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ISSUE: Foundations - Working for the greater good / The untold story

Issue: Recent attention to foundations has not focused on their good deeds, but instead on a small number of foundations that have abused their charitable status and violated the public trust. As a result, discussions are ongoing in Congress to further regulate foundations, which certainly have the potential to make it more difficult for foundations to effectively conduct their good work.

Key Facts:

- *Over 1,285 Georgia foundations with assets of over \$9 billion provide more than \$657 million in grants and scholarships annually.(Foundation Center Data, 2005)*
- *Since inception in 2001, The St. Marys United Methodist Church Foundation, Inc. has made approximately \$9.4 million in grants supporting 70 organizations serving southeast Georgia and beyond.*

Background: One could argue that without foundations, we would not have a national 911 emergency response system, The Public Broadcasting System or Pell Grants for it was foundations that provided the financial underwriting of these important and innovative endeavors. In his book *The Foundation – A Great American Secret*, Duke University Law Professor and author Joel Fleishman concludes that “...foundations, along with the organizations that they support, are the great secret of dynamism of America’s civic sector”. Our world, our country and certainly our great state of Georgia have all benefitted significantly from the work foundations have envisioned, implemented and financially supported.

In southeast Georgia, there are several foundations working to improve our communities, one of which is the *St. Marys United Methodist Church Foundation, Inc.* www.smumcfoundation.org. Our foundation was established as a Type 1 Supporting Organization to the St. Marys United Methodist Church in 2001 to support the charitable activities of our church. Through our grants, a number of organizations have brought new services and activities to Camden County and are working with local agencies to improve the quality of life. For example, the *Coastal Medical Access Project (CMAP)*, established free health clinics in Brunswick and St. Marys to serve the uninsured and underinsured in southeast Georgia, the *Methodist Home for Children & Youth* built a group home for boys in St. Marys providing shelter for boys ages 4-18 that have been abused and *America’s 2nd Harvest* established a satellite food distribution center in Brunswick, which means local food pantries can now procure low cost food products without driving to Savannah. The *Georgia Center for Non-profits* opened coastal regional offices in Brunswick and Savannah providing all local nonprofit organizations with educational and training resources to improve their effectiveness.

Our grants continue to support the establishment of the *Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation* www.coastalgeorgiafoundation.org. This very new community foundation enables people with philanthropic interests in Camden, Glynn and McIntosh counties to easily and effectively support the issues they care about – immediately, or through their will or other planned giving vehicles.

The Southeastern Council of Foundations www.secf.org, of which we are a member, is working proactively on these issues. For example, they have developed “Guiding Principles for Foundations”, which includes a self-assessment tool that many member foundations including the St. Marys United Methodist Church Foundation, Inc. utilize to implement best practices and ensure compliance with current legislation.

Action: The majority of foundations are effectively working for the greater good. We encourage our representatives in Washington and their staff to discuss these issues with organizations such as the *Council on Foundations*, the *Southeastern Council on Foundations* and foundations such as ours to learn more about the positive impact of foundations beyond the articles published in the general media.

St. Marys United Methodist Church Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 160, St. Marys, GA 31558
(912) 510-9350

Jeff Barker
President
smumcf@tds.net