

Cycles of Stewardship: A Stewardship Program for the Local Church **By Jack Phillips**

Review by Herb Miller

Cycles of Discipleship: A Stewardship Program for the Local Church. Authored by Jack Phillips, this program combines the “every member in ministry” approach financial stewardship education. The program is especially helpful in (a) smaller congregations that are unwilling to conduct an annual stewardship program of any kind and/or (b) congregations of any size in which the pastor is uncomfortable teaching the principles of percentage giving of income.

Cycles of Discipleship has a strong biblical foundation (2 Corinthians 8 and 9) and its message is one of loving, caring, and sharing. The program does not stress money, but ministries. The focal point is on building a Budget of Ministries, not on attempting to underwrite a church budget. Christians are inspired to “excel in the grace of giving” when they understand the multiple ways the church serves its families, its community, and the world. Members and friends gain a new appreciation for the role of the church in their lives and are motivated to give liberally of their time and abilities as well as their money in order to enhance the varied and valuable ministries of their church.

Cycles is introduced to the congregation with a four-Sunday program highlighting

- Celebration—a joyful remembrance of the prayers and gifts across the years that have made today’s church possible
- Vision—a challenging view of what God can help the church accomplish, today and tomorrow
- “A Place for You”—an opportunity for service, as Christian disciples make a promise of their time and abilities for the ministries of the church
- Commitment—after considering the ministries of their church and its value to their own families, members and friends make a “Discipleship Promise” of their financial resources

A unique element of Cycles is that it gives people the opportunity to renew their Discipleship Promise every four months rather than making the traditional annual pledge. If circumstances change, a person may change the amount of his/her promise on “Renewal Sunday” at the beginning of each four-month Cycle during the year.

The objective of *Cycles of Discipleship* is to integrate stewardship into the life of the church. The three Cycles per year help make stewardship a part of the church’s lifestyle, rather than an annual fund drive.

Since its introduction 18 months ago, about 94 churches in the West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church have implemented Cycles, and another 25 are implementing the program in spring 2005. Initial reports from churches using Cycles indicate the following results (average attendance—54 to 419):

- 33.3 percent of churches experienced increases in giving of 22.0 percent to 63.0 percent
- 29.2 percent of churches experienced increases in giving of 15.0 percent to 18.5 percent
- 20.8 percent of churches experienced increases in giving of 12.0 percent to 14.0 percent

- 16.7 percent of churches experienced increases in giving of 3.0 percent to 6.1 percent

To order *Cycles of Discipleship*, visit its www.cyclesofdiscipleship.com Website.

The Program Kit has nine Program Guides, a Training Video, a CDROM containing all promotional materials needed, plus a CDROM with Sunday school lessons for children, youth, and adults. Churches receive on-going support from the Cycles of Discipleship Website, including an Update that begins each of the Cycles with suggestions for planning each "Renewal Sunday."