

# ‘Jesus Made it Clear’

A proper view of stewardship essential for Christian living, says retired banking executive

By Michael Barrick

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**PITTSBURGH** – Jeff Leininger could be spending his retirement completely indulging himself. He has the resources, the time, the health, and from the world’s perspective, has earned it after a successful career in the high stress and highly competitive world of finance.

But Leininger does not measure success by the standards of the world, a fact even he acknowledges is ironic, considering the success he enjoyed in his profession. “I have always been a reluctant leader. By that I mean it was not important to me to advance my career at least to the same extent that it was many other people. I was advanced in spite of that kind of reluctance.” He said he did try and be excellent in his work but added, “I think this was God’s will. He pushed me to reach further, to do more. Without Him, left to myself, I would not have gone as far as I did. I was never really out there looking for the next position, but it just came to me. God’s hand was in this. I prayed about it a lot, as you can imagine. I just let God guide me through my career. It’s unusual because a lot of people in corporations spend a lot of time trying to figure the next step. I didn’t. It just happened. It was God’s will.”

He acknowledged that the Christian work life requires a commitment to excellence and a sense of stewardship. “I have always believed that I have a responsibility to pass along to others the things that I learned professionally throughout my career.” He explained, “I believe taking a strong interest in others and helping them advance their careers and professional growth is consistent with biblical faith. It is very easy for me to reconcile.”

He continued, “I’ve always had an interest in advancing the work of others. I am a strong believer in team play and team recognition over individual recognition. That’s why I think I was successful, in part, in my work career at Mellon. You can succeed more working with others than you can on your own. I carried that belief into my work career and still do in all my activities. Developing others is part of an important part of your responsibility and success.”

It is Leininger's sense of stewardship that guides his belief system. “Stewardship is an integral part of any commitment that a person makes. With your job, it takes a lot of stewardship commitment and dedication to succeed. The company has a right to expect it. It is just living the Christian life. Stewardship is key to fulfilling our obligations as Christians. Jesus made that clear.”

### **Continuing the call**

So, though he is retired, Leininger continues to take his stewardship responsibility seriously. Indeed, before retiring, he planned to help his community through ministry, education and the arts.

Consequently, at about the same time that Leininger was retiring in June, 2004, he accepted the challenge of chairing a capital campaign for Family Guidance, Inc., a community development Christian ministry serving impoverished children in Pittsburgh and nearby communities. In that role, he agreed to steer the effort to raise \$4.3 million for the ministry's Promise Camp, a key component of its ministry, which relies heavily upon mentoring and volunteers.

He explains, "The New Testament makes it clear. You have an obligation to share your blessings with those that are less fortunate. I've kept that in my mind and tried to contribute a reasonable amount of my financial resources, my time, and my talents to my faith first, to my family second and to my job third. It's all worked out for me. God has blessed me in many ways. I'm fortunate. Retirement is an opportunity to return those blessings to the benefit of others."

Hence, he developed a plan to return those blessings. "I came to the decision to plan how I would serve because I wanted to continue to be engaged on a variety of fronts after my retirement. I was used to expending energy. Life was complex. I wanted to find some free time, but I was also realistic to know I could not do only family things and personal things."

That his passions are the arts, education and ministry is not surprising. Leininger has served as a board member of the Pittsburgh Symphony, and as a member of the Penn State Smeal Business School Advisory Board, where he completed his undergraduate work. And, he notes, "I've always been engaged in Christian endeavors. I wanted to choose how I would help. It was the combination of having exposure to those three fields where I found enjoyment, and believing that with retirement I should involve myself more, given my work history."

### **Lessons learned along the way**

Leininger spent 34 years with Mellon Financial after a brief stint with Westinghouse. "I came up the long way. I started as a trainee and worked my way to vice chairman responsible for the Treasury Services Sector, which included all of the company's commercial lending, global cash management, and global institutional sales activities. That represented about one-third of the company at the time I retired. It was a substantial responsibility."

While Leininger said his faith influenced his work – such as believing that the Bible clearly calls upon excellence and good stewardship – he noted also that how he demonstrated it was with a long-term view. "When working for a publicly-traded company in the business world, you have a different focus. I remained committed to my

faith through my church and community activities and over time tried to be a good example of Christian living in my business activities as well as my home life.”

Leininger is quick to note that he has had his struggles. A son experienced an illness which proved difficult to diagnose and treat. “What I needed to realize here was that God would lead us to the right solution if that was His will. And I think He has.” He acknowledged, “It was probably the biggest burden of my life to be honest about it. That was the problem. I was treating it like a burden.” Then, he said, “I turned it over to God, and as He often does, He provided a solution. We’re not completely home, but we’re encouraged at this point.”

He added, “God always has a plan. I’ve gone through many fundraising activities for Christian organizations. There have been periods of frustration when we didn’t accomplish what I hoped to accomplish. I’ve learned it was the way it was meant to be and there was another solution and God knew what it was all along. He provided for it in His time. He had a plan. While we have a role and can influence the outcome, what God plans is the way things will be. You may not always understand, but if you keep the faith it will become clearer to you with time.”

Not surprisingly, Leininger points to another in addition to the Lord for his success. “I give all the credit to my wife Nancy,” he said. “While I brought a Christian faith to our marriage, it was multiplied when I married her because she is a very, very strong believer. When I had doubts, she was always there. She is intelligent, educated and would have been an outstanding counselor or lawyer, but she pursued an even more important career, raising our children and she has done a wonderful job. Both of our sons accepted Christ at an early age. Their mother has always been there.”

He says that biblical knowledge is important in these days. “These are tough times that we as Christians are living in. The secular world is working very hard against us. I see it in everything I do today.” But, he added, “We know what the end game is and it will be glorious for true believers. If we are mindful of this, we can keep the faith and advance the agenda in very difficult times.”

He speaks, he said, from personal experience, “I bring my problems to the Lord and ask for direction. He’s never disappointed me. It has always been a part of my life. I have faith that if I place a decision or concern before the Lord, He will work the right outcome.

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