC LEAD Conference

The Loft has been selected as the host venue for the **UMC LEAD conference** (www.umclead.com) in 2016. UMC LEAD is grassroots crowd-sourced conference focusing on advances in United Methodist Ministry. It launched five years ago as clergy across the Connection joined to share ideas, celebrate expansion, and search for best practices. UMC LEAD exists to be engaged in conversation around leadership, theology, worship, mission, and innovation within The United Methodist Church.

In the midst of talk of the “death of the church,” vital, creative, life-giving communities exist around the world, in communities large and small. The LEAD conference has always strived to shine a spotlight on this emerging church, not as a hope for the future but as a recognition of God’s work in the world here and now.

For three days, every year, LEAD brings together leaders, innovators, and creatives from within, and outside of, The United Methodist Church. Participants hear big ideas, experience amazing music, and network with others. There are no paid speakers or professional “experts”, this is a conference that is fully participant driven. Past LEAD Conferences have been held in Portland, Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Austin.

The conference will take place **January 10-13, 2016**, welcoming approximately 100 clergy from all over the country. We are honored to host such an event at Westwood UMC and rejoice at the acknowledgment of the good work happening among us.



NEW WEBSITES:
WestwoodUMC.org
TheLoftLA.org

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SUNDAYS at 10am

Two Unique Gatherings Where Everyone is Welcome



The SANCTUARY

A sacred gathering with traditional liturgy, a thoughtful message, and resounding organ.

INFO: WestwoodUMC.org



The LOFT

An innovative gathering with spiritual conversation, creativity, coffee, and music.

INFO: TheLoftLA.org