Learning Together across Generations

The 2018 WFF seminar on Friday, April 6, gathered 89 women of all ages from the tristate area to learn together in a new multigenerational format. The day began with an interactive keynote workshop—“Multiply Your Generosity: Bold Action, Inspired Giving”—presented by Consuelo Gutierrez-Crosby and Cindy Aegerter from InFaith Community Foundation in Minneapolis. As part of this workshop, participants had an opportunity to share stories of their personal giving and volunteering and the bold difference they hope to make through giving back. The presenters raised up stories of women in the Bible as inspiration for generosity in supporting the causes most important to us. Women also learned about charitable and financial tools, along with exploring various giving styles and ways to advocate for change.

In the late morning, attorney Jennifer Gumbel of LeRoy, Minnesota, led a session on estate planning considerations for all life stages. Following lunch, we concluded the day with a highly anticipated session by Michelle Whitehill and Brenda Ranum of Decorah about downsizing and passing on personal property. This topic really resonated with the audience, and great ideas were shared for organizing and decluttering.

Thanks to a generous sponsorship by Decorah Bank & Trust Company, all participants received their choice between two resource books in addition to printed materials for each of the session topics.

Our new format for the seminar this year kept the full group together all day, rather than offering concurrent sessions. The program was designed to appeal to a multigenerational audience, and participants really enjoyed learning together as one large group and hearing perspectives from all ages. We also included an optional service project, supported by a Thrivent Action Team grant and our WFF advisory group, at the conclusion of the seminar. (See story on page 3.) This, too, was well-received by our participants as a tangible way to put our collective philanthropy in action.

As part of the 2018 WFF seminar, InFaith Community Foundation donated $100 to a charity of choice in a special drawing. Judy Strike of Cresco was the lucky winner and selected the Winneshiek County Genealogical Society as her charity. Special thanks for supporting a local organization!

Planning is under way for the 2019 seminar on Friday, April 12, when we will celebrate the 15th anniversary of the WFF Initiative!
2018 Women, Faith, and Finance Seminar Highlights

Copresenters post participant responses about meaningful gifts and bold difference.

Brenda Ranum addresses passing on personal property.

Participants network between sessions.

**Finances in Focus: Your Year-End Checklist**

Many people review their finances at the start of a new year. But why wait until then?

Reviewing them now—while you still have time to make adjustments—could save you money and stress.

More specifically, assessing your finances before the end of the year can:

- Offer a snapshot of what you’ve earned, spent, and saved
- Provide insight on where you stand on year-end deadlines
- Help you track progress against long-term goals

A checklist to help with your annual financial review:

1. **Study your expenses.**
   Where did your money go? Making a list of all of your expenses can help you answer that question—and expose habits that could hurt your future.
   
   **Tip:** Look closely at your monthly expenses. You may be able to save money by cutting back on services you don’t use enough to justify their cost, such as cable TV or a gym membership.

2. **Evaluate your savings goals.**
   Are you on track to hit the financial goals you set? Do you still need to, for example, build up your emergency savings fund?
   
   **Tip:** Don’t get discouraged if you haven’t met your goals. Remember, a little can go a long way. And right now is always the best time to start.

3. **Identify your year-end tax strategies.**
   Make sure you fully understand your tax situation. Have you earned investment dividends and interest? If so, it can affect how much tax you’ll owe. And if you made money by selling an investment, that gain also may be taxable.
   
   **Tip:** You might be able to offset your tax obligation by selling another investment at a loss or making charitable contributions. Remember to consult with your tax advisor for more year-end strategies.

4. **Review your retirement contributions.**
   If your financial situation allows, it’s usually a good idea to maximize your retirement savings, particularly if you have individual retirement accounts.
   
   **Tip:** If you didn’t hit your year-end target, see if you can catch up in the first quarter of 2019.

5. **Consider your charitable donations.**
   Helping those in need is the most important reason to give. But how you choose to pay for those donations also may cut your tax bill.
   
   **Tip:** If you’re 70 1/2 or older, you typically must take a required minimum distribution (RMD) from your retirement accounts each year. If you donate some of that distribution directly to a charity, you may trim your tax bill.

6. **Evaluate your flexible spending dollars.**
   If you’ve set aside pretax dollars in a flexible spending account for health care or child care, check your balance. Figure out how you’ll use it up by the end of the plan year. And remember: if you don’t use it, you generally lose it.
   
   **Tip:** Use your 2018 flexible spending to estimate how much to set aside next year.

7. **Inspect your insurance contracts.**
   Major life events such as marriage or a new baby can affect the amount and type of insurance you need. And if you’re starting your first job or changing careers, make sure to consider disability income insurance.
   
   **Tip:** Employer-provided life insurance may not always be the most affordable option. Don’t be afraid to shop around—you could find a more cost-effective alternative to purchase on your own.

8. **Prepare for next year.**
   Look over your objectives from the beginning of this year, and make any changes you need for the coming year. Now is also a great time to contact your financial representative for help with planning for 2019—and farther down the road.

**DEADLINE: December 31, 2018**

You must complete the following items by the end of the year to count toward your finances for the current year:

- Make charitable donations.
- Contribute to your 401(k) or other workplace retirement plan.
- Take required minimum distributions on retirement accounts.
- Use flexible spending dollars, if your company does not have a grace period or carryover.
- Sell investments at a loss to offset capital gains taxes on other investments.

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Avoid unplanned purchases and take control of your spending

An astonishing number of us spend impulsively—some 84 percent of Americans, according to a January 2016 creditcards.com poll.

More than half of the poll’s respondents said they’ve spent $100 or more on an impulse buy. An additional 20 percent said they’ve spent at least $1,000 on impulse.

But learning to control impulse shopping is possible. It’s a matter of thinking about what your money can do for you and aligning your spending with your values.

Seven Simple Strategies to Curb Impulse Spending

1. Create a monthly spending strategy.
   First, set aside part of your money to “share” or donate. Then, put at least 10 percent to 15 percent of your monthly income into savings. Next, figure out how much you’ll spend for housing, utilities, taxes, basic groceries, and other fixed expenses. Out of what’s left, plan to use some of it as “fun money” for however you want.

2. Put your fun money on a prepaid credit card.
   Using prepaid credit cards can help make sure you don’t overspend. “I sometimes suggest people have a couple of prepaid cards,” says Jim Clouser, a Thrivent Financial representative outside Boston. “Put some money for eating out on one card, for example. Set up another card for clothes shopping.”

3. Don’t shop when you’re sad or angry.
   “Reasonable people overspend when they’re emotional,” says Micah Velilla, a Thrivent Financial representative in Chapin, South Carolina. “Buying something can make you feel better. But the thrill you get from buying something you didn’t intend to buy is usually temporary.”

4. Don’t shop with other people.
   While it’s fun to shop with others, peer pressure can push you to spend—and spend a lot. “You’re more likely to buy a dress you hadn’t planned to buy if you’re with friends who tell you how great it looks on you,” Velilla says.

5. Wait before you buy.
   Before you make any discretionary purchase, make yourself wait a day. Often, when the wait is over, so too is the urge to buy. This rule of thumb also applies to online shopping. “Before you hit ‘buy,’ save your shopping cart, log out, and go for a walk,” Clouser says. “Many times, you’ll decide you don’t want to hit the ‘buy’ button after all.”

6. Make a list.
   Retailers arrange their merchandise strategically to catch our attention and generate spur-of-the-moment buys. With a shopping list in hand, you’ll be able to ignore what you don’t need.

7. Don’t be fooled by sales.
   “Sales can make you feel like you’ve won something,” Velilla says. “You won! You saved $100! But the truth is, if you spent $500 that you weren’t planning to spend, you didn’t save a thing.” That said, those clearance racks can be a good thing—when you’re mindful about your shopping habits, you can wait for a sale to buy items you need.

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“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

—Maya Angelou

Generosity in Action!

As part of our 2018 WFF seminar, we led a service project to create personal care bags for Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC) to distribute to people in need. We secured $250 in seed money from Thrivent Financial, which our 10-member WFF Advisory Group matched with $300. With these combined funds, we purchased supplies to create 50 bags that included shampoo, conditioner, body lotion, toilet paper, and laundry detergent. Decorah Bank and Trust donated 50 canvas shopping bags to hold the items. At the conclusion of the WFF seminar, participants were invited to help assemble a bag and/or make a monetary donation. (Many did both!) In less than ten minutes, we had assembled all 50 bags and raised an additional $147 for NEICAC. Thank you to all WFF participants who supported this great project—together we made a difference in our community!

Ticket offer for WFF participants

On Friday, April 12, 2019, the Luther College Center Stage Series will present a performance of The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain. This much-beloved orchestra returns to Luther to prove that the ukulele may be small, but it sure is mighty. From Tchaikovsky to Nirvana via Otis Redding and spaghetti western soundtracks, the orchestra takes its audience on a world tour through its unexpectedly virtuosic playing and singing.

Group ticket sales are available by contacting the Luther College Ticket Office at 563-387-1357. Individual tickets go on sale Monday, March 11. Those who register for the Women, Faith, and Finance seminar will receive a discounted ticket price for this evening performance.
From the Director

As the days get shorter and the holidays get closer, we know that fall is here. Our spring seminar seems like a long time ago, yet one of the topics we covered that day continues to be on my mind. Downsizing! In the days after the seminar, I ran into several WFF participants who had taken the advice to heart and were beginning to clean out closets, sort through drawers, and organize spaces in their homes. It was fun to hear people's tales of beginning the process of decluttering and to see the ripple effect of these helpful tips shared by our speakers put into action.

Given my Scandinavian heritage and my interest in downsizing, in the past year, I've read two books about the Swedish philosophies of döstädning (meaning "death cleaning") and lagom (meaning "not too much and not too little—just right") or enjoying balance in all aspects of life. Though it sounds more dramatic than it is, "death cleaning" is really a form of decluttering that you do while you're living, so your family doesn't have to deal with your belongings when you are gone. Lagom also reflects moderation, which ties nicely to the concepts of downsizing and decluttering. (The idea is that we really don't need all the stuff we acquire and keep—and sometimes freeing ourselves from those extra unnecessary items can be really liberating.) Both philosophies have been added motivation to start (and continue) ridding myself of possessions that don't bring joy or hold meaning to me. As Michelle Whitehill shared in her seminar session, "the more stuff, the more stress." She also wisely asked us to consider, "Which is more important, the item or the space it is taking up?" It does feel good to donate or recycle items, knowing others who need them more can benefit. I encourage everyone to give downsizing and decluttering a try. While it may seem like a daunting process, it's a gift to ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities!

Jeanie Lovell, CFRE
Program Director, Women, Faith, and Finance Initiative

P.S. As holiday shopping rolls around, let's keep this idea of lagom in mind (and also note the article on page 3 about ways to avoid impulse buying).