A FAMILY SHARES THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF ITS WISE WITH MONEY JOURNEY

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Tips for tackling money issues in blended families
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TAKING THE NEXT STEP

THRIVENT
December 2018
WHEN YOU REFLECT ON YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY, WHAT DO YOU SEE?

At Thrivent, we’re here to guide you on your Wise With Money Journey. Start by taking our New Money Mindset quiz. It’ll help you look below the surface at your financial strengths and challenges so together, we can help you chart your course to a more content, confident and generous life.

Take the quiz at Thrivent.com/moneyquiz.
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A Time to Every Purpose

Many consider autumn to be our most beautiful season—a time of thanksgiving and transition as summer gives way to winter.

We are in a season of transition at Thrivent, too, and as chair of the board of directors it is my privilege to share with you news about significant change.

First, and most importantly, over recent months Thrivent leadership has established our new strategy to become the “Wise With Money” organization, providing support to help our members achieve financial security. As members, we recognize that all we have is a gift from God and that we are called to be stewards of those gifts.

The other significant change is in Thrivent’s leadership. Brad Hewitt announced his decision to retire as CEO at the end of October. In this space where you have been reading messages from him, and on behalf of the board of directors, I want to express our deep gratitude to Brad for his dedicated service as our chief executive.

Possibly, Brad’s most lasting contribution will be the outstanding team he cultivated. In selecting Brad’s successor, the board recognized the right talent already in place in the leadership team. We are so pleased that Terry Rasmussen has accepted our call to become Thrivent’s new CEO.

Terry is a strong, compassionate and wise leader who has the business competency to continue to lead the new strategy forward. Starting with the next issue of Thrivent magazine, she will be writing to you in this space.

Under Terry’s leadership, and with our vision and focus, I am confident that Thrivent will realize its promise in full. The organization will continue to serve you well and grow to serve new generations of Christians in the future.

It has been a busy fall as we’ve held the discussions that preceded these transitions. Autumn is turning to winter. It is, indeed, a new season for Thrivent.

As we now prepare for Advent, and a new year on the Christian calendar, we look forward to celebrating the birthday of our Lord. And we also look forward with continued confidence and fulfillment to our collective Wise With Money Journey.

Bonnie E. Raquet
Chair of the Board
LETTERS

Add Recycling/Reuse
“Take Stock of Your Stuff” [September 2018] should have a five-box method to conquer clutter, and “Recycling/Reusing” should be another method. There are so many items that are broken or unusable that end up in our landfills. Most of these items can be partially or fully recycled. Before throwing away items, check to see if they can be recycled curbside. There are many options for items not collected in your recycling. For example, some hardware stores take old batteries, Best Buy will take used computers and electronics, and Lions Clubs will take used eyeglasses. You can find a place for many items and save them from ending up in a landfill!

Kristie Dailey
Angola, Indiana

Don't Do This
I became a mom 40 and 37 years ago via infant adoption through two different Lutheran agencies. I was so excited when I saw the article in the September 2018 Thrivent magazine regarding financing adoption. My husband and I worked hard to save for our children. We lived frugally. We borrowed from our parents and later paid them back. Your article mentioned it is popular to ask family and friends online for money to defray costs. We find it appalling. Other people should not have to pay for your life. What’s popular is not always right, and what’s right is not always popular.

Mary Ludwig
Oakville, Missouri

Appreciate the Help
The September 2018 issue of Thrivent magazine was a great publication, and it will be filed as a reliable resource for myself as a retiree. The page 27 article concerning do’s and don’ts on personal financial records (“Get Your Data in Order”) by Amy Merrick was especially helpful and appreciated. The religious piece by CEO Hewitt gave a grand twist to the biblical book of Ecclesiastes. Our “Living Joyfully” took a serious downturn as my wife faces a serious health issue. Mr. Hewitt’s article was very comforting and insightful.

Ted Lueking
Bloomington, California

THE THRIVENT WAY | Member Commitment

OUR FRATERNAL BENEFIT SOCIETY
As a fraternal benefit society, Thrivent is a membership organization of Christians where members are owners. We envision a world where Christians are more confident, content and living their God-given callings in service to one another, their churches and their communities.

OUR BELIEFS
We are all on a lifelong journey to be wise with money and live generously.

▶ All we have is a gift from God.
▶ We are called to be wise stewards of these gifts.
▶ Generosity is an expression of faith.

OUR COMMITMENT TO ONE ANOTHER
We commit to help and guide one another along the way, plus invite others on the journey with us.

We will nurture relationships that encourage one another to live wise and generous lives; act with character and competence; and give mutual respect in the spirit of shared ownership.
MEET A MEMBER
THE ROAD TO FULFILLMENT
By Kathleen Childers

A member finds dreams can come true, but often in unexpected ways.

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA—Paula Blessman likes to meditate when she walks. The enthusiastic 52-year-old has lots of energy and distractions, and the movement helps her find clarity as she converses with God.

Such conversations started when she was young. Around age 12, she felt a clear message that God was calling her to do missionary work. She formed a plan: Go to college and then carry out God’s work abroad.

Decades later, she finds herself doing just that. But there were a few detours along the way. She credits God in guiding her through them.

The first detour happened in college. She hoped to study international business as a foundation for missionary work. But that wasn’t a degree option, so she pursued an accounting major and a foreign language minor—both useful skills, she felt, for her ultimate goal.

After college, Blessman worked as a CPA for various businesses and nonprofits. She enjoyed her work and often volunteered in the community. Still, she believed her place ultimately was in another country.

Another detour came when Jim Blessman, her sister’s husband (Paula is married to his cousin, John Blessman), called to offer her a job as the administrator of a nonprofit, Health Care Access Network, which provided medical services in various communities. But that job would take her back to her home state.

“I asked for time to think about it,” Blessman says, “and prayed for guidance. First God said if I was willing to go to Africa as a missionary, I should be willing to go to Iowa.” Then God erased any doubt two days later when she learned her current position was being eliminated.

She accepted the position, and it turned out to be life-changing. A few years later, her brother-in-law decided to start another nonprofit, Blessman International. It helps provide food, clean water, housing, education and other services to orphans and vulnerable children in South Africa.

Eventually, Blessman was able to make her dream to live abroad and do missionary work a reality. She stopped working for a paycheck and committed to volunteering full time with Blessman International and another favorite organization, Days for Girls International, as a volunteer leader. In that role, she organizes efforts to make and distribute reusable/washable hygiene kits for girls in Africa. She spends one month each year volunteering for Days for Girls in South Africa.

“Part of my definition of being a Christian is being led by the Lord,” Blessman says. “I haven’t always been in tune with things like I should, but I have definitely learned that when you’re walking closely with the Lord, He does guide your path. And boy, you’d better listen!”

Since she was a child, Paula Blessman has relied on conversations with God to guide her through life’s many detours.

WE ASKED,
YOU ANSWERED
WHAT TIPS WOULD YOU SHARE TO HELP OTHERS BE WISE WITH MONEY DURING THE HOLIDAYS?

Using the Compassion gift catalog, I had each member of our family select a favorite subject. Funding supported topics like dental, baking, water, chickens, small business startups, education, sports camps and mind, body and soul.

Jerry Larson
Glenwood, Minnesota

Make homemade gifts. No need to spend $$ on Christmas gifts.

Marie Isernhagen-Schmidt
Georgetown, Texas

Remember the true meaning of the holiday. It is not about the money, it is about thankfulness for what gifts God has given us. Be thankful not “spendfull.”

Carsten Falkenberg
Crown Point, Indiana

QUESTION FOR NEXT ISSUE: What’s the best piece of financial wisdom you’ve passed on to a child?

Let us know in 50 words or less at Thrivent.com/share or write to us at the address on page 3.
RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA—Next June marks the 75th anniversary of D-Day. To honor those who served in World War II, an event that’s been years in the planning will take place June 6 in Normandy, France. Longtime Thrivent members Tim and Vicky Tarris will be attending. Both will fly there from the U.S., but Tim will do so in a particularly special plane.

About 250 World War II-era planes will make their way to Normandy for the commemoration, including one nicknamed the D-Day Doll that Tim will be flying. Tim, a retired Air Force and commercial pilot, is leading a team of a dozen volunteers who are restoring and making necessary safety upgrades to the Doll, a C-53 that was flown on many missions during the war.

“The historical significance of this event is immense in honoring all veterans,” Tim says. “I’m very proud to be part of it.”

Tim and the team of volunteers also are raising funds to support the effort. He spends much of his time reaching out for donations. Others on the team operate, maintain and display the Doll at air shows and other public venues. They provide tours, share its history and distribute literature about the aircraft to garner interest and donations.

Planners expect hundreds of thousands of people from around the world to attend the event in June, including many of the remaining veterans from the war. Because this likely will be the last time the World War II veterans will have a chance to participate in a large D-Day anniversary event, Tim and the others are working hard to make sure it’s one they’ll never forget. You can learn more about the D-Day Doll restoration effort and the Normandy event at inlandempirecaf.com.

MEMBERS IN ACTION

FLIGHT PLAN

By Kathleen Childers

A passionate group makes a special effort to honor vets.

In August, volunteers for Thrivent Builds with Habitat for Humanity of South Palm Beach County worked with Sheila Francis for a day to repair and do maintenance on her home. Francis has lived in her Habitat home for 23 years and paid off the mortgage last year. Although she struggles with medical issues, she regularly gives back to the community and supported the group gathered that day to work on her house. Francis said it was an honor and blessing to be part of the Thrivent Builds program and the Habitat for Humanity family.
REGIONAL ROUNDUP
Members’ generosity efforts help communities and causes.

DRESSMAKING TEAM SEWS GOODWILL
LAS VEGAS—In just three days, a Thrivent Action Team led by Jil Gertz made more than 200 dresses for Dress a Girl Around the World, a campaign that helps lift up girls in impoverished areas. On the first two days, they picked out fabrics for the garments and cut them using patterns provided by Dress a Girl. On day three, they sewed the pieces together at a local fabric store that donated the use of its space. The finished dresses were sent by Dress a Girl to girls in Guatemala, Mexico and Zambia.

DINNER RAISES MONEY FOR KIDS
BEACH, NORTH DAKOTA—Barbecue chicken with all the fixings was the main attraction at a summer cookout and fundraiser. Steve Popeil led a Thrivent Action Team with six others to buy the chicken and prepare it. Members of the congregation contributed side dishes and desserts for the dinner, which was hosted by First Lutheran Church. Guests donated nearly $400 to benefit Home on the Range, a therapeutic working ranch and residential facility in North Dakota for youth who have experienced abuse or other trauma. The money will be used for kids who want to attend religious services and camps.

MEMBERS STEP UP TO HELP BUILD A HOME
BOISE, IDAHO—Dozens of Thrivent members along with volunteers from eight local churches helped make home ownership possible this year for Mohamud Muse and his family. The Thrivent Member Network–Northwest Region organized the effort for this Faith Build project in partnership with Habitat for Humanity. Working alongside the owners, who are originally from Somalia, volunteers helped frame the house, raise the walls, install siding and more. The family moved into the home in August.

MEMBERS LEND A HAND IN MIDST OF DISASTER
KAPOHO, HAWAII—A river of lava took away John and Susan Hendricks’ beloved home in June, turning their lives upside down. Not only did the couple lose their house and some of their belongings but also their source of income: Half of the home was a vacation rental. The Hendrickses continue to rely on their faith to keep them going and, even in the midst of their grief, find ways to help others affected by the volcanic eruption. They help with their church’s outreach efforts, and they shared the temporary home they rented with others who had lost their homes.
MUSIC BRINGS IN CROWD AND DONATIONS

SIoux City, Iowa—A summer concert at Redeemer Lutheran Church drew about 150 people and raised nearly $1,100 for the Food Bank of Siouxland. The New Horizons Band performed marches, show tunes and medleys. Food and beverages were donated by several local businesses. A Thrivent Action Team including Dr. Lou Rossman, the band’s founder and director, and 20 others organized and ran the event.

PASTA DINNER PROVIDES MUCH-NEEDED FUNDS

Long Beach, Mississippi—Mary West found the perfect way to help Carmela Jones with her cancer treatment bills. West organized a Thrivent Action Team with 25 others from her church, Grace Lutheran, to prepare and serve a ziti dinner (ziti is a classic pasta dish). Jones provided the recipe, and she and her sister coached the team members as they made it. Guests paid $7 per plate. The event raised more than $2,600 from ticket sales and donations.

GET INVOLVED!
Volunteer with Thrivent in your community. Find out how at Thrivent.com/livegenerously. Tell us what you did and share photos at Thrivent.com/stories.

MEMBERS HELP DIABETIC KIDS ATTEND CAMP

Amelia Island, Florida—Camp Angels has helped more than 3,000 kids with diabetes attend special camps around the U.S. The nonprofit (campangels.com) is run by its founders, Don and Diane Rung. When their son was diagnosed with diabetes as an adult, they learned about camps for kids with diabetes. The Rungs were inspired to help financially challenged diabetic kids have camp experiences. Camp Angels provides $200 scholarships per child to families with limited incomes. Donations come from many sources, including Thrivent. Camp Angels is enrolled in the Thrivent Choice® program where members can make personal donations online (fee-free) and eligible members can recommend where Thrivent distributes some of its outreach funding.
On a trip to Europe in 2010, Lynn Kahl noticed something unusual about her husband of 10 years: Fred was having trouble walking. Fred, then 56 years old, blamed his lack of balance on the cobbled European streets. But after the couple returned to their hometown of Brookfield, Illinois, his coordination became worse.

It took about a year before Fred’s doctors determined he was suffering from a rare disorder called multiple system atrophy. As his condition deteriorated, Lynn retired in 2016 from her career as a principal at St. John’s Lutheran School in La Grange, Illinois, where she met Fred and worked for 42 years. She began taking care of Fred full time—and the couple started making plans for an uncertain future.

Looking Ahead
The Kahls wanted to organize their finances. They had financial accounts with various organizations, including Thrivent.

“I told Fred that we needed to get things in order because we had accounts all over,” Lynn says. “We both drove out to the Thrivent office and met with Mike [Stehlik] to start consolidating everything.”

Working with Thrivent Financial professionals Stehlik and his joint field work partner, Paul Hoyem, the Kahls made a plan to consolidate their accounts in one easy-to-access place. Stehlik and Hoyem also helped Lynn envision her financial future.

“We did a lot of legwork discussing with Lynn what her retirement might look like and
positioning assets for her retirement needs,” Stehlik says.

It was during one of these meetings that Stehlik discovered a way to save Lynn and Fred money. “When we looked at each of their universal life insurance contracts, we saw Fred had a premium rider on there,” Stehlik says. “It stated that if the contract owner is deemed to be disabled, then the insurance company would pay the premiums for the contract holder going forward. So we were able to help Lynn get started on the paperwork and take that responsibility off her.”

In April 2017, during the process of consolidating the Kahls’ finances, Fred died of a stroke. “It hit me really hard,” Lynn says. “We were married for 17 years. I still miss him every single day.”

But the comfort that remains, she says, is feeling in control of her finances. “There was a whole lot of change, really fast,” Lynn says of the time following Fred’s death. “But I knew I’d be financially OK based on what Mike and Paul put together for me. I knew what we had insurance-wise. I knew what we had in our various funds. That was a very nice sense of reassurance.”

Ongoing Support
The financial guidance didn’t stop after Fred died. “After Fred died, I didn’t really pay attention to my money,” Lynn says. She felt that her finances were organized, so she didn’t have to constantly worry. But Stehlik continued to check up on her occasionally. He also helped her invest funds from a previous investment into her universal life insurance contract. The contract’s cash value can help pay for potential long-term care expenses, should they occur.1 “If I need to go into a nursing home, the contract could help pay for it. I never would have come up with that myself,” Lynn says.

Lynn credits Stehlik and the rest of her Thrivent team with the relief she feels and the freedom not to worry. But Stehlik says all the credit belongs with Lynn. “Lynn was the head coach, and I was the offensive coordinator,” Stehlik says. “I gave her the plays, but she had to call it.”

Sarah Watts is a freelance writer and content strategist based in the Chicago suburbs.

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1 Loans and surrenders will decrease the death proceeds and the value available to pay insurance costs, which may cause the contract to terminate without value. Surrenders may generate an income tax liability and charges may apply. A significant taxable event can occur if a contract terminates with outstanding debt. Contact your tax advisor for further details. Loaned values may accumulate at a lower rate than unloaned values.
Age 70½ may seem like an odd milestone, but for many people it’s decision time. What will you do with the required minimum distributions (RMDs) that you now must take annually?

That was the case for longtime Thrivent member Donald Mortensen when he was required to take minimum distributions from his two IRA accounts. Most retirement savings accounts require these distributions, with the exception of Roth IRAs (see “Learn More” on page 9 for details).

The retired packaging engineer in Racine, Wisconsin, felt he had sufficient income from his 401(k) and his pension. He needed only a portion of the RMD for himself. What he really wanted to do, he says, was “make sure my kids, now 33 and 36, would be well taken care of after I am gone.”

But he couldn’t just take part of the RMD. If he didn’t take the full RMD, he’d face a tax penalty from the IRS, says Shawn Mees, a financial professional on the Thrivent Financial Guidance Team (TFGT). “If you ignore it and don’t take the money, the government will take 50 percent of the RMD.”

—Shawn Mees, a financial professional on the Thrivent Financial Guidance Team

As the two began talking about options to reinvest the RMD, Mortensen made it clear that he preferred a conservative approach to investing at this point in his life. He wanted something he could invest in for about a decade that would deliver a good return and would be relatively stable.

Mees and Mortensen discussed several options.

“We first looked at a mutual fund solution but shied away from that,” Mees says. “Donald wanted to avoid any tax consequences and was simply looking to pass along money to his children income tax-free.”

They also looked at a life insurance contract that has a guaranteed death benefit and a cash value component.

“We looked at a whole life 10-pay insurance contract where Donald would pay premiums using his RMDs for 10 years and then no longer have to pay premiums because the product would be fully funded at that point,” Mees says. But Mortensen wanted something with a higher death benefit than what the 10-pay could offer.

The Solution

With the other options off the table, Mees...
suggested using Mortensen’s existing universal life (UL) insurance contract. Doing so would help Mortensen meet his goal of leaving more money and reducing or eliminating the tax burden to his heirs.

Mortensen would be able to keep some of his RMDs for expenses and contribute some to the UL contract for 10 years. After that? “If all of the nonguaranteed assumptions in the illustration are realized, then the death benefit may grow,” Mees says. “This may give him a higher death benefit in the future.”

Mortensen also is able to surrender or borrow the cash value from the UL, and his children may not have to pay taxes on the inherited money. That’s because beneficiaries of life insurance proceeds typically don’t have to include that money in their gross income they report to the IRS.¹

“My children and I both benefit,” Mortensen says. “I continue to have some money coming in every month and also can divert some to make sure they’ll be taken care of. It’s a way for them to get a nice little nest egg when I pass away, to help them with their expenses.”

Stacey Freed is an award-winning writer for national trade and consumer publications. She lives in Pittsford, New York.

Under current tax law (IRC Sec. 101(a)(1)), death proceeds are generally excludable from the beneficiary’s gross income. However, death proceeds may be subject to state and federal estate and/or inheritance tax.

Loans and surrenders will decrease the death proceeds and the value available to pay insurance costs which may cause the contract to terminate without value. Surrenders may generate an income tax liability and charges may apply. A significant taxable event can occur if a contract terminates with outstanding debt. Contact your tax advisor for further details. Loaned values may accumulate at a lower rate than unloaned values.

The member’s experience may not be representative of the experience of other clients. This story is also not indicative of future performance or success.

Thrivent and its financial professionals do not provide legal, accounting, or tax advice. Consult your attorney or tax professional.

¹ "Life Insurance & Disability Insurance Proceeds," Dec. 6, 2017, IRS
² "Retirement Plan and IRA Minimum Distributions FAQs," May 30, 2018, IRS
³ "Publication 590-B (2017), Distributions from Individual Retirement Arrangements (IRAs)," 2017, IRS

 Guarantees are backed by the financial strength and claims-paying ability of Thrivent.
dreaming of RETIRING EARLY?

By Tom Brandes
Illustrations by Anna Dawson

THERE’S A LOT TO WEIGH IN CHOOSING WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT TO RETIRE. CONSIDER THESE FACTORS BEFORE YOU MAKE YOUR DECISION.
How do you envision your retirement years? Like many people, you may be looking forward to traveling, spending more time with family, becoming more involved with your church, volunteering and pursuing hobbies that have been put on hold.

It’s no wonder that you might want to start those retirement years as early as possible.

“Among the advantages of retiring earlier rather than later is stepping away from the stresses and demands of work and having the time to relax and do enjoyable things such as volunteer, travel and other activities while you’re younger and presumably in better health,” says Thrivent Financial professional Isaac Taylor of Arcadia, California.

But can you afford to retire early?

That depends on how you define “early” and your finances. “There are many considerations that may impact the decision,” says Taylor, “including the danger of outliving assets.”

When do you want to retire?

Often, the year someone plans to retire is tied to when they would be eligible for Social Security benefits. “Most of my clients consider their Social Security full retirement age as their target retirement age,” says David Calloway, a Thrivent Financial professional in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Social Security defines full retirement age as the age at which you are eligible for full Social Security benefits. That age is determined by the year you were born: It’s age 66 for people born from 1943 through 1954. From 1955 through 1957, it’s age 66 plus 2 months for each additional year, up until 1960. From 1960 on, full retirement age is 67.1

How much retirement income do you anticipate?

Thrivent members Peter and Helen Hauser in Raleigh, North Carolina, decided on partial early retirement. Helen, a former teacher and counselor, decided to retire in 2009 at age 63 so she could care for her grandson 40 hours per week. That’s also when she began taking Social Security benefits. Her husband, Peter, began a phased retirement in 2017. He’s teaching just one semester per year at North Carolina State until 2020. The couple felt financially confident that Helen could retire early while Peter opted to delay taking Social Security until age 68½, to have a larger monthly benefit.

Retirement income can come from a number of sources. Make sure you’re aware of any penalties or restrictions to accessing them at the age you want to retire. And project your income needs so you know how long your resources will last.

>> INVESTMENTS: Consider how early retirement might affect your need for income from investments as well as how much income they’ll produce and how much you’ll be able to continue to invest.

>> SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS: You can begin receiving Social Security benefits at age 62. However, doing so reduces the amount of your payments. Depending on the year you were born, you may receive only 70 to 75 percent of what you would be paid if you waited until full retirement age.1 In addition, for each year beyond full retirement age that you delay receiving Social Security payments, the benefit increases by 8 percent, up to age 70.

>> RETIREMENT SAVINGS ACCOUNTS AND PENSIONS: If you’re counting on income from a 401(k), a pension and/or IRA accounts, find out if there are penalties to be paid when you start drawing income from them. With few exceptions, there’s a 10 percent premature distribution penalty on 401(k) and IRA distributions taken before age 59½. Look at your specific retirement plan to determine any penalties for early payments.

THRIVENT’S RETIREMENT CALCUlATOR

Thrivent’s online retirement planning calculator offers an easy way to estimate your future retirement success, based on 13 inputs including current age, household income, total retirement savings, annual retirement savings, planned retirement age and rate of return on investments.

Thrivent.com/retirementcalculator

This tool is not intended to provide or replace specific professional financial advice. We cannot and do not guarantee its applicability or accuracy in regard to your individual circumstances. All examples are hypothetical.
What will you do for health insurance?
Calloway says affordable medical insurance is one of the biggest challenges for people retiring early. You can purchase health insurance on the open market, but that’s often an expensive option.
If you had health insurance through an employer, you may be able to continue that plan when you quit your job.
The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA) is a federal law that gives employees the right to continue participating in their employer group health insurance plan for a certain amount of time after leaving a job. This might be a good option if you’re considering retirement before age 65, when you can apply for Medicare coverage.
Medicare Part A (hospital coverage) begins at age 65, and there’s usually no premium cost. Part B, which covers medically necessary services needed to diagnose or treat medical conditions and preventative services, typically must begin at age 65 or when you leave employment after age 65, unless you’re covered by your spouse’s insurance. Prescription drug coverage will be an additional cost.

Do you want to continue making charitable contributions?
For Oliver and Susan Stark, the path to retirement has involved twists and turns. But throughout their journey, they’ve remained committed to giving back.
“In 2002 we were working with another advisor, and I ‘retired’ early (at age 48) to work as a consultant twice a week,” Susan says. “When the Great Recession hit, Oliver was laid off and went one and a half years without income. I went back to work, and it was a very challenging time, but God provides and things worked out. We were even able to continue tithing during that time.”
The Hausers, who have worked with Calloway since 2004, continue to make tithing a priority in retirement.

“Each month the first thing we pay is our tithe,” Helen says. “God expects us to be good stewards, and He has proven over and over He’s going to help us with whatever comes up. We rely on Him and don’t need to be afraid.”
Calloway says the Hausers’ retirement plan provides for their financial security as well as their ability to give back. For example, he worked with Peter to set up a foundation at North Carolina State.
“They’re big givers, they live within their means, and they’re well-prepared for retirement,” Calloway says.
The Hausers are grateful for the many retirement decisions Calloway has helped guide them through. Talk to your financial professional and tax advisor to see if early retirement might be in your future.

Thrivent Financial and its respective associates and employees have general knowledge of the Social Security tenets; however, they do not have the professional expertise for a complete discussion of the details of your specific situation. For additional information, contact your local Social Security Administration office.
The members’ experiences may not be the same as other members’ and does not indicate future performance or success.
CREATING A BLENDED FAMILY means unifying two sets of experiences and expectations. While all couples face tough conversations about money, those bringing children—no matter their ages—into a marriage have extra factors to consider.

Whether you’re talking about remarriage after being widowed or divorced, or you’re already living as a blended family, these tips from Thrivent members and financial professionals can help you balance everyone’s interests.

**Start the Conversation**
Everyone brings personal attitudes and beliefs about money into a relationship. When creating a blended family, one partner, for example, might have money issues stemming from experiences with a previous partner. The other person might have concerns about how budgeting will affect their children. To work through issues and set the tone for how they will manage finances, couples should have an open
dialogue about their assets, income, expenses and spending habits.

David Stach, a Thrivent Financial professional with The Dulles Group in Chantilly, Virginia, recommends that couples make a list of their assets to help in discussing long-term financial plans. For example, if one person has a 401(k) plan or IRA that she had planned to use for her own retirement, that could prompt a discussion about what retirement might look like with a new spouse.

Jeremy Simpson, a Thrivent Financial professional in Hartselle, Alabama, suggests couples closely examine all income sources. These calculations can be more complex for blended families, whose income may include support from an ex-spouse or Social Security survivor benefits. “It’s a transition in life for these families,” he says. “We ask them to really look at the big picture and lay out everything on the table that they can, and to talk through it, trying to identify immediate and specific needs for their kids.”

Couples also should discuss expectations around expenses. What seems natural to one may seem unusual to the other. For example, older couples who are remarrying may have become used to budgeting in certain ways for many years. Stach recalls a situation where just one spouse—the wife—was tithing, but her new husband didn’t believe in the practice. In their conversations with Stach, she expressed how important it was to her, so the couple made tithing from her income part of their financial plan. “Her husband often made fun of it, but he understood,” Stach says. “It didn’t become a sore spot.”

For couples who share a common faith, Stach adds, it can be helpful to pray together about financial concerns. “It leads to a deeper discussion,” he says.

**Treat Children Fairly**

In a blended family, you’ll likely encounter a number of decisions about how to financially provide for the kids. Every family’s situation will look different, depending on the age of the children and whether a former spouse shares custody.

Expenses for each child can vary as families merge. For instance, one spouse’s child might have expensive private-school tuition while the other spouse’s child might attend a tuition-free public school. While there’s no single solution to reconciling child expenses, it’s important that this be addressed intentionally and fairly, knowing that fairness isn’t necessarily monetary equality. Couples need to find ways to show they are committed to each child’s well-being.

Even couples who marry and have adult children need to consider fairness. For Sal and Diane Signorino, Thrivent members in Haymarket, Virginia, their marriage in 2006 began what has been a journey of bringing their children together to feel comfortable as a blended family. It also prompted conversations about how to share their financial legacy among their children.

The Signorinos, who were both widowed, were in their 50s when they married. Sal’s son was graduating college, and his daughter was 25. Diane’s children were in their late 30s, and she already was a grandmother.

“We didn’t have to worry about how to pay for college,” Sal says. “We had to worry more about getting ready for the next phase of life.”

After covering expenses following his wife’s death, he found himself swimming in a little bit of debt, he says. He worried about whether he would ever get to retire.

Over the next few years, the Signorinos paid off his daughter’s college loans, his credit card debt and a home-equity loan. Today, they are semiretired and work part time—Sal as a substitute teacher, Diane as a school nurse.
With their finances stable, they bought a lake house where they can gather with their children and their families. They try to get everyone together at least once a year. Sal’s finding that new grandchildren, who never knew their previous spouses, are helping to strengthen their family ties.

The Signorinos want to divide their estate equally among all four children, instead of basing it on which one of them contributed more or less. “When the day comes and we’re gone, I want to leave something with no one having to worry about it,” Sal says. “I’m hoping it’s as fair as it can be.”

Keep Communication Open
Stacie and Justin Nails, Thrivent members in Decatur, Alabama, blended their families five years ago. Both were previously divorced and Justin had three children from his first marriage, who then ranged from 5 to 13 years old. Stacie had a 6-year-old daughter, whom Justin has since adopted. The couple also recently adopted another child from China.

“It was definitely a growing process,” Stacie says. “The hardest thing for me was I had one child, and then all of a sudden we had four together. That was a big jump for me financially.” The responsibilities of moving children between two homes and splitting expenses with ex-spouses were, she adds, a big learning curve.

Justin says they learned quickly to improve their communication skills. They let each other know right away about unexpected expenses such as doctor bills, so no one would get surprised. “That would just put a stress between me and Stacie,” he says.

Now, at the beginning of each month, they include a line in their budget for unplanned costs, such as doctor copays or school field trips. If they don’t end up using the money, they carry over that amount to the next month or spend it on something else the family needs.

They also are careful to communicate with their ex-spouses in writing about financial decisions, which reduces misunderstandings, and to keep their children out of any disagreements.

“You’re not always going to agree on certain things, and that can get heavy, especially in your marriage,” Stacie says of dealing with an ex-spouse. “But you make a plan, you pray about it, you communicate constantly, you work through it and you move on.”

Set Up Accounts
The Nails have multiple joint accounts—two savings and two checking—but only to help them organize different types of spending. They share all their financial resources without considering who contributed the income.

That’s the approach suggested by Simpson, their Thrivent Financial professional. “Although one spouse might make all the money, or one might make more than the other, that doesn’t mean they get more say or more control,” he says. “Hopefully they’re both contributing 100 percent, whether through finances, time, talents or love.”

Stach says the best plan can depend on a couple’s life stage and goals. When he and his wife, Tara, married and formed a blended family, they kept savings for their children’s college tuition separate. Since they knew they would spend the money in the next few years, it didn’t make sense to merge the funds.

With younger children, it can help bring the new family together by having both parents contribute to the same pool of money. An exception may be child-support payments to an ex-spouse, which Stach suggests paying from a separate account. Keep in mind that whether you are the person paying or receiving support, remarriage can change child-support or spousal-support payments. It’s a good idea to have your attorney review your divorce decree and the laws in your state.

By keeping the lines of communication open, blended families can grow together, resolve conflicts and develop their own dreams. “You need to go into it with the question: Is this person my partner?” Sal says. If the answer is yes, “then everything else will work.”


“You make a plan, you pray about it, you communicate constantly, you work through it and you move on.”

—Thrivent member Stacie Nails on blended families and an ex-spouse

Resources for Blended Families

» brightpeak financial™, a division of Thrivent, helps couples understand their relationship with money. brightpeakfinancial.com

» Auburn University’s National Stepfamily Resource Center has educational programs and tips for blended families. stepfamilies.info

» The American Psychological Association offers tips on finances and parenting responsibilities for stepfamilies. apa.org/helpcenter/stepfamilies.aspx

» FamilyLife Blended offers a variety of biblically based resources for blended families, including books, DVDs and other educational materials. familylife.com/familylifeblended

» Prepare/Enrich is a relationship program for all couples, including those in blended families. It strengthens relationships by providing research-backed resources to families and clinicians. prepareenrich.com

Thrivent.com
How are you using the gifts (time, talents and treasures) God has given you to help others around you?
That was the question we posed for our 7th annual Kids’ Contest. Children from preschool through high school could enter.
There were prizes at stake—up to three $100 awards were given for each medium in each age category.
A panel of judges made up of Thrivent employees pored over all of the entries to determine the winners, which you’ll see on
the following pages. That process made us realize that we were winners too, because the heartfelt essays and drawings the kids
submitted in response to the question warmed our hearts and inspired us.
You can see all of the entries, including the full essays, videos and artwork, at Thrivent.com/contest. Keep in mind that what
you see here in excerpted form and online is exactly what was submitted, including grammar and spelling slip-ups.

**GOD’S GIFTS**

**PRE-K/KINDERGARTEN**

**ESSAY**

**Clean Earth**

HAILEY B., 6, EAGAN, MINNESOTA

I use God’s gift of thinking about the Earth to pick up trash so others can enjoy the Earth.

**VIDEO**

**Henry’s Gifts**

HENRY R., 4, BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Henry’s Gifts is a short video of the way he is using his gifts in everyday, simple ways to serve.

**DRAWING**

**I Can Help My Friends at School**

ALEXANDRA M., 5, CHASKA, MINNESOTA

In this picture, I am sharing some food and toys with my friend who doesn’t have any. I am also pulling out my teacher’s chair to help her sit down.

**DRAWING**

**Serving My Grandma**

NATHAN R., 5, SEWARD, NEBRASKA

This is a picture of Nathan and his great grandma. He is raking leaves in her yard.

**DRAWING**

**I Fly to Rwanda**

LINNEA MARAIS H., 3, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Linnea can’t write, but she carefully copied these letters, after asking her family how to spell “I fly to Rwanda.” She traveled with her mamma on a service trip to Rwanda in February/March.
ENTRIES FOR OUR ANNUAL CONTEST WERE A SHOW-AND-TELL ABOUT HOW KIDS USE THE GIFTS THEY’VE BEEN GIVEN.

GRADES 1-3

I Like to Serve
AARON R., 8, SEWARD, NEBRASKA
I drew pictures of ways I like to help and serve people. The cross shows that Jesus loves me, and I like to show His love to others.

I Love to Serve
FINLEY C., 7, OMRO, WISCONSIN
I love to sing. My drawing shows me in the Vacation Bible School choir.

Using God’s Gifts to Help Others
MASON B., 9, EAGAN, MINNESOTA
Using the gifts God has given me: time, energy and open mind, to serve people food. Once every month we put food on a plate to give people warm, healthy food. I like to serve people food who can’t get it.

Ways I Do God’s Work
NAOMI O., 8, WALDO, WISCONSIN
My class goes to Project Angel Hugs to make cards and crafts for kids with cancer. I always try to use bright colors for my projects because I think it would cheer the sick kids up. I do not like cancer.

SEE MORE!
Find links to the videos, the complete winning essays and the thoughts behind the drawings at Thrivent.com/contest.
**Your Talent is God's Gift to You—What You Do With It Is Your Gift to God**

**BRIELLE D.-W., 11, LOCKHART, TEXAS**
I share my time, talents and treasures with others in my daily life through my faith in God.

**My Time, Talents and Treasures**

**KASEN A., 9, JACKSON, MISSOURI**
I drew a treasure chest to represent all my gifts. In the thought bubbles I put the ways I help people.

**I Can Help With God’s Love!**

**SOPHIA B, 11, SILVER SPRINGS, FLORIDA**
I can use my God given talent of drawing to help people feel better.

**Hurricane Harvey**

**IAN S., 9, SPRING, TEXAS**
I was able to use my time, talent, and treasure when Hurricane Harvey hit our area last August. I used my treasure by giving offerings that helped storm victims. I used my time and talent to help my church with helping the victims of the storm. The first few days after Harvey, my church was a shelter. I helped to set up beds for people to sleep on and label bags full of clothes for people that needed them.

**The Joy of Serving**

**MICAH R., 10, SEWARD, NEBRASKA**
God has blessed me with the gift of a glad heart. This summer I vounteered for the Orphan Grain Train, and it made me feel good to know that I am helping other people. I spent time preparing boxes of clothes to be shipped around the world. It makes my heart glad to know that I am serving others.

**Using the Gifts God Gave Me**

**ALAYNA G., 11, LINCOLN, NEBRASKA**
My school is very multicultural. When a student from another country came to my classroom, she was very shy and couldn’t speak any English. She didn’t have very many friends. So me and my friends stepped in and became her friend. I talked slowly and used my hands to explain. Just because she couldn’t speak English, doesn’t mean she can’t be my friend.

**Using Time, Talents and Treasures**

**ASHER A., 9, JACKSON, MISSOURI**
Asher tells five ways he uses his talent and treasures to help others and shows some of the tools he uses to do so.

**My Sharpie Project**

**TAYA K., 11, BELLE FOURCHE, SOUTH DAKOTA**
I was challenged by a good friend to do this and while I was doing this, I noticed how much people judge and how it makes them feel, and I also noticed how much I even judge people.

**My Talent**

**LEVI R., 11, BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA**
My Talent is a short video on how Levi uses his gift and joy for fishing to serve others.
GRADES 7-9

ESSAY
The Joy of Giving
NINA N., 11, EDEN PRAIRIE, MINNESOTA
As a homeschooler, God gives me the time to help my church during weekdays. I’ve helped ladies at church assemble homemade quilts that go to other countries. I’ve also had the chance to help set up post-funeral luncheons at my church. My mom and I come early to help others prepare food and clean up after the service.

ESSAY
God’s Little Blessings
LILLIAN H., 12, ARVADA, COLORADO
With the gifts that God has given me, I can bless other people. One of the gifts that God has blessed me with is my intuitiveness. I can tell when other people feel hurt, discouraged, or are just having a bad day. Using that knowledge, I can do little things to help them. Whether it’s writing them a nice note or giving them a piece of candy to sweeten up their day, I can make a difference in their lives.

VIDEO
5 Ways I Use My Gifts From God to Help Others
NATHAN M.-R., 12, PORTLAND, OREGON
In this video I become a minifigure and show the ways I use my gifts from God to help others.

VIDEO
Where Can You Use Your Time, Talents and Treasures?
ISAAC N., 12, ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA
You can use your time, talents and treasures to give glory to God...no matter where you are!

GRADES 10-12

ESSAY
My Gifts From God
JASON S., 17, HILLSBOROUGH, NEW YORK
I thought that even though I was just a kid, what if I worked hard to help people in need? The next year we volunteered to coordinate the backpack program. That was 11 years ago and I still give speeches to the congregation, apply for grants, talk to store managers about our donation needs and spend almost every day during the summer shopping and organizing supplies.

ESSAY
The Two-Way Touch
EMILY H., 15, ARVADA, COLORADO
Even a gift of creativity can boost people up! I like to craft homemade cards for friends on their birthday or make big “Get Well” signs for family in the hospital. Sometimes, something that comes so naturally seems insignificant to me, but these personal touches make people smile, and that keeps me going.

DRAWING
Beginning of Love
ELSIA P., 17, STILLWATER, MINNESOTA
One of the gifts God has given me is a big and beautiful smile. One of the easiest ways to show love and kindness to others is through a genuine smile.

ESSAY
Serving God by Serving Others
HAILEE C., 15, PLACENTIA, CALIFORNIA
God gave me the trait of a servant’s heart. Our church has many opportunities to serve and I began working in kid’s ministry in 5th grade. My favorite part of volunteering with the kids is hearing their stories and making sure they know that they matter. I have also had the privilege this year of volunteering with a program called lot 318. It is a homework program for under privileged kids.

VIDEO
Enriching Lives Through Art
CATHERINE H., 17, CHANDLER, ARIZONA
Voice over video explaining how artistic talents can be used to bring people together and send messages to others and the public.
A Fraternal Benefit Society for Christians

Thrivent’s structure creates unique opportunities for you and the organization.

By Donna Hein

IF YOU HAD TO DESCRIBE THRIVENT TO SOMEONE, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Maybe you’d tell them about the life insurance you purchased to protect your family or the retirement strategy you’ve built with a Thrivent Financial professional. Or you’d talk about the Thrivent Action Teams you’ve participated in and the educational workshops you’ve attended. Maybe you’d describe it as an organization for Christians.

But would you also mention that Thrivent is a fraternal benefit society?

You certainly could, and perhaps should. It’s the first line in Thrivent’s Articles of Incorporation, a document that dates back to 1902. But what does “fraternal benefit society” really mean, and what’s the history behind it?

By definition, a fraternal benefit society is a not-for-profit organization that provides insurance to its members and carries out social good for its members and the public. The activities are carried out through a system of local branches; Thrivent calls them Thrivent Member Networks.

Essentially, a fraternal benefit society combines the “member-owned” characteristic of a mutual insurance company with the “social mission” characteristic of a faith-based or service organization.

Fraternal benefit societies, unique to North America, actually started in the U.S. in the late 1800s to provide mutual aid to new Americans underserved by commercial insurance companies and united by a common bond. Typical common bonds included ethnicity, religion and occupation. Christianity is the common bond uniting today’s Thrivent members.

As a member, the fraternal benefit society concept is important to know because it’s the structure that gives Thrivent a truly distinctive place in the broad universe of financial services.
A fraternal benefit society has five distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other financial services organizations.

1 Fraternal purpose to serve members and society
Thrivent’s fraternal purpose is to guide both to be wise with money and live generously.

2 Common bond that unites membership
Christianity is the common bond shared by Thrivent members.

3 Lodge system to gather members regionally
All Thrivent members are part of a regional Thrivent Member Network, which gives them access to charitable and educational programs.

4 Insurance benefits to protect members and their families
Thrivent offers life and disability income insurance, as well as a broad range of financial solutions, to help protect families.

5 Membership-owned structure
Thrivent is accountable to its member-owners—you—not third-party stockholders. This means you have a say in how Thrivent is run, and you share in Thrivent’s success.

"No other company has the unique combination of being both a top-rated insurance organization and a mission-driven, not-for-profit organization," says Randy Boushek, Thrivent chief financial officer and treasurer.

To help you understand what that means, consider these facts:

- In 2017, Thrivent members volunteered 14.4 million hours to help their communities, and $280 million in total outreach was generated by Thrivent and its members.1
- Also in 2017, 88,600 members led 124,000 Thrivent Action Teams, making a difference in their communities.1
- For more than 20 years, Thrivent has been one of the few insurance organizations that has earned the A++ Superior financial rating, the highest of 16 ratings from A.M. Best, an independent insurance ratings agency.2
- Thrivent is listed as No. 343 on the Fortune 500 list in June 2018.3

As a fraternal benefit society, Thrivent is not beholden to Wall Street, Boushek says, and that’s an advantage. “We can do the right things to manage our business,” he says. “We can manage it for the long term; we can hold a big rainy day fund. And when we’re successful, it’s shared with our members.”4

1 All numbers are for the year 2017 and as of Dec. 31, 2017.
2 Ratings reflect Thrivent’s overall strength and claims-paying ability but do not apply to the performance of investment products.
3 Source: Fortune magazine.
4 Not all members receive dividends, and dividends are not guaranteed.


Thrivent member activities, such as Thrivent Action Teams, Thrivent Builds, and Thrivent Choice, engage Thrivent members and Thrivent Member Networks in charitable activities, furthering Thrivent’s mission and its purposes under state law. You should never purchase or retain any insurance or annuity products simply to be able to participate. Participation is subject to applicable Terms and Conditions. Terms and conditions available at Thrivent.com.
After years of persistence, sacrifice and barely making ends meet, Pastor Michael and Amber Lehmann were closing in on their goal: three months of living expenses in an emergency fund. It was then that the Tomball, Texas, couple realized they didn’t know what to do next with their finances.

The Lehmanns have a full life. They planted Trinity Vineyard Church 14 years ago and serve in full-time ministry. They have five children—three biological and two adopted—ranging in age from 15 down to 8 years old. And Amber recently started a full-time job at Houston Methodist Hospital after going back to school to earn her nursing degree.

They started Trinity Vineyard in a leased warehouse, which limited growth. They then moved to rented space before finding a permanent building. For two years during the rental period, Michael taught at a Lutheran high school in addition to his pastoral responsibilities. His teaching salary went to the church building fund.

They managed those years with only a little debt, but they lacked savings and a retirement and insurance strategy.

“So much of our lives had been about giving to others and our church, but we knew we needed to plan for our future,” Michael says. “Amber and I had talked about our need to finish well, to be in a financial place that we can say ‘yes’ to the things we want. But how do we do that?”
We know that we’re called to ministry, but we’re not called to just survive. The only way to change the trajectory is to make different choices.”

—Thrivent member Amber Lehmann

“They already had the foundation built with their positive financial habits,” Greenwood says. “They just needed someone with a little more ‘architectural’ experience to come in with some recommendations of how to build something exquisite on their solid foundation.”

Together, they’ve addressed their need for life insurance and disability income insurance. They’ve started saving for retirement. And they’re working at setting up college saving plans for their children.

Similar to many who are called to ministry, the Lehmanns were serving their congregation, yet they didn’t have anyone serving them and their financial needs. Their previous journey was one of owing money and paying off debt, Greenwood says. “Now it’s one of knowing what they want to do and that if they commit X dollars for Y months, it’s achievable,” he says.

“We were on a treadmill for a long time,” Michael says. “Now that we feel like we’re making progress, it gives us confidence to do more.”

Yet Michael and Amber are being realistic. “The pace of our journey may be the same,” Michael says, “but we feel like we’re actually going somewhere instead of just surviving.”

And they’re happy they’ve developed a partnership with Miller and Greenwood as well as an organization that serves Christians. “They understand our guiding principles and why we are where we are, why we’ve made the decisions we’ve made,” Michael says. “Someone without a faith background may not understand.”

Getting Started
The Lehmanns reached out to Miko Thomas Tisdale, a Thrivent community engagement leader who had attended their church, for guidance. Tisdale put them in touch with Blair Greenwood and Matt Miller, Thrivent Financial professionals, and a meeting was set.

“We know that we’re called to ministry, but we’re not called to just survive,” Amber says. “The only way to change the trajectory is to make different choices. And we were ready to do that.”

Unfortunately, the day before the meeting in November 2017, Michael and Amber learned that a tax error from previous years needed to be made right. They nearly depleted their emergency fund to pay it.

“We felt so far behind again,” Amber says. But they weren’t deterred. They kept the meeting with Greenwood and Miller, who shared Thrivent’s story and then listened to them share their story and goals.

“We really wanted to help Michael and Amber put together a plan for their short-, mid- and long-term goals,” Miller says. “And that started with listening to their hopes and dreams. We can never predict what the future will hold, but we can help people prepare for whatever it brings.”

The Lehmanns appreciated the approach. “We all have expectations that we don’t even know we have,” Amber says. “While Michael and I generally are always on the same page, Blair and Matt helped us identify where we are and where our expectations differ.”

For example, while they want to help their kids with college, their views of how that might be accomplished differ. They both want to travel and plan for annual family vacations. And it’s important to Amber to be able to pay for her two daughters’ weddings someday.

“Before this, we hadn’t let ourselves dream past our emergency fund,” Amber says.

Moving Forward
With the guidance of Greenwood and Miller and their own perseverance, the Lehmanns have replenished the emergency fund, identified their goals and created a plan to carry them into their future.
Have a Holly, Jolly (and Generous) Christmas

By Karina Corona

Don’t lose track of what matters most during the season of giving.

Cookie baking, gift shopping, party planning. The season of Christmas ushers in the busiest time of year for many of us. But all that focus on friends and family comes with the risk of forgetting about the needs of the larger community. Making time to volunteer and pay forward the gifts God has given you—your time, talents and treasures—helps you stay grounded in what matters and keeps the season’s stresses in check.

Give Your Time

Across the country, Americans are living generously.

62.6 million volunteers provide 7.8 billion hours of service annually and help contribute $184 billion nationally.1

This Christmas season, gather friends and family to volunteer for a cause. Here are a few ideas to jump-start your thinking:

• Organize a community toy or coat drive.

• Build and distribute blessing bags for the homeless and include items like socks, gloves, scarves, sunscreen, toothbrushes and toothpaste.

• Help prepare meals for members of your local homeless shelter.

Share Your Talents

As you review your holiday to-do list, consider visiting a local nursing home or elderly community. Here are four ways you can share your talents with that community:

• Organize a recital for the elderly at your church or a nursing home.

• Create and distribute handmade Christmas cards.

• Deliver groceries to someone who doesn’t have a car.

• Partner with a community outreach center to host a holiday gathering.

For many, this time of year is a welcome chance to connect with friends and family. But for the 28% of people age 65 and over who live alone, the holidays can be lonely.2
December is the month of generosity: it’s when 18.2% of annual U.S. charitable giving takes place.³

62% of religious households give to charity, compared with 46% of households without a religious affiliation.⁴

Thrivent members are particularly generous. In 2017, members helped raise $176 million through Thrivent programs for people in need, churches and other nonprofits.*

As you and your family prep for Christmas, take time to discuss shared interests and determine where to donate dollars. For example, are you passionate about feeding the hungry or sheltering the homeless? There are many local, national and international organizations from which to choose. Not sure where to get involved?

Here are some resources to help choose your cause:

>> InFaith Community Foundation is a national, faith-based charity with a mission to serve donors, spread joy and change lives. infaithfound.org

>> Thrivent Choice® in partnership with InFaith Community Foundation provides an online platform for making personal donations to causes and nonprofits. Thrivent pays the processing fees so 100 percent of your donation goes to help. Eligible members also can recommend where Thrivent distributes a portion of its charitable funding by directing Choice Dollars*. Thrivent.com/choice

>> Thrivent Action Teams allow you to organize a team of friends and family to meet a community need. Thrivent provides $250 to help you kick-start your project. Thrivent.com/actionteams

>> CharityNavigator.org

>> GoFundMe.com


* For the year 2017 and as of Dec. 31 2017.
If you have a student loan, you probably also have an inbox full of emails and a growing pile of snail mail offers suggesting you refinance that loan. Their appeal seems simple enough: By refinancing, you can ease the financial burden of a loan. Who wouldn't want that?

But proceed with caution, and do your homework before taking action. The decision to refinance depends on several factors: your ultimate goals, what you may give up, the true costs and savings, and the difference in terms among lenders. Here's a brief study guide to help you with the process.

Set Your Goal
“You need to start by asking, ‘Why do I want to refinance? What is my goal?’” says Debra Chromy, president of the Education Finance Council. For most people, refinancing is considered to achieve one or more of these goals:

> Lower the interest rate.
> Lower the monthly payment.
> Keep the same monthly payment but repay the loan more quickly.
> Consolidate multiple loans into one loan.
> Switch from a variable to a fixed interest rate.

“But once you figure out what you’re trying to accomplish, it will be easier to narrow down your refinance options,” Chromy says.

Weigh the Benefits of Federal Loans
There are two types of student loans: federal and private. The federal government provides federal loans, while private loans are offered by lenders such as banks, credit unions, state agencies or schools. Both types of loans can be refinanced, at which point they become private loans.

However, there’s a potential catch. “Federal loans come with a number of benefits that are lost if you refinance,” says Susan Farrell, vice president of curriculum design for Thrivent Student Resources.

Federal loans offer deferment, which postpones repayment while you are in school, in the military or unemployed. Individuals in certain professions—such as teachers in low-income schools or nonprofit or government employees—may be able to have their federal loans forgiven after a certain number of years. Federal loans also offer eight different repayment plans, including a few that cap

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**REFINANCING VS. CONSOLIDATION**

Many families don’t realize that refinancing and consolidating of loans are different. Refinancing is creating a new loan to pay off the loan balance of an existing loan. Borrowers refinance to save money on interest. The market and creditworthiness of the borrower determine the interest rate.

Federal loan consolidation rolls multiple direct student loans into a single loan. When you consolidate, your interest rate does not change—it’s based on the weighted average of the original loans. In most cases, the term of the loan is extended, so you end up paying more over the life of the loan.
your payments at a certain percentage of your income, which is helpful if your income is low. “If you think you might need to use these benefits, then refinancing may not be the right option for you,” Farrell says.

**Do the Math**

If you won’t need the benefits of your federal loan or if you only have a private loan, then the decision to refinance usually hinges on whether you will save money.

The terms of a refinance will depend on your income and credit score, a three-digit number based on your bill payment, debt and credit history. Lenders use those numbers to determine if you qualify for a loan on your own—without a co-signer—and what interest rate and term (length of repayment) to offer you.

“You only want to refinance if you can save money on the interest rate,” Farrell says. In general, lenders offer lower interest rates for shorter-term loans, such as three years.

However, some people extend their payments over a longer term (10 to 15 years) because this lowers their monthly payment and helps with immediate cash flow. “You need to do the math,” Chromy says. “By spreading out the loan over a longer period of time, your actual overall loan costs might be higher and may end up costing more than your original loan.”

However, if you want to reduce both your monthly and long-term costs, there is a solution. “If you go with a longer-term loan, you can make extra payments toward the loan’s principal when you have additional funds, to pay it off ahead of schedule,” Farrell says.

**Comparison Shop**

Not all refinance loans are created equal—there are factors beyond the interest rate and term to consider. Shop around and ask tough questions to find the best deal: Do lenders offer a discount if you set up automated payments or establish a bank account with them? Do they offer hardship deferments? Will they release a co-signer after a certain number of payments? Will the lender forgive the debt obligation for the co-signer in the event of the borrower’s death?

If the refinance terms you’re offered aren’t competitive, put off taking action. Work on improving your credit score and apply again in six to 12 months. “It’s worthwhile to dip your toe in the finance waters to see what kind of loan you’re eligible for,” Chromy says. “If you can decrease your interest rate and the cost of your loan, then the effort could pay off.”

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St. Louis-based freelance writer Kristin Baird Rattini has written about consumer finance for national publications for two decades.
Thrivent recently brought together leading scholars, economists and theologians at the 2018 Thrivent Faith & Finance Conference in Minneapolis to discuss how faith can influence the way people think about economic opportunities and combat inequality.

“This event encouraged a dialogue and deeper understanding of the ties between faith and finance,” says Tanweer Akram, director of global policy and economics at Thrivent. “It was fascinating to hear from leading experts who shared their research in economics, finance, history, philosophy, theology, public policy and law.”

The conference featured four panel conversations: Economic Opportunities: Real World Outcomes and Faith; Values and Consumerism; Faith, Financial Intermediation and Economic Development; and U.S. Workers, Business Ethics and Good Capital. Leaders from the local business community, nonprofit organizations and college students were invited to attend.

Highlights from the event include:

>> **SCRIPTURE CAN TELL PEOPLE A GREAT DEAL ABOUT ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY.** Scripture, specifically the book of Genesis, can serve as an economic framework if read closely. For example, it says people are created to work and care for the earth, not simply to generate an income. It also reveals prosperity is meant to be inclusive instead of exclusive, and profit is time. If people have more time, they can be generous stewards and help combat greed and self-interest. Genesis reveals God has given us all we need to flourish. His definition of success is all individuals living in their creativity without hindrance, and that’s when economic opportunity becomes most abundant.

>> **PEOPLE CAN CHANGE TODAY’S ECONOMIC REALITIES IF THEY ADJUST THEIR THINKING.** Before modern times, humans had a connected relationship with nature. If they took something from the earth, it was always restored. But over time, that notion faded with the rise of science and institutions. These systems implied that nature was exploitable, value belonged only to a privileged few and the world was up for grabs. Today, people live in a mindset where they are driven more by consumerism than by core values. And increasingly, values are being turned into commodities that can be purchased or sold. If people want to change today’s economic realities, they must reflect on their faith and redirect their thinking so it reflects concern for the broader good instead of individual desires and interests.

>> **HAVING A CHRISTIAN MINDSET CAN HELP COMBAT INEQUALITY.** During pivotal moments in history, Christian theology was foundational in guiding Christians to take action to challenge structures and abuses that limited access to economic opportunity. Yet, over time, inequality has taken root again. In each new age, a renewal of Christian thought can help equip Christians to tackle issues related to economic disparity.
**Inspiring Generosity Explores 40 Artworks**


*Inspiring Generosity* shares a historical account of each artwork, followed by a theological commentary and a modern devotional reflection. The artworks highlight examples of compassion, giving and sacrifice in subjects from the Western religious tradition. The original prints, drawings and manuscript illuminations in the book span eight centuries of Western art history and include pieces by Albrecht Dürer, Rembrandt van Rijn, Sybil Andrews and Édouard Manet.

“We created *Inspiring Generosity* because we believe the artist’s contribution is worth celebrating and preserving as expressions of our shared history,” said Joanna Reiling Lindell, director and curator of the Thrivent Collection of Religious Art. “At Thrivent, our mission is to help Christians be wise with money and live generously. The artworks express varying perspectives on generosity and Scripture. This can shed light on how we can be wise stewards of the gifts God has given us and live in service to one another, our churches and our communities.”

Lindell is one of the authors of the book; the other two are John Busacker and Ed Klodt.

To learn more about *Inspiring Generosity* and to order a copy ($35), visit ThriventInspiringGenerosity.com.

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**MEET THRIVENT’S NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS**

Two Thrivent members appointed to Thrivent’s national board of directors in 2018.

**Bradford N. Creswell**

From Mercer Island, Washington, Creswell is co-founder and managing partner of NCA Partners, LLC, a private equity firm in Seattle. He’s been a member of the Thrivent Board of Directors since February and serves on the Audit and Thrivent Holdings committees.

Creswell currently serves on the boards of two privately held portfolio companies, PTW Energy Services Ltd. and Apply-A-Line, LLC. In addition, he is director and chair of the Audit Committee for the Reading Partners national board and the director and acting interim chair of the Reading Partners Seattle regional board. Creswell was previously on the regional board of the Thrivent Member Network–Northwest Region.

**Nichole Pechet**

Pechet, CEO of Homebound, a venture-backed company creating a better way to build homes with the help of technology, has been a member of the Thrivent Board of Directors since June and serves on the Thrivent Financial and Audit committees.

Before Homebound, Pechet was the vice president of marketing and a core member of the executive team at Thumbtack, a growth-stage technology company. She oversaw both growth and experience teams, as well as communications/PR, brand, content and the Thumbtack Creative Studio.

Visit Thrivent.com/governance to learn more about Thrivent’s leadership.
TFCU Offers New Credit Cards

Thrivent Federal Credit Union has introduced a new product to help its members build credit: the TFCU Mastercard® credit card.

Members can apply for either the TFCU Standard Mastercard or the TFCU Rewards Mastercard. The standard card offers a lower interest rate, while the rewards card enables the cardholder to earn a cash rebate on spending. Neither has an annual fee. Both cards come with introductory offers.

In addition, TFCU has created an eBook that can help members on their journey to better credit. Building Your Credit Future: A Guide to Responsible Credit Card Use offers information on how, with the right card and the right plan, a cardholder can:

- Boost and understand their credit score.
- Build their credit.
- Reach financial goals.
- Embrace sound financial behaviors.

For more information on the TFCU Mastercard® credit card, visit Thriventcu.com/credit-card. To obtain a copy of the eBook, visit Thriventcu.com/credit-guide.

1 You will automatically earn a 1.5% cash rebate on net purchases (purchases less any credits, returns and adjustments). Cash advances of any kind and balance transfers are not considered purchases, will not count toward your rebate and may affect the credit line available for this offer. Cash rebates earned will post to your account on each calendar quarter’s statement (March, June, September and December). All loans are subject to credit application, qualification and approval. Restrictions may apply. Must qualify for membership.

Thrivent Action Team Kits Redesigned

Starting in 2019, when you’re approved to lead a Thrivent Action Team, we’ll send you a new and improved Thrivent Action Team kit. It will include some of the same items as before—seed money, T-shirts (in a new color) and promotional materials—and a few new things to help make your project even more impactful. All of the contents have been designed to make them more useful and environmentally friendly.

- All paper products in the kit are now fully recyclable and were created for the purpose of reuse after the project.
- The leader notebook now makes it easier to lead a Thrivent Action Team by organizing the steps and minimizing the amount of information you will need to read. It also includes lots of blank lined pages, so you can use it for future events, event reflections or determining next steps in making a difference.
- The new “banner” will come as a string of five felt pennants that you can hang up at your project location and then distribute to volunteers as a keepsake of your work together.

To apply for a Thrivent Action Team, simply identify a community need and fill out the application at Thrivent.com/actionteams. Your effort could be as simple as helping an elderly neighbor with yardwork or hosting a bake sale to support a mission trip. For project inspiration and to see what others have done, go to Thrivent.com/actionteamshub.

Thrivent member activities, such as Thrivent Action Teams, Thrivent Builds, and Thrivent Choice, engage Thrivent members and Thrivent Member Networks in charitable activities, furthering Thrivent’s mission and its purposes under state law. You should never purchase or retain any insurance or annuity products simply to be able to participate. Participation is subject to applicable Terms and Conditions. Terms and conditions available at Thrivent.com.
INFAITH LAUNCHES PROGRAM FOCUSED ON FAMILY GIVING

InFaith Community Foundation takes its mission to serve donors seriously. So when 62% of donors said in a 2017 survey that they use their giving as an example to their family and 52% said they are motivated to give because their family gave, InFaith took action.

The foundation created a program called GenerationsGive inFaith—providing resources to support charitable giving for families. The program is designed to help families:

- Talk about their giving plans.
- Model and share giving values.
- Explore and focus those giving values/interests.
- Put a plan into action and achieve their giving goals.

“Taking time for these conversations reinforces a family’s story by giving voice to all family members. It helps bring clarity to charitable giving passions and brings families closer,” says Chris Andersen, InFaith president and executive director.

The resources range from activities and worksheets to a webpage with online tools and a community of family charitable funds. Future donor gatherings also are in the works to provide online training, programs and events.

Also part of the program is the webinar Unleashing Generosity: Talking With Your Family About Giving Values. Tracy Gary, author of Inspired Philanthropy, will discuss various topics, including ways to share your giving passions and purpose, tools to include in your family’s giving plan and how faith and values can build a sense of security and uplift others.

For more information about GenerationsGive inFaith and to view the webinar, visit infaithfound.org/GenerationsGive.

InFaith Community Foundation is a public charity that services individuals, organizations and the community through charitable planning, donor advised funds and endowments. InFaith works collaboratively with Thrivent and its financial professionals.

Schedule for 2018 Tax Statements

Soon you’ll be welcoming the new year, and before you know it, you’ll be thinking about tax preparations. Here’s when to expect your tax statements from Thrivent:

- Generally, all annuity, insurance and mutual fund tax statements will be mailed to members by Jan. 31, 2019. Allow five to seven business days for them to arrive.
- Statements for mutual funds with holdings in real estate investment trusts (REITs) are typically delivered to members in late February.
I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.
John 10:10

The promise of abundant life gives me special joy and contentment. As a sheep in His flock, I try to follow Jesus, my good shepherd. The path is narrow, but I know it leads me to His eternal pasture of heavenly bliss. There I will enjoy a life of abundance.
—Esther Oehme
Fredonia, Wisconsin
We hear the drumbeat of more all around us. More wealth. More toys. More likes.

Our faith uses a different kind of accounting. While the more of materialism is “get more,” with the lens of Christianity it’s this: love more. More is driven by values rather than by volume.

Our charitable giving comes from a will to do more. Through InFaith Community Foundation, you can act on your intentions and make more of your charitable giving. Together we can spread more joy and change more lives throughout our shared community.

Make your giving do MORE.

Call InFaith at 800.365.4172

InFaith Community Foundation is a public charity that serves individuals, organizations and the community through charitable planning, donor advised funds and endowments. InFaith works collaboratively with Thrivent and its financial professionals.
Explore a Career as a Thrivent Financial Advisor

Does helping people reach their goals energize you? Would you feel rewarded in a career where you empower others to build stronger financial futures?

Thrivent Financial is growing, and if you have a heart for service and a passion for helping Christians be wise with money, you can grow with us. A career as a Thrivent Financial advisor allows you to earn an attractive income while making a big impact in peoples’ lives.

If you think you’d be a good fit for Thrivent Financial, or if you know someone who would, visit Thrivent.com/LiveYourCalling today.