



THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR STEWARDSHIP & GENEROSITY

The National Center for Stewardship & Generosity: How It Came To Be

The duty of capturing the history, events, and energy of any movement is no easy task. The movement of stewardship and generosity, generally stated, seeks to inspire stewardship and generosity within Christian laity, leadership, churches, and other organizations. As an outcome of the general stewardship and generosity movement, the focus of The National Center for Stewardship & Generosity is on

- the preservation of historic, Biblical charity (*caritas*), one of the three theological virtues (those being faith, hope and charity ;
- promoting the increased practice of stewardship and generosity in American Christian culture;
- providing Biblical models and concepts to encourage the preservation and practice of stewardship and generosity; and
- serving as a recognized affiliation structure where individuals, of like-minded purpose and service, network to find encouragement, exchange information, and to share best practice ideas and information.

The literature base upon which The Center relies is the Bible, the very Word of God as it is available to Christians in all its translations.

Years ago, Dr. Scott M. Preissler began in-depth stewardship study through existing graduate programs, intending to eventually remedy the stewardship education problem.

In 1994, Scott Preissler earned the first, Masters of Arts degree in the country in Philanthropic Studies through the now acclaimed Indiana University Center on Philanthropy. He then earned the first Ph.D. doctorate degree in Steward Leadership Studies in the United States. His doctoral dissertation included pioneering research that would establish a recognized literature base (to cover the past 600 years) as a foundation for a new higher education field: Steward Leadership Studies. The library books, materials, and media of the Kingdom Generosity Collection were established following that dissertation.

The vast resources of the Kingdom Generosity Collection further and exemplify the knowledge foundation of the Bible. The Collection's literature base is comprised of a large part of all known and available stewardship and generosity historic books and literature, as well as thousands of representative art and antiquities, all relating to stewardship and generosity.

The amassing of Kingdom Generosity Collection is the work of many years by Dr. Scott M. Preissler and his wife, Andrea. The stewardship of many, across the world, have allowed the collection of the literature base, the art and the antiquities; each individual stewardship these profound items that were searched for and eventually located, many unexpectedly, by the Preisslers. The extraordinary scope of the Kingdom Generosity Collection can be described as the largest stewardship *reference library*, *generosity artifact collection*, and *stewardship-related art galleries* in the world. The vast Kingdom Generosity Collection is referred to and used in the research by theology and philanthropy scholars world-wide. Over 7,300 items are included in the art and artifact collection. In addition, there are 3,900 books, written materials, and other media in the reference library.

While Dr. Preissler furthered his education, he also served in leadership positions in the field of stewardship. It was during this period that he began the accumulation of what is now the Kingdom Generosity Collection. As the mass of items in the Collection grew, there was no place to properly exhibit it and make it available to the public.

Dr. Preissler and other stewardship leaders across the United States believed a Center would become a creative method to preserve and promote “the heart work of ministry stewardship leaders”. Meetings took place, plans were laid, and in 2005, with the primary assistance of Dr. Terry Austin, and supported by Sylvia Crecelius, Beth and David Andrews, Terry and Lorry Evearitt, and others from The Stewardship Alliance, Dr. and Mrs. Preissler moved to Dallas, TX to begin the effort to create and establish the first exhibition of the Collection.

By spring 2005 the (as it was then named) International Center for Steward Leadership had its first home in the 1,500 square foot east wing of Arlington Heights Baptist Church, off the historic red brick, Camp Bowie boulevard in Fort Worth, Texas. Dr. Preissler was wonderfully aided by his systems-analysis trained wife Andrea, and co-founding colleagues Terry Austin, Dr. David McQuitty, and Sylvia Crecelius, President, of The Stewardship Alliance (TSA). Many faithful members of the TSA organization, friends of Dr. and Mrs. Preissler, rallied quickly to support the work of The Center. TSA leaders had collaborated as Diamond members of The President’s Council of the Christian Stewardship Association during the years of leadership in which Dr. Preissler served as president of that association. Most importantly, the multi-year financial commitment shouldered by Stan and Mary Williams of Daytona, Florida made the first Center possible and carried forward the initial few years of work.

Shortly after the first Collection exhibition was completed and dedicated, Dr. Preissler was invited to and was named the first full professor in the United States in the emerging academic area of higher education to be known as Steward Leadership. This field will impact all areas of ministry as well as Nonprofit Management. Dr. Preissler began his service as the first endowed Chair of Stewardship in the United States, serving from December, 2006 to October 2013, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, located in Fort Worth, TX.

During the 7 1/2 years Dr. Preissler served to found and build-out this field at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Preissler Collection equipped the seminary’s academic stewardship with much needed intellectual capital on the subject. This knowledge base came along side this graduate school of theology, school of missions, and school of education concentration program.

Dr. Preissler’s focus at the Seminary was to develop and originate higher education coursework in the field of stewardship during this period. Students in the first years of the founding Steward Leadership seminary program studied and pursued the rigors of the program. The members of those first classes earned the Steward Leadership certificate in addition to seminary degrees. This program of education, however, did not bridge continuing education options for laity or leaders in the field who do not seek the completion of advanced degrees.

Dr. Preissler and those in the movement that he leads have long held high interest in the promise that practicing biblical stewardship holds for all Christian disciples. In our era of time, we want generations going forward to loyally discern and follow what God tells us about our discovering our purpose and callings, and how money and possessions relate to eternity. We have studied with, internationally travelled with, and now carry on, with many others, the early visions of this National Center’s education and study goals.

Over the years, Dr. Preissler and many interested colleagues began to design and implement the largest inclusive stewardship education and certification plan to date. This would quickly become the nationwide establishment of a United States, uniquely American Center. This Center was fully purposed to equip and inspire Christian leaders in the rich and long knowledge of biblical stewardship for ministry transformation today. Believing that inspiration emits transformation, Dr. Preissler, his team and his friends worked to build out the beginnings of an experiential center where active, not passive, learning on the subject could be confronted by visitors. Word travelled quickly, and with many advocates, educational programs and tracks for certification began to emerge as services.

The Kingdom Generosity Collection was housed at The Center, and fully displayed and curated. Display cases were donated or purchased, and the history of each object began to be chronicled. Within months, the parallel Preissler Stewardship Collection (as it was then identified) began to grow in ways it had never before. Desiring to help build the

Preissler's interesting acquisitions, people began to bring antiquarian artifacts, art works, documents, archives, photographs, and more, all related to stewardship and American generosity history. After a few years, the Preissler's former acquisitions and these gifts formed a sizeable collection of art, artifacts, and books and archives all illustrating and preserving arguably, American Christian generosity history for posterity. The Collection took on new significance and individuals came forward to make important founding donations. Stewardship leaders scheduled visits and shared their unique stories, and group tours began. By 2007, numerous projects were commissioned, and a world database was begun. Scholars took serious interest as the academic field of Steward Leadership also grew, founded by Preissler at Southwestern Seminary with close assistance from Dr. David McQuitty. With the limitations of the academic field being focused solely at the Seminary level, this conundrum continued to develop with the question of how to share the information more globally outside of the seminary as well as how to inculcate the wealth of knowledge of stewardship and generosity to every person.

The board of advisors quickly determined that the focus of the Center must be honed to focus on the stories and styles which shaped and preserve American stewardship, past and present. The history of stewardship back to New Testament times can be traced within the halls and galleries of The National Center.

When the Center's Camp Bowie boulevard location was closed in 2009 by its owners, and the historic church building offered for sale, compounded by the growth of the Collection required a move to a larger space. This effort was supported by financially committed, prayerful supporters and volunteer workers.

The Center temporarily moved its location, to be housed in a 3,500 square foot vacant Christian school library in Grapevine, Texas. Aided by leadership of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, a fruitful alliance was further developed with the Southern Baptist of Texas Foundation in cooperation with Dr. Johnathan Gray, Executive Director, to assist the Center in its operations. This became a wonderfully mutually beneficial strategic alliance. In 2009, through colleague Wayne K. Hast, an annually renewable support grant was attained in partnership with Exxon. Wayne Hast joined Preissler in teaching at Southwestern and added prominent interest in what is now known as Biblical Financial Education (BFE).

By early 2011, The Center was moved from its temporary location to a special 2nd floor, 7 suite room 9,000 square facility at historic Riverside Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. Momentum gained rapidly during this time in a more expansive facility, interactive education, internet and in-person delivery of certified education, and self-tour galleries where visitors could ponder generosity foundations.

Suddenly, in February 2013 an American Theological Association report documented a 10 year continued decline in overall seminary enrollment, and "seminary financial challenges" at Southwestern were announced by campus leadership. Faculty position cuts were determined, and the seminary's promotion of the Steward Leadership academic program noticeably diminished.

The Center's board of advisors met, making the decision to conclude further partnering services and study access to the Collection. The Center amicably ended its alliance with the seminary program by mid-summer in view of building a larger, national education and influence platform, and to pursue national educational alliances not possible in its alliance with the seminary. Disappointingly, to date, no similar program has grown or developed at Southwestern. This launched the need for a larger and more expansive academic program, through on-line education access and with multi-university connections to serve emerging leaders in all areas of focus.

For historical reference, since its academic inception in 2007 as the Steward Leadership graduate concentration, a high number of students pursued interest and graduated full Master degree programs with complete Steward Leadership program credentials. This positive remnant of emerging leader graduates, each completing full program coursework and receiving graduate school credentials in the new field, continue to be tracked. Their hallmark high interest in pastoral, and ministry steward leadership service supports their continued involvements with The Center and their personal stewardship initiatives. Those graduates are historically recorded and honored by The Center with lifetime memberships in The Center in recognition of their founding study and research contributions. Their contributions continue today with some having provided acclaimed contributions to the field. New academic higher education initiatives in the field are growing each year and The Center is growing in many academic teaching and research services

and new alliances.

The Center more intentionally, and more formally re-organized in April, 2014 and gained the prayerful, spiritual, and supportive backing of Jack and Gwen Shaw of Dallas, Texas, as well as that of long-time friends Wayne, and Shirley Hast, and firmly supported by The Stewardship Alliance (TSA) professional organization. BEST Stewardship Education as well as the Biblical Stewardship Seminary Series authored by Art and Bonnie Ally of The Timothy Plan were adopted by The Center, and more fully developed. The Center formally became The National Center for Stewardship & Generosity. Subsequently more expansive growth occurred. Again volunteers, including Terry Evaritt and David Andrews, appeared to help unpack and deploy The Collection.

At the creative and heartfelt ministerial interest of Dr. J. Robert White, Executive Director of the Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC) and his leadership staff, The Center and the Preissler's historic collection was invited in October 2013 to move to Duluth, Georgia. Simultaneously, Dr. Preissler was pleased to join in the ministry and work of stewardship with endorsed permission to operate out of the Georgia Baptist Missions and Ministry center (GBM&MC). Again volunteers, including David and Beth Andrews and Terry Evaritt, appeared to help unpack and deploy The Collection once again.

Believing in the GBC's sincere and genuine "on-mission" purpose in action, Dr. Scott and Andrea Preissler moved to Georgia to enhance the GBC's mission promotion of its' 5 Smooth Stones Strategic Plan. Smooth Stone number 2 is to promote Kingdom Generosity in reaching the lost for the sake of the gospel in Georgia. Next, the Preissler's renamed their highly prized collection to express appreciation, support for, and strong endorsement of the 5 Smooth Stones Mission of the GBC to The Kingdom Generosity Collection. Important to understand in the GBC's mission statement is Smooth Stone number two (2): strong commitment to encouraging disciples in the state of Georgia to shoulder the promotion of Kingdom Generosity in lives and churches. The Georgia Baptist Convention today "stands in the gap" to encourage Kingdom Generosity through its commitment to promote biblically-based stewardship education.

In 2014, Dr. Preissler was selected as Executive Director of the National Center for Stewardship & generosity. In the fall of 2014, Dr. J. Robert White, Executive Director of the Georgia Baptist Convention, hosted the first Georgia state exhibition of The Kingdom Generosity Collection and shared an office home for The National Center for Stewardship and Generosity. The full Collection by invitation and agreement, is on exclusive, long-term loan from The Center for view and study throughout the Georgia Baptist Missions and Ministry Center. The galleries of stewardship art, artifacts and the national library are as awe-inspiring as the wonderful GBC building in which they are housed. Floor by floor, exhibits and galleries tell the history of biblical stewardship as stewardship education relates to all areas of ministry. Today, the holdings of The Collection showcase the lasting impact of biblically-based stewardship through church and parachurch methods on contemporary culture.

The National Center has become the brain trust and most expansive expression promoting biblical stewardship and Christian generosity – all in one location, in the world. This national Christian treasure remains the only institution available - dedicated to honoring biblical stewardship and Christian generosity for future generations.

Tour requests may be considered for scheduling. Email inquiries for visits, and tour interests online at spreissler@nationalstewardshipcenter.org.

Before the God-sized details of history of The National Center could be lost, we captured the essence of this unique story from many of the founders and leaders who shaped this wonderful Center and who fondly remember shouldering its early work.