

July 1, 2017 – Local Church Budget

A pastor decided to start an elective class in his congregation targeting young married couples. The topic was stewardship. As the students prepared for the class, they shared their opinions about the meaning of stewardship. Bill suggested, “Stewardship is giving your tithes.” Mr. Sims, a down-to-earth businessman, declared, “This is a way of getting cash. This is a refined way of getting the church’s bills paid.” Someone else commented, “It’ll be easier if people get a fixed quota.” Richard wondered, “What about the money I give my widowed mother, or the money I donate to not-for-profit organizations, is that tithing?” (C. W. Hatch, *Stewardship Enriches Life* (Anderson, IN: The Warner Press, 1956), 7.)

Stewardship involves much more than money and certainly is not just about covering expenses. Stewardship is a way of life. It helps believers keep life in perspective. Generosity with time, talents, and money are certainly clear external signs of stewardship. Believers should not give because it is asked of them. They should give because of whom they represent, what He has done for them, and where their future is. This is how Paul puts it, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-6).

Today believers have an opportunity to give. Giving from what God has given us is a form of thanking the One who gave His life for us. May the Spirit of the Lord be with us as we “ship” our worth to God for “He is Worthy” (Rev. 4:11).

July 8 – NAD Women’s Ministries

Today’s offering is for the North American Division (NAD) Women’s Ministries, which was first established in 1898 at the urging of Ellen G. White. In the book *Evangelism*, we find her marching orders to the women of the church:

“The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty and labor under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed.”

(Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), 464.)

All across the North American Division, from the United States to Canada and from Bermuda to Guam-Micronesia, the women of the church are engaged in serving others. They give Bible studies, hold evangelistic series, and minister to those in shelters for battered and homeless women. They provide for the needs of families seeking refuge on our shores from oppressive regimes, teach English as a second language classes, tutor school children, and make bags of love for children who are displaced from their homes or their parents. The women of the church are making a significant difference in their communities and their congregations. I invite you to make a generous gift today with an offering to affirm their work and ministry.

July 15, 2017 – Local Church Budget

Jesus warned believers against fasting for self-righteous reasons (Matt. 6:16-18). God is after the heart, not external signs without true conversion.

What if believers were to practice fasting from the stewardship perspective? This does not propose fasting *from* stewardship, but rather including fasting *in* stewardship. Since fasting is commonly defined as abstaining from food for a period of time for health or spiritual purposes, what if fasting got expanded to refraining from things that clog one's life for a period of time? One could calculate those savings and then give them to a church project, missions, or someone who needs help. For instance, fasting from eating out, renting movies, or going to malls could be a starting point. The savings would translate into more time, more disposable income, and better health.

It takes one person to begin. It takes many to start a movement. Imagine what your family, this congregation, or your Sabbath School class could accomplish if every family member, church member, or student would give five dollars more a week for a year? Five dollars is the price of a quick meal, entertainment, or beverage. However, for missions it could mean sponsoring a missionary, planting a new congregation, or even providing food for those who can't afford it locally or abroad. Suddenly, a "sacrifice" turns into a double blessing for those giving and those receiving.

What a spiritual, physical, and material blessing it would be if believers today decided to apply fasting to stewardship. May the Lord bless you as you consider sacrificial giving today.

July 22 – Combined Youth Ministries (Conference Advance)

Since childhood, Dorothy Green wanted to become a missionary. That dream stayed alive throughout her high school and college years. All her focus and energy went into taking classes that supported her dream. Unexpectedly and regretfully, she was diagnosed with a medical condition that would not allow her to endure the life of a missionary overseas. Accepting this reality was difficult. Depression, anger, and denial were just a few of the feelings Dorothy dealt with before finally accepting her reality through much prayer and counsel.

One day a thought came to her mind: What about the miracle of money? By giving to missions, Dorothy could teach a child in India to read the Bible, teach children English in the jungles of Brazil, and minister to those suffering in hospitals all over the world. She would not need to learn all those languages or move to those countries. That thought changed Dorothy's perspective for her future. Her new goal was to work as hard as she could and to give almost half of her income to God. After tithing and giving offerings to her local congregation, she gave to as many mission projects as she possibly could.

(EC. W. Hatch, *Stewardship Enriches Life* (Anderson, IN: The Warner Press, 1956), 57.)

Each one of us has a golden opportunity today to partner with God in mission—locally as well as regionally. After returning God's tithe and giving offerings for your local church's budget, would you consider a generous offering for our conference Combined Youth Ministries? Just like Dorothy, your gift could make the proclamation of the Gospel in underprivileged areas and specific ministries possible. May the Lord fill your heart with the joy of missions and generosity. May God be exalted today.

July 29 – NAD Evangelism (Note: Conference Evangelism was April 29)

The USS Benevolence was a ship built in 1944. It was later converted into a hospital and commissioned in May 12, 1945. The 11,141-ton ship had a capacity of 802 beds and a crew of 564 people. The USS Benevolence served in the Pacific providing medical services during campaigns against Japan in addition to receiving battle casualties.

(USS Benevolence (AH-13). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Benevolence, AH-13 (accessed on April 1, 2016).)

On August 25, 1950, John Napoli was fishing 30 miles from the San Francisco's Golden Gate. He was returning home that foggy early afternoon after a three-thousand-dollar catch of salmon. Two miles from San Francisco Bay, he noticed movement in the water as if people were struggling to stay afloat. As Napoli slowed down and took a closer look, he saw the big white Red Cross vessel underneath the water. A collision with another freighter sank it just 15 minutes from San Francisco. Napoli later wrote, "My eyes were full of tears, and God said to me, 'Now you've seen them, go to work.'"

(Kenneth Wood, *Meditations for Moderns: Three-Minute Devotional Readings for Daily Inspiration* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1963) 59.)

This fisherman began "fishing men," pulling them one by one out of the waters and into his small fishing boat. As the space quickly shrank, Napoli had to release all of his precious fish in order to save more lives. Isn't that also what the Lord has entrusted believers to do? Jesus said, "...Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). May each of us as believers give sacrificially so others around North America who don't know the Lord get an opportunity to make a decision for Jesus.

Readings & Stewpot posted on: www.imsda.org/resources