



October 2023

Greetings, Friends,

I'm grateful for the opportunity to write our annual stewardship letter. First, I need to say **thank you!** I'm grateful that you are part of our **God Loves You No Matter What** community. Simply being here, you are the supportive and inclusive space in which we grow in our faith.

I'm Scott (he/him), and I'd like to share our HUMC story: After my son attended UMC Camp Otterbein in 2021, the UMC admin staff referred us to Pastor April. When I drove my son to school, we read the HUMC slogan and then started attending online. I joined HUMC in early 2022 because HUMC is an inclusive community. We attend the 10:30 family service in person. We also attend virtually when we visit grandparents or when my prayers for rest are granted. My son is active in the youth activities. He was a youth volunteer for VBS, and he attended Lakeside Camp the past two years. Many of you will recall the beautiful May Sunday when Pastor April baptized and confirmed him with four other confirmands. This community is a blessing!



This past May, my son and I participated in the *Weekend of Healing* with Pastor Jenny Smith. The discussions included many COVID-19 pandemic experiences, which underscored numerous life challenges over the past three years. Our HUMC community has met virtual technology and financial challenges, which had a cascading impact on members, ministries, and giving. Today, we are becoming financially stable and growing our community. The practice of stewardship and servant leadership is embodied by this congregation, and we continue to thrive.

As we approach the final quarter of 2023, this is also an update on the 2023 stewardship letter from our current chair of finance, Will Thorsberg. In that letter, Will offered three finance goals for 2023: increased giving, growing our faith community, and innovative & creative ways to generate sustainable income. (You'll find that letter here under the heading Invest in Hilliard UMC: [https://hilliardumc.org/giving/.](https://hilliardumc.org/giving/))

- **We have seen increased giving!** Our budget has begun to stabilize because of your generous giving. As of August 31, giving to HUMC has increased 8.4% over this time last year. This progress reflects an increase in family giving and in the number of households giving. It is important to note that while the budget stabilizes, we continue to have an overall projected budgetary deficit for 2023.

- **We celebrate our growing faith community!** We now have three worship services averaging nearly 175 in-person and virtual worshippers each week: Traditional at 9am, Family at 10:30am, and beginning weekly October 22, Warehouse 389 worship at 11:15am. Our new Accompanist Tony Hagood and new Director of Contemporary Worship Jeff Rone have blessed our community. Amen!
- **The 501(c)(3) nonprofit efforts are taking shape.** The leadership plans to launch in mid-2024. This will expand our ability to support the local community in new ways and provide relief to the operations budget for mission and outreach.

As we approach 2024, the finance committee is requesting an **Estimate of Giving card** from individuals and families for 2024. We request that you prayerfully complete and return your 2024 Estimate of Giving on or before **Sunday, October 29**, when we will pray over your proposed commitments and ask God to bless each estimated gift.

These estimates will then be used in the 2024 budget planning process, as greater than 60% of our budget is based on them. Please remember these estimates are just that, what we believe God is calling us to generously offer to HUMC.

They can always be modified if your circumstances change. Earlier this year I was unemployed and facing financial instability, and I adjusted my giving to a safer monthly amount given my change in income. In the spring of 2023, I was employed and increased my recurring giving. I found myself upset by companies that monetize every second of my time and attention, even at a stoplight! So, I doubled down and increased my support for HUMC and the community that supports my family's wellbeing.

This summer, Pastor Jon asked and, after a time of prayer and reflection, I have accepted the role to serve as chair of the finance team for 2024. In the coming year we will continue to examine efficiencies and ways to reduce costs and increase flexibility. The finance team foresees our 2023 goals will continue into 2024. In 2024, however, our financial stewardship priorities will also include:

- 1) Align 2024 budget expenses more closely with annual giving estimates.
- 2) Share testimonials across all ministries to reflect our core mission.
- 3) Create, review, and/or update finance policies, procedures, and accounting methods to reflect the current UMC recommended guidelines.

Are you aware that HUMC supports more than 30 ministries? So much good is happening through HUMC because of your generosity.

Because of you, my family has been able to grow in the endless love of God. There is no other place that enriches our spirit. Thank you for supporting our community, where we can grow together in the love of God.

Grace & peace,

Scott Merillat
Finance Committee Member