

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

December 1, 2018 – Local Church Budget

A tax? Do you regard church tithes and offerings as some kind of “tax” you are obligated to pay? Some do. But that frame of mind robs us of the joy of supporting God’s work and makes it a drudgery to return the Lord’s tithe. Please notice that we said “the Lord’s tithe.” That ten percent already belongs to Him, and retaining it for ourselves is called robbery in the Bible.

Perhaps some of this “tax” idea is a carryover from earlier times. Some churches still tell the story of the days of “pew rent,” where each family was assigned an area of seating and required to pay a rental for that spot. (I guess many of us still feel that we have a “spot” in church that is exclusively ours! How sad it would be to displace someone, especially a visitor, from our so-called “spot!”)

What does it really mean to be a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7)? First of all, we should be cheerful that we have sources of income that sustain us. Second, we should be cheerful that the Lord’s work is well organized and growing, and we have the privilege of supporting it. Third, we should be cheerful that it means that Jesus is coming back soon. We could enumerate many, many more blessings.

No, tithes are not a tax at all. Neither are offerings. They are a gift that God places in our hands, a part of which we can return to Him. Why not consider giving a gift today to support our local church and its mission in our community?

December 8 – World Budget (NAD Adventist Community Services)

The panhandlers. We see panhandlers frequently, often at a busy intersection, with their cardboard signs. We don’t know their names or their histories. We don’t know if they will spend the money they receive on food, drugs, or cigarettes. Yet the very sight of them tugs at our hearts, and we wrestle with whether to give or not.

Recently, a pastor had an experience that restored his faith in some of these folks. He had been downsizing his life and taking many of his things to a local flea market. Late one Sunday afternoon, as he was packing up his things, a couple came by and asked if they could help because they were hungry and needed to find lodging for the night. They began to recite a litany of hard luck events. Well, the pastor had heard many such stories, so he stopped their recital, but did let them help. They really worked—and worked hard. They carried boxes over to the car and trailer, and even helped put on the tarp and bungees. Evidently this was a worthy case, and he gave them a generous sum. And he even had prayer with them.

As Adventists, we are truly blessed with our community services organizations, as well as our disaster response and relief programs. Our personnel are highly trained to distinguish the truly needy, and we can trust that our support goes a very long way in making a difference in many lives.

December 15, 2018 – Local Church Budget

Counting down. In just a couple of weeks, 2018 will be over and 2019 will come upon the scene. Has it been a good year for you and me? Have we been blessed by God with good health, prosperity, and spiritual growth? Or have times been tough and maybe even discouraging, for us?

The world in general is filled with misery and woe, and sometimes it even touches us and our loved ones. Regardless of our circumstances, God has told us to focus our hopes, on the better land to come. Happy is the Christian who can sing with enthusiasm, “This world is not my home; I’m just a-passing through. My treasure is laid up somewhere beyond the blue.” And whatever our lot in life, all it takes is one trip to a disadvantaged land or to a refugee camp to put things in perspective and realize that we are truly blessed.

As we count down to the end of the year, it is typical for some of us to begin thinking about the upcoming tax season and how we might take stock of our overall financial picture for the year. In certain businesses, such as farming, for example, we don’t really know what we have earned until all the accounts have been reconciled and our true gain or loss has been determined.

Let us then plan to “bring all the tithes into the storehouse” by the year’s end, that the Lord’s house may truly prosper and be blessed.

December 22 – Combined Youth Ministries (Conference Advance)

Christmas. Christmas is a beautiful and emotional time of year. As we think of cards and decorations, gifts and family gatherings, and for some the lovely whiteness of the snow, we can’t help feeling a warm glow in our hearts. At the same time, we recognize that for some it can be a time of sadness and loneliness if we recently lost a loved one or are confined to a bed or wheelchair. It would be good if we were to seek out those who have special needs and find ways to bring them cheer and remembrance.

“Brethren and sisters, while you are devising gifts for one another, I would remind you of our heavenly Friend, lest you should be unmindful of His claims. Will He not be pleased if we show that we have not forgotten Him? ...He suffered even unto death, that He might give us eternal life.

“It is through Christ that we receive every blessing.... Shall not our heavenly Benefactor share in the tokens of our gratitude and love? Come, brethren and sisters, come with your children... and bring your offerings to God according to your ability. Make melody to Him in your hearts, and let His praise be upon your lips” (The Adventist Home, p. 480).

Might you consider giving to our heavenly Friend today through our Local Conference Advance, which includes Christian education, local evangelism, Vacation Bible School, and other special needs of our conference? What wonderful ways to express our gratitude to Him!

December 29 – Union Designated (Camp Heritage)

Belonging. There is little doubt that the adolescent period is a most critical stage of development. During these years, families and the church must, therefore, assume the heavy responsibility of nurturing the youth in such a way that they will emerge from adolescence with a mature faith and relationship with Jesus. The summer camp program at Camp Heritage provides important growth and development opportunities toward that goal. At summer camp, youth are led to submission to God and are helped in the decision-making process without making those decisions for them.

At summer camp a young person learns who he or she is—a child of God;
what he is—one in need of saving;
where she belongs—in the family of God;
how to belong—through commitment to God;
how to relate to others—in loving, caring responses;
and what the future holds—security in Jesus.

Our offering today is to support the important ministries that take place at Camp Heritage. Thank you for your generous offering today that will enable an expanded ministry to continue at Camp Heritage.