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## January 5, 2019 – Local Church Budget

***Negative inventory.*** At this time of year, many stores are involved in taking inventory as they prepare to file their business tax returns. One of the terms that has come out of this process is “negative inventory.”

As they attempt to reconcile their computer records between the goods they believe they have on hand and the actual amount, sometimes there is an unaccountable difference. Sadly, “negative inventory” reflects goods that are no longer there due to shoplifting or employee dishonesty.

This is a good time for us as Christians to take stock of our giving and lay good, solid plans to be faithful in this New Year.

What does “faithful” actually mean? God’s Word in Malachi tells us: “Bring ye *all* the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3:10, KJV, emphasis supplied).

As we begin this New Year, let’s ask God to help us be faithful in our return of tithe and giving of offerings. We don’t want a negative inventory in God’s house!

## January 12 – Combined Youth Ministries (Conference Advance)

***“Over and above.”*** Several years ago, our church needed to raise a large amount of money to pay off its mortgage. A very experienced retired Adventist stewardship director was hired to lead the campaign. A large kickoff banquet was held and pledges were taken. But one thing he often emphasized was this catchy phrase, “over and above.”

Because of the ongoing needs of the church—bills that must be paid and ministries that needed to be funded—he wanted to impress upon us that we absolutely *not* take from our giving to the local church budget or other offerings in order to give to the campaign, but that anything we pledged must be “over and above” all other giving.

As we, the givers, bought into this plan, an unusual thing happened. During the five years it took us to retire the church debt, tithes and other offerings went on the increase! How incredible! But, you see, we were excited about our church!

Unfortunately, after the campaign, it was “business as usual,” and the increase in offerings reverted back to its normal level. Aren’t people funny?

Let us all be solid, faithful stewards! This Sabbath, as we give for our local conference needs, let’s get excited about our fine conference-wide ministries such as church building programs, camp meeting, summer camps, and many other worthy endeavors. And let’s remember, “Over and above!”

## January 19, 2019 – Local Church Budget

**MLK.** My wife and I happened to be in Memphis, Tennessee, in early April of 1968, visiting friends. They took us on a ride to the motel where Martin Luther King, Jr., had just been assassinated on April 4. It was not yet a memorial; just a second-story room roped off with police tape. We stood there mute, thinking about the tragedy that had recently occurred. It was a solemn moment, and in our thoughts, we paid tribute to one whom we now consider to be a great hero of our nation, a victim of prevailing racial hatred.

*Martin Luther King Jr. was an American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the civil rights movement. He is best known for his role in the advancement of civil rights using the tactics of nonviolence and civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs and inspired by the nonviolent activism of Mahatma Gandhi. – Wikipedia.*

So here we are more than 50 years since his death. We reflect on other heroes from many lands, such as Mother Teresa, Martin Luther, and Nelson Mandela. Our church has had heroes and special people as well, and continues to have them.

Undoubtedly, the great majority of heroes remain unsung and unknown. Today, we have the opportunity to be heroes for Christ and His church, by being faithful to our calling. Please give generously today.

## January 26 – Religious Liberty

**Religious Liberty.** Nothing is more important than liberty of conscience and religious freedom. We were created to serve by choice, and Christ came to free us from the result of bad choices. The good news of the Gospel is a message of freedom.

It is no accident that the Adventist church has championed religious liberty from its very beginnings. Early Adventists suffered steep fines and even chain gang imprisonment under abusive Sunday blue laws. Our prophetic imperative told us that even in a land of blessed freedoms, powerful forces will again try to compel all to worship falsely.

Our church early on opposed a national Sunday law before Congress. Our church for well over 100 years has sent *Liberty* magazine to legislators and community leaders to clarify the great issues of conscience. Our church has defended Adventists in the workplace. And by radio, television, and a myriad of member events and outreach events, it keeps the freedom bells ringing.

In this offering today, you are making all this a continuing reality. Give as if your very liberties are at stake. They are. If the watchmen cry not, who will give the warning?—Lincoln Steed, editor *Liberty* magazine and associate director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, North American Division.