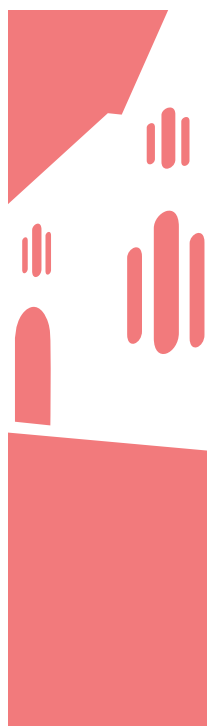


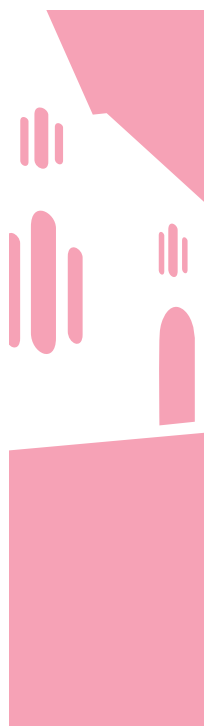
OFFERTORY



READINGS



20
16



North American Division 2016 Offertory Readings

Our mission as a church is "to reach the North American Division territory, with the distinctive, Christ-centered Seventh-day Adventist message of Hope and Wholeness." Stewardship Ministries is dedicated to helping members catch the vision of "*funding the mission to finish God's work.*" These funds make an impact on preaching the gospel to save the lost.

Systematic giving is part of being a faithful steward. When we tithe, we are recognizing that God owns everything. Offerings express our gratitude for what Christ has done for us. He loves a cheerful giver and has chosen this method to support those who preach the gospel as they reach the world with His message.

The 2016 English offertory readings were written by Nelson Silva. He is a native of Venezuela, a church planter and pastor who lives in Indianapolis, IN. He earned his Doctoral degree in Ministry in Youth, Family and Culture. Silva created the DDMC (Development, Discipleship and Mission in Community) model in collaboration with Brown Chapel Missions in Indianapolis Public Schools.

Again, this year we are videotaping these offertory readings in short clips that can be played in your church. You will find them at www.iGiveSDA.org.

Revival and reformation will drive your actions. Wherever revival and reformation is present, tithing appears. These three: revival, reformation, and tithing, will deepen your spirituality. Remember to *fund the mission to Finish God's work.*

John Mathews
NAD Stewardship Ministries Director

NOTE TO PRESENTERS

DEAR PRESENTER,

Thank you for your willingness to share the offering appeals with your local congregation. It is a wonderful and gratifying responsibility. How you present these readings could determine how effective they are. Here are some suggestions you may want to consider before you share:

PRAY: Pray for the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray that God will use your words to speak to the hearts of the congregation.

PRACTICE: Read over the appeal at least three times to familiarize yourself with it. Find key words (underline or highlight them) to emphasize throughout the reading. Strive to share these readings with excellence.

PREPARATION: There may be times when other materials are sent to your local church to distribute or present along with the appeal. Please use them accordingly, and determine how they can be used most effectively.

PRESENT WITH PASSION: Read slowly and clearly. It is an amazing responsibility to lead out the worship in giving. Fill your heart with the thoughts presented, and God will do the rest.

PRAY: Each appeal has a prayer that has been prepared as a guide to go along with the thought of the day. Present to God what is on your heart as it relates to the appeal. Please keep the prayer concise and to the point.

May God richly bless you and speak through you as we take this journey together in 2016.

2016
JANUARY

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Today is the first Sabbath of 2016. New Year's resolutions are on many people's minds these days. Most resolutions center on education, health, finances, and relationships. According to researchers, almost half of the population in the United States make resolutions, but only about half of those people keep their resolutions longer than six months. Still, there is something powerful about setting goals at the beginning of the year (*Journal of Clinical Psychology*).

Interestingly, Christians can summarize most New Year's resolutions with one word: Stewardship. God owns everything (Ps. 24:1). Therefore believers are managers, not owners. What if believers would keep God and others foremost in this year's resolutions instead of setting goals with selfish motives in mind? For instance, self-improvement is great, but why do it? Are you seeking power, fame, and recognition? Or are you seeking to honor God by being good stewards of gifts, talents, and abilities in order to serve others?

Avoiding debt, saving, and investing in God's cause are biblical financial concepts. How can Christians honor God with the money He has entrusted to them? What would your giving resolution be for 2016? Are you willing to test the Lord on this? May the Lord pour His blessings abundantly upon you in 2016 as you faithfully give for God's work locally and worldwide through returning His tithes and giving generous freewill offerings.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

A church member once confessed to struggling with tithing. She was going through a number of difficulties at home, at work, and with extended family. How could the little money she brought home be sufficient for the needs of her family?

For this woman, giving wasn't an issue of outstanding debts, poverty, or even distrust in the church's handling of money. While taking a class on biblical finances, she realized that some of her financial problems stemmed from her family's handling of money. There was no family budget, and often money was spent without a lot of forethought.

Once this woman realized the source of her problem, she made a promise to God to claim His promise to "supply all her needs" (Phil. 4:19) when she kept her covenant to return God's tithes and her offerings to His church. On Sabbath she gladly shouted, "I'm trusting God to supply all of my family's needs according to His riches in glory."

Statistics show that only 5 percent of the people living in the United States give 10 percent of their income to churches or charities. About 80 percent of Americans give 2 percent or less of their income to any charities. Christians are giving only about 2.5 percent of their income, down from 3.3 percent during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Will you trust God as you return your tithes and give a liberal offering for local outreach today? God will keep His promise and supply all your needs as you trust Him with the funds He has entrusted to you.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

by Lincoln Steed

This year the Liberty Campaign video features the heart-warming story of how Patty Waldrop not only found a way to Sabbath accommodation in the workplace, but found out how God can reward us in ways we never imagined. Religious liberty is not an abstract concept but a living principle of the Gospel in action that is proven again and again by faithful Christians.

Your religious Liberty department, through legal interventions to support mostly workplace challenges; through distribution of Liberty Magazine to thought leaders in Washington, D.C., and State and Provincial centers; through member-based initiatives and seminars; as well as all media outlets, is dedicated to spreading an understanding of the great "gospel of liberty."

Without your cooperation, without your funds, little can be done. We need you as never before. Prophecy is unfolding daily and the moves to compel to false worship more blatant. Thanks for your generous participation.

23
JANUARY

30
JANUARY

UNION DESIGNATED

A little girl surprised her teacher by bragging about the slippers she was going to purchase for her daddy. The teacher asked her, "How are you going to get money to buy those slippers?" The little girl replied, "My father will give it to me." In a moment the teacher reflected, "Then your father is paying for his own gift."

Believers fool themselves when thinking that tithing is doing God a favor. God, the Creator of this world, is in no need of believers' insignificant gifts. After all, He created the entire universe and sustains it. This thought was well captured in the words of this old hymn:

"We give Thee but Thine own
Whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee."—William W. How.

Consider the words of the following poem as you give today. These words put into perspective the relationship between God, believers, and stewardship.

Nine dollars for me and one for the Lord;
Somehow that seems very small
When I think how He counted not the cost
But freely poured out His all.
Shall I stop giving a tenth, when He
Has given Himself—priceless gift—for me?

(Leslie B. Flynn, *Your God and Your Gold*, 53).

13
FEBRUARY

ADVENTIST TELEVISION MINISTRIES

by *Derris Krause*

In North America, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a leader in television media ministry since television's inception. For more than 65 years we've been proclaiming God's good news for a better life today and for eternity. The television ministries of the North America Division including *Breath of Life*, with Carlton Byrd, *Faith for Today* with Mike Tucker, *It is Written* with John Bradshaw and *Jesus 101* with Elizabeth Talbot.

These ministries continue to produce life-changing television programs with new and fresh content. All of these programs can be seen on *Hope Channel* and *EsperanzaTV*, many other networks across North America, and on a wide array of Internet platforms.

Since the first Adventist television programs aired with William Fagal, George Vandeman, and C. D. Brooks, our church has used television to help people take their first steps of faith and prepare them to spend eternity with their Creator. Our television programs look very different today, but the mission remains the same. Adventist media television never stops, right this moment, someone is hearing about a crucified, risen and soon coming savior. It might be your neighbor, or a member of your family.

Thank you for your sprit of faithfulness and sacrifice. Producing relevant media is costly, but the benefits are priceless.

27
FEBRUARY

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

The topic of money seems to have been important to Jesus. Two thirds of Jesus's parables are related to material possessions or one's attitude toward it. The Bible contains 2,000 references to money in the Bible, and just 500 references to prayer and even fewer references to faith (Arturo Allegue et al., *Faith and Finance*, 8).

Malachi 3:10-12 is one of the most quoted passages on tithing. It is in fact where God's plan regarding tithes and offerings is clearly stated (*Stewardship*, 75). The whole nation had not set their hearts to honor God. They had been unfaithful and God pled with them to return to Him. God noticed their blemished offerings, the priests' unfaithfulness, and Judah robbing God.

"Robbing God" seems to be too strong of a term for our culture today. It sounds manipulative using guilt to induce Christians to give. But God owns the gold and silver (Hag. 2:8). He has no need for our money. Rather, God wants the heart. He desires a covenant relationship of love that is demonstrated in faithfulness. You were "bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:20) by the blood of Jesus (Rev. 5:9). Let nothing come between God and you. Your faithfulness is tied to your gratitude and is demonstrated by your cheerfulness in returning tithes and freewill offerings to Him.

Your offerings today will be instrumental in bringing others to Christ through the outreach ministries of our local conference.

12
MARCH

ADVENTIST WORLD RADIO (AWR)

Adventist World Radio blankets over 80 percent of the world's population in more than 120 languages using AM, FM, and shortwave radio as well as the Internet and podcasts. All the work is done by producers who are born and raised in the language group they serve. That's right. AWR doesn't just translate English sermons into other languages. Local people write messages that will reach the hearts of people in each region of the world.

One of Adventist World Radio's most exciting outreach tools is podcasts. AWR provides more audio content for iTunes than anyone else in the world. In 2014 alone, listeners downloaded more than 8.75 billion programs! That's Billion with a "B."

Radio works! The highest mountains cannot stop the signals; borders of closed countries cannot block the programs; people locked in a lonely prison cell or caught in a traffic jam in a large city can tune in to listen to God's message of love in their own language. Radio is reaching the hearts of listeners every day!

It costs money to reach the world for Christ. Your help is needed to keep producing new programs in new languages every day. Today your gift of love will help provide programming in one of more than 100 languages around the world. Think of the people who may hear the name of Jesus for the first time because you gave your offering for Adventist World Radio today.

26
MARCH

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

John, the beloved disciple, contrasts two individuals in one story. Both labeled themselves as followers of Christ, and both witnessed Christ's miracles and forgiveness. However, each took a different path.

Mary was forgiven. "Seven times she had heard His rebuke of the demons that controlled her heart and mind" (DA, 568). Mary witnessed the resurrection of her brother, Lazarus, and subsequently heard Jesus's announcement of His death. Her heart was full of gratitude for what Jesus had done for her, and she wanted to do something special for Him.

On the other hand, Judas was attracted to Jesus's preaching, teaching, and miracles. Judas, like the other disciples, came with baggage. Peter was impetuous, Mathew had an honesty problem, and John was a poor financier. Judas, however, regarded himself as quite capable (DA, 717).

"Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair" while Judas complained, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" (John 12:3, 5). While Mary spent a year's wages to prepare Jesus for His death and burial, Judas sold Jesus for a third of that amount.

Jesus said that it is impossible to serve God and money. Judas chose money. Many others have also chosen money (John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 66).

Who will you chose to imitate today? Your generous offerings will allow the conference to invest in advancing God's kingdom where we live.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Is there ever a time when believers are excused from tithing?

Debt is a prevalent issue in society today. Can believers be excused from tithing when expenses are greater than their income? Can believers be excused from tithing while working toward getting out of debt? Mrs. White posted a logical question, "Should I tell you to be sure to pay all you owe any man, although you rob God to do so?" (*Counsels on Stewardship*, 92).

Many believers have significant consumer debt. Some make a difference between good and bad debt. Charles Griffin observes, "Being in debt is not a sin! The Bible does not forbid us to have debts, although it does recommend that we don't have them" (*Personal Finance*, p. 16). Mrs. White agrees and adds that debt is the symptom of a much deeper problem: selfishness. "Some will always remain in debt. Because of their covetousness . . . they love this world better than they love the truth" (*Counsels on Stewardship*, 93).

Mrs. White advises that the believer's first duty is to God, even over the family. She encourages practicing economy at home, denying extravagant purchases, and trusting God. Nine-tenths of our income with God's blessing is worth more than ten tenths without it (*Counsels on Stewardship*, 68, 74, 94).

What would happen to your giving if you were debt free? What would happen to this congregation if all of our members would practice self-control, live debt free, and give generous offerings to further God's work? What would mission look like here at home and around the world?

20
APRIL

69 APRIL

CHRISTIAN RECORD SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

Christian was ten years old when he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Surgery removed the tumor, but Christian was left legally blind. Imagine being ten years old and blind. Christian found it difficult to take part in the fun and games with his classmates as he had before he lost his sight. "I lost my sighted friends," he says. His life was turned upside down.

Christian so wanted to do the things his friends did—including going to camp. Then he learned about summer camp for the visually impaired, where blind and visually impaired children can ride a horse, learn to water ski, climb a rock wall, or slide down a zip line. They can do many of the things their sighted friends do.

Christian loved camp! "I liked the water tubing and kayaking. And I really enjoyed the zip line. Camp has been great for adding to my independence."

The Seventh-day Adventist Church provides other ministries to improve the quality of life for thousands of visually impaired adults, teens, and children in North America and in some 70 other countries. Christian magazines and books are provided in audio, braille, and large print formats, including the adult and children's Sabbath School lessons and Bible study courses.

Open your eyes to the possibilities as you give an offering today that will help Christian Record Services enhance the lives of those who cannot see.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

A long-time Christian approached a new Christian with a question on stewardship. "If you had 100 cows, would you give 50 for the Lord's work?"

"Sure I would," the new Christian replied.

"What if you had 100 horses," the seasoned Christian continued. "Would you give 50 to the Lord's work?"

"Sure I would," the new Christian replied.

The experienced Christian continued, "What if you have 100 sheep? Would you do the same?"

"Yes," the new Christian replied with conviction.

"Now," the older Christian asked, "would you give one goat to the Lord?"

"No!" snapped the new Christian. "And you have no right to ask me. You know I have only two goats!" (adapted from Leslie B. Flynn, *Your God and Your Gold*, 58).

What believers do with little is exactly what they would do with much. In 2013, the wealthiest people donated only 1.3 percent of their income, while the poorest donated 3.2 percent (Ken Stern, *Why the Rich Don't Give to Charity*).

Some Christians believe that giving is for the rich. But Jesus taught His followers that giving is not about quantity. The widow gave two mites, all she had (Luke 21:2). Those two mites equal about one-fifth of a cent today. Let us give sacrificially to our local congregation today. May the Lord bless us as we give our all to Him.

16
APRIL

23
APRIL

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

Young people today are challenged by a fast-paced life, an information-driven society, and a confused culture when it comes to defining how to become adults (Roger L. Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*, 216). What a blessing it is to have programs dedicated to serving youth in ways that speak to their souls while challenging them to find who they are in Christ: "in the world but not of the world."

Charles Thompson, youth director for the Indiana Conference, reflects, "Last summer a member from one of our churches here in Indiana related this story: Their local church had sent a young boy to Timber Ridge Camp through the Opportunity Camper Program. The boy came from an atheist home. He did not believe in God. At the end of the week, he came home a changed boy! He had given his heart to Jesus and was singing songs he had learned from camp. The seed has been planted. This boy's life is ahead of him and now he knows about Jesus.

Please keep this boy and the sponsoring church in your prayers!"

Your continued support of camp ministry yields real, tangible, and eternal results! Prayerfully consider helping your local conference to direct and encourage an "army of youth," who believe the truth and are blessed by God while learning to be a blessing to others (*Christian Experience*, 205).

Your offering today will benefit your local conference youth programs among many other initiatives.

NAD EVANGELISM

The name of Jesus comes from the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “the conqueror.” Emmanuel means “God with us.” Both names align with the fact that Jesus came to “seek and save what was lost.” Moreover, Jesus said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 4:17, NIV). Jesus recognized the preaching of the good news of the kingdom of God as the purpose for which He was sent (Mark 1:14; Luke 4:43). Furthermore, Jesus “traveled from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1, NIV).

Jesus commissioned His disciples to continue announcing the Kingdom of God. Errol McLean from the North American Division says, “Evangelism is not a focus of the church for the sake of the church. Evangelism is the focus of the church for the growth of the kingdom of God. Evangelism is about inviting lost people to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord so the church must once again take up the challenge of evangelism and experience the heart of God in love for lost people” (NAD Evangelism Challenge).

What a privilege believers have today to partner with the Lord in announcing His kingdom through their freewill offerings. Today's offering will be used for evangelism in the North American Division. Let us fund the mission to finish the work where we live!

30
APRIL

07
MAY

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Martin Luther once said, "Every man needs two conversions: the first of his heart and the second of his pocketbook." Tithing and giving offerings are an affirmation that God is first in the believer's life.

Dogon Goon was a Chinese Christian who came to America in the 1920's. His bride, Toy Len Goon, was also new to America and to Christianity.

Over the years the couple had eight children. Mr. Goon returned a faithful tithe regardless of how hard the economy was or how large his family grew. His influence helped his wife's faith grow stronger as well.

Dogon Goon died in 1941, leaving his wife to care for the children with only a small laundry business and her faith in God to see her through. Week after week she faithfully returned her tithe to God. And God blessed her. Her children took turns attending university, and all became accomplished in their fields of endeavor. In 1952 she was chosen as the American mother of the year.

"When God controls our money we can live better on nine tenths than on ten tenths.... And when this happens God will set a song in our hearts and glorify the work of our hands" (Charles M. Crowe, *Stewardship Sermons*, 91-95).

Today's offering will further the ministry of our local church.

DISASTER AND FAMINE RELIEF

Almost every day somewhere in the North American Division, people are affected by natural disasters. Many blame God for the destruction of homes or community, and for the death of loved ones during disasters. But the Bible assures us that during those real or metaphorical storms in life, God is beside us, leading us.

Jesus warned us about destructive forces at work in the world. "See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Matt. 24:6-7). *The Great Controversy* (589-590) says that "Satan . . . is at work. In accidents and calamities, . . . in fierce tornadoes and terrific hailstorms, in tempests, floods, cyclones, tidal waves, and earthquakes, in every place and in a thousand forms. . . . These visitations are to become more and more frequent and disastrous."

Almost daily, Adventist Community Services (ACS) volunteers compassionately respond to disasters throughout North America. They collect, sort, and distribute items needed by people who have endured these disasters. They also train and locally deploy Adventists to provide emotional and spiritual care to the survivors.

As Adventists, we are compelled to do our best to provide assistance to survivors. ACS and volunteers join forces to transform us into Christ's hands and feet to fulfill that purpose. We demonstrate God's love when we mobilize to assist our community and neighbors during times of disaster.

Today, your offering will benefit Adventist Community Services in North America and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) internationally to further their efforts. Thank you for returning God's tithe and supporting today's offering for ACS.

14
MAY

21
MAY

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Randy Pausch, an American computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon University, became famous in 2007 when his “Last Lecture” went viral on the Internet. He lectured on living while dying from pancreatic cancer at the age of 47.

The Apostle Paul was in a similar situation. He was not sick; but he knew that going to Jerusalem could mean his death. Paul had one more lecture to deliver: a message for the church leaders. At the end of his message, Paul highlighted two important principles that had been clearly illustrated in his life: work and giving (Acts 20:33-34). Paul believed that a worker deserves his wages (1 Tim. 5:18), and he warned against idleness when he wrote, “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). Leading by example, Paul worked as a tent maker so he wouldn’t be a burden to the churches (Acts 18:3).

Paul put the responsibility of helping someone in need first on the immediate family, telling those responsible for helping family members that if they refused to help, they were denying the faith and were “worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). Paul’s last words to the elders from Ephesus were on giving. He quoted Jesus’s words, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Although not found literally in the Gospels, these words summarize Jesus’s ministry.

What a blessing to be able to work in order to give! Your giving today will not only help with this building’s maintenance; it will also bless those who are in need. Paul concluded by saying, “you must support the weak” (Acts 20:35).

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

"As a nation, Americans could give away an extra \$100 billion per year without even feeling a pinch—but statistics show we are getting stingier than ever. Why don't we give more? Sometimes it's simply a matter of lack of vision, ignorance, or poor planning" (Ron Blue, *Generous Living*, 30).

In 1997 Ron Blue made a case for a culture that gave in disproportional direction to income. In other words, the more a household made, the lower their percentage of giving and the higher their consumer debt.

In Christianity, the reasons for the earnings/debt ratio could be explained from three areas: spiritual and financial problems, limited vision, or lack of information. In order to change that, Ron Blue proposes three simple steps: 1) Prepare to change your beliefs. Giving starts by allowing God's word to change your heart and mind. Anchor your financial decisions in the truth, whether it is investing, purchasing or giving. 2) Change your direction. Financial problems could be the symptom of wrong thinking, bad attitudes, or poor decision-making. 3) Change your vision. Allow God and others to give you input on your giving. Finally, you need a plan (ibid., 39-40).

The stewardship department in your local conference can help you plan ahead: How can you bless your family and God's work even after you are gone? Deciding that now is good stewardship!

Today's offering will help advance ministries in our local conference area. Thank you for sharing the burden so that many can be blessed.

28
MAY

04
JUNE

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

How can someone be rich toward God? Luke 12:13–22 describes a man who wanted Jesus to convince his brother to divide their family's inheritance with him. Jesus, however, followed the inquiry with a series of teachings that are still relevant to Christian living today.

Jesus warned against greed. One's life should not consist of accumulating possessions. Next He urged listeners to seek the kingdom of God, centering their lives on God's eternal kingdom. The promise is that God will provide for the physical needs of those who give priority to God's kingdom. The third piece of advice is one of response. The disciple who trusts God will be a good, watchful steward. In fact, the owner might come at any time and will hold the steward accountable. "For everyone to whom much is given ... much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

Many are tempted to think of men such as John D. Rockefeller Jr. or Albert Schweitzer when reading this passage. One inherited a fortune, which he never thought of as his own. He served God and humanity with it. The other was one of the most gifted men of all time. He used his gifts freely for God and humanity (Campbell Ferenbach, *Preaching Stewardship*, 62).

But what about ordinary people like you and me? What has God given you? Has God given you property, speech, strength, or influence? "According to the talents bestowed will be the returns called for" (*Stewardship*, 116). Being rich toward God is about where your treasure is. Your heart follows your treasure. Where is your heart today? May the Lord help you to be rich toward God as you support the local ministry with your offerings today.

CHAPLAINCY MINISTRIES/ * MULTILINGUAL MINISTRIES

by Paul Anderson

The Great Commission demands and authorizes a global concept of ministry and missions. A fairly new paradigm for Adventist ministry is chaplaincy. Like John Nevins Andrews, chaplains are visionaries who lead in ministry on contemporary mission fields.

Whether on public university campuses or in secular business institutions, military units, hospitals, or crisis points in the world, an Adventist chaplain is likely making a difference in the midst of a crisis or on the periphery helping those who are coming out of the thick of it. Chaplains represent the work of the church as surely as do pastors of local congregations or evangelists who plant churches where none have been before. The Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM) Department is the agency of support to our chaplains.

For 30 years Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries has touched lives meaningfully. Civilians, bureaucrats, police officers, hospital patients, students, prisoners, disaster victims, and military personnel in all arms of the military have received support and assistance through the ministry of the pastors who are endorsed as Seventh-day Adventist chaplains. Adventist chaplains serve selflessly, often in isolated locations or institutions where there may be few if any other Seventh-day Adventists.

On campuses, they create a spiritual comfort zone for young believers and seekers. They represent our church as the hands, feet, ears, arms, and heart of Christ. They serve where most church members can't go. Send them your support and appreciation through a generous, offering today. Write "Adventist Chaplains" on your tithe envelope with your gift. Your generosity will be appreciated and used directly to support the ministry that our chaplains do on their mission field, wherever it might be.

11
JUNE

* An added **Multilingual Ministries** appeal, can be found on the last page of this document.

18
JUNE

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Wealth is a gift from God. Many men of God were rich. Abraham, David, and Solomon were just a few. Wealthy women followed Jesus, and many others became Christians through the ministry of the disciples in the early church (Luke 8:1-3; Acts 16:14; 17:4).

"The desire to accumulate wealth is an original affection of our nature, implanted there by our heavenly Father for noble ends" (*Stewardship*, 148). In fact, Mrs. White encourages mission work among the wealthy, the talented, and those of influence. They have a special place in God's work (*Stewardship*, 139-140).

Many use the young rich ruler as grounds to refuse wealth. "Go, sell what you have and give to the poor..." (Matt. 19:21). However, this young man's problem wasn't the money, but the love of money. "Christians are safe only in acquiring money as God directs, and using it in channels which He can bless" (*Stewardship*, 139, 141).

Whether rich or poor, spiritual prosperity comes from dependency upon God. Wealth or the lack of it should not come between God and the believer. What a privilege we have to give from what the Lord has given us this week. God demands faithfulness, which is the reason why He says, "My son, give me your heart" (Prov. 23:26).

OUR LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3:5).

Solomon defines and exemplifies what he meant by trusting in the Lord. First, he alludes to the “Shema”—also known as the Jewish central prayer. This prayer should be the starting point for all believers. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (Deut. 6:4-5).

Solomon describes three specific pillars of trust. Believers know they trust the Lord when they honor Him with their possessions (Prov. 3:9). Trust is also built when believers submit to God’s corrections (Prov. 3:11). And finally, believers who trust the Lord use their time to bless others (Prov. 3:27).

Solomon assures Christians that trusting God will prolong one’s life and bring prosperity (Prov. 3:2). Would you trust God today? Trust that He will fill your barns and overflow them. Trust that your vats will brim over as you honor God with your means. Trust that the Lord will use your offerings today to meet the needs of this congregation. Trusting God begins with knowing, and knowing has evidence. “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” (Ps. 34:8).

WOMEN'S MINISTRY

by Carla Baker

Today's offering is for the North American Division (NAD) Women's Ministries. Since its inception, the Women's Ministries Department has been engaged in carrying out the mission of the church, which is to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel.

When Jesus explained what separates the sheep from the goats in Matthew 25:31-46, He made it clear that ministry to others is a primary characteristic of Christian believers. With the theme "A Ministry for Every Woman," the North American Division Women's Ministries Department actively encourages every woman to be involved in service to others. According to Ellen G. White, women "can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed" (*Evangelism*, 465).

Among its many resources to help with local church outreach and ministry needs, the Women's Ministries Department has two DVD Bible study series for women: Journey of Joy with speaker Carla Gober, and Surprised by Love featuring Elizabeth Talbot. These DVD studies make giving Bible studies as easy as turning on the DVD player.

Your gift marked NAD Women's Ministries Offering will affirm the work of women in the church.

09
JULY

16
JULY

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

A young person once confessed after asking for a ride to the mall, "I just got paid and want to get a new pair of shoes. This is my greatest addiction. I purchase shoes, wear them once, and then I display them on my bedroom wall never to be used again."

Most of us would agree that this young person's addiction is an unwise use of hard-earned money. What do believers do with their "first fruits"?

In the Jewish culture, the feast of harvest, known as the Feast of the Weeks, was celebrated at the end of May or early June, the time of the early spring harvest. Seven weeks after the barley sheaf was offered, first fruit offerings were brought to the temple priest (*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, 627).

In wisdom literature, it is common to see the connection between giving and receiving blessings in return. "First fruits are the best the land can offer. When you give the best and are rewarded for that, we would try harder next year." Similarly, giving one's best first fruits is applicable in all areas of life: time, talents, and resources. However, "best efforts" is not limited to the 10 percent alone. It affects 100 percent of everything believers are trusted to manage for God's glory (Douglas W. Johnson, *Tithe: Challenge or Legalism?* 26, 27).

Instead of using your first resources on consuming something, even if it's not as frivolous as new shoes, put God first by giving Him the tenth of your first fruits and then more according to how God has blessed you.

Today's offering goes to local church budget, which includes outreach ministries to those who live near us.

LOCAL CONFERENCE

God's love for the world is clearly delineated throughout the scriptures. John 3:16 says that God so loved the world that He sent his son, Jesus Christ. John 3:1 says that God poured down His love on the world to the point of calling the believers His children. Furthermore, Paul describes a God who loves a cheerful giver.

Years ago a viral video showed a worshiper in a church during the offering time doing back flips and dancing to the beat of the music. Spectators watched in anticipation of what he would do next. As the believer made his way to the platform, in a gracious way, he brought his offering to the altar and then danced back to his seat. The title of the video was: "A Cheerful Giver."

Paul appeals to the church in Corinth by reminding them of Jesus's sacrifice for humanity though which believers are considered rich. Paul also gave clear advice on how to give: "Give according to what one has, not according to what he does not have" (2 Cor. 8:9, 12).

Ellen White affirms, "Unselfish liberality threw the early church into a transport of joy; for the believers knew that their efforts were helping to send the gospel message to those in darkness" (*Stewardship*, 172).

As you consider what Jesus did for you, may the thoughts fill you with a cheerful heart. Your liberal offerings will be a blessing in your conference as plans are made to further His kingdom.

23
JULY

30
JULY

UNION DESIGNATED

It was said of John Wesley's life philosophy, as it related to money, that people should earn all they can, save as much as they can, and give away as much as possible. Douglas Johnson believes that Christians in affluent societies have exceeded in the first two, but they "get off the train just before the last stop" (Douglas W. Johnson, *Tithe: Challenge or Legalism?* 74).

Why is giving such a challenge? Johnson believes it has to do with false assumptions. 1) People give from what's left. After paying bills and consuming, not much is left. 2) Lack of planning. Having a budget is crucial to one's giving. He who fails to plan, plans to fail. 3) Giving as the Spirit moves. Giving shouldn't be a sporadic action based on spiritual highs. Giving should be a discipline. 4) Service organizations receive the tithes instead of churches. This is a matter of faithfulness. The believer follows the Bible's directions on tithing, which was set aside for a holy use.

The remedy? 1) Study. What does the Bible have to say on this topic? 2) Discipline. It has to do with conviction rather than convenience. 3) Prayer. Changing life patterns are only possible with God's help. 4) Action. Don't just give, but also get involved in God's mission (*ibid.*, 75-79).

May the Lord help us align with scriptures as we faithfully give for God's work locally, regionally, and globally.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

What does money say about a person? "We may not give money away, but money will give us away.... If a man is after money, he is money-mad; if he keeps it, he is a capitalist; if he spends it, he is a playboy; if he doesn't get money, he is a ne'er-do-well; if he doesn't try to get it, he lacks ambition; and if he accumulates it after a lifetime of hard work, people call him a fool who never got anything out of life" (Leslie B. Flynn, *Your God and Your Gold*, 12-13).

Although an exaggeration, the paragraph above reflects a lot of truth. A person's overall expenditures reflect where their interest is. Jesus said it best, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21).

Many years ago in China, citizens of a town were in fearful expectation of an enemy army invasion. Soon, soldiers would go door-to-door getting anything they could grab. Many, in desperation, sought refuge in a mission compound run by English missionaries. Knowing what the soldiers were after, the missionaries welcomed refugees with nothing of value on them. Greedy soldiers would take the missionaries' word when declaring that the compound was a place of poverty.

Sadly, many citizens walked away from safety because they couldn't part from their jewels, silks, or silver. They were mastered by money (ibid., 19, 20). Today, believers have an opportunity to serve the Lord by depositing treasures in heaven. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34). May your heart and treasure be in heaven today and always. Today's offering will bless our church's local outreach.

06
AUGUST

13 AUGUST

OAKWOOD UNIVERSITY/ANDREWS UNIVERSITY/ LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY

A research team studied different grade levels to find out how students' dreams shift throughout their development. The results? The younger the students were, the bigger were their dreams. It seems as though growth kills dreams. Many underprivileged youth even believe that higher education is impossible for them (Leslie Morrison Gutman and Rodie Akerman, *Center for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning: Research Report*).

Many students see Adventist education as impossible due to the soaring cost of private education. Adventist education is only possible thanks to the generosity of former students and faithful church members who believe in Adventist education. "Many graduates will become employed as accountants, pastors, teachers, physicians, nurses, dentists, hospital workers and so forth, in denominational employment" (T. Joy Willey, *How Much Does It Really Cost to Go to an Adventist College?*)

What a great opportunity we have today to partner with God and Adventist universities in the North American Division in preparing young people for ministry. Part of your offering today will help students study in Adventist institutions and graduate to serve.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Human beings are created to worship Someone or something. No wonder the Ten Commandments begin with "You shall have no other gods before me" and end with "you shall not covet" (Ex 20:3, 17). Covetousness is defined as "The wish to have more." Money, like gods, has many names. As early as 1890, scholars listed no less than 130 English expressions for money (Leslie B. Flynn, *Your God and Your Gold*, 18).

Some people will do almost anything for money. The Bible illustrates this subject. Judas sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Sorcerer Simon offered Peter money for the Holy Spirit, and Felix kept Paul in prison in hopes of receiving money for his release. Money itself is neutral; it is just a means of exchange. It can be used to apply the golden rule or to rule the gold.

The California Gold Rush of 1848 brought more than \$400 million dollars into the economy of the United States. Providentially, an interest in stewardship surfaced in many denominations as an antidote to covetousness. It brought revival and an increased giving for missions. "Money invested in spiritual projects provides an entrance into the more abundant life" (Ibid., 16-17).

By contemplation the believer is transformed. May God be the only One we contemplate as followers of Jesus. May the moneymaking talent God has given us be used to advance His kingdom locally, regionally, and to the end of the world.

Today's offering is for the local church budget, which helps keep our church open and operating and helps fund outreach in our community.

20
AUGUST

27
AUGUST

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

A woman once told her husband, "I need a little money," to which her husband replied, "How little do you want?"

This reflects some believers' attitude toward giving. Some Christians argue that tithing is a legalistic practice from the Old Testament. They seem to ignore the many allusions to tithing in the New Testament. Jesus affirmed tithing (Matt. 23:23), and Paul alluded to it (1 Cor. 9:13-14; 16:2). Regardless, this negative attitude toward tithing appears to be an issue of covetousness rather than legalism. How little will God accept?

A young girl received a silver dollar once. She asked her dad to break it into dimes. She excitedly exclaimed her anticipation of the next week's church service where she would give her tithe. When Sabbath came and the offering plate passed by her, she dropped one dime in and then a second one. In admiration, her dad inquired, "Why did you give two coins instead of one? Isn't tithe one tenth?" The little girl replied, "No, daddy, one-tenth belongs to Him and I can't give to the Lord what is His, so if I give Him anything, I must give Him some of what is mine" (Leslie B. Flynn, *Your God and Your Gold*, 37).

Perhaps giving is better described as God's tithes and the believers' offerings. Paul says that everyone should give in accordance with one's prosperity (1 Cor. 16:2). Tithes should be the Christian baseline of giving. Tithe acknowledges God's ownership of everything. Offerings should acknowledge God's blessings to you.

Today's offering will be used for upkeep on our church and for reaching our community for Christ.

10
SEPTEMBER

FALL MISSION APPEAL

A church member reminisced about her memories of raising funds for mission. Ingathering came to mind, triggering memories of discomfort as well as a smile. "Ingathering was not the most exciting activity for a timid teenager," she recalled. "However, it sparked sense of community and mission among church members and neighbors alike."

Ingathering, as it was known for decades, started in 1903 when Jasper Wayne, a nurseryman from Iowa, ordered 50 copies of the Signs of the Times magazine from the publisher. When the magazines arrived at the post office, Wayne opened the parcel and gave the magazines away to people he met. If someone gave him a donation, he gave it to support the mission outreach of the church. The magazines were quickly distributed. Ten days later a second parcel arrived by mistake. Wayne took those copies in his buggy and offered them to customers and friends, asking for a donation for missions. Ingathering, as the project became known, was endorsed by the General Conference in 1908 as a means to raise funds in local communities for both local and worldwide mission work (see R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant*, 346).

Ellen White highlighted the need for creativity in mission work, as a means to put "new life into old methods" of raising funds to support missions. She encouraged the church to find new methods of awakening the interest of church members in a united effort to reach the world. (See *Counsels on Stewardship*, 190). Ingathering was one example of creativity in the twentieth century.

While we may no longer go from house to house asking for donations for missions, let's do find new ways to fund the work of mission and finish God's work!

24
SEPTEMBER

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

"The largest monetary unit in the world is from the Island of Yap. It is made of stone, measures thirty inches in diameter, weighs over one hundred pounds, and is pierced with a hole so it can be carried on a pole. This peculiar coin is used only for weighty transactions. It has an exchange value of 10,000 coconuts, one-quarter acre of land, an eighteen-foot canoe, or a wife" (Charles M. Crowe, *Stewardship Sermons*, 101).

Acquiring that coin was quite a dangerous quest. The stone from which it was carved came from a distant island and had to be brought by canoe across rough seas. Today, people pursue other symbols of status, such as vehicles, properties, or stocks. Others, like King Ludwig II from Bavaria, Germany, built many castles. His masterpiece, the Neuschwanstein Castle, wasn't completed by the time of his death; so, he didn't get to enjoy it.

Jesus's teachings on money can be summarized in this verse: "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26). Charles Crowe suggests that Christian stewardship of money is pivotal to believers. He proposes three principles: 1) Managing money requires respecting it and what it can do for good or for evil. As stewards, believers must recognize God as the grantor of blessings. 2) Money should be mastered. Money should be subordinated to love and truth. 3) Money should be dedicated. Dedicated money can heal, educate, and enlighten (Ibid., 102-109).

Let us honor, master, and dedicate what the Lord has given us, so we profit eternity and lose this world. Your offering today will help in advancing God's kingdom in your conference.

08
OCTOBER

VOICE OF PROPHECY/LA VOZ DE LA ESPERANZA

by Kortnye Hurst

Jamie's enthusiasm for ministry is intoxicating. He shares the ways God changed his life and created a new one—he could only dream of inside his old world. In 2013 Jamie saw an ad for a series of meetings called "Revelation Speaks Peace." He was interested, but didn't think he could make it. "I was in a parked car with my homies. We'd been chillin'," Jamie recalls with an in-quotes gesture. "It was late at night. Everybody was passed out. I should have been too . . . but I wasn't."

Discouragement weighed heavily on Jamie. "I looked around the car, taking it all in. I saw my reflection—maybe on a window or side mirror. Plain as day, a voice asked, 'Is this what you really want?'" Jamie heard his Savior's voice that night. He attended the meetings presented by Voice of Prophecy's Shawn Boonstra, and later pledged his life to God through baptism.

"In spreading the gospel, people need a guide, not a greasy car dealer. Quality counts," Jamie explains. "My birth dad was a military man. He taught me to meet the enemy at the front gate. Don't hide under a bed or wait by the front door. Go to the front gate. Take all the resources with you that your enemy is bringing. Then, do it better."

As the offering plate is passed down your aisle, consider what financial resources the Savior is asking you to bring to the front gate. Support *Voice of Prophecy* and *Voz de la Esperanza*, two of our church's leading evangelistic resources.

22
OCTOBER

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

At a resource committee held many years ago, a cross-section of a congregation was asked to put down how much they felt each of the church members could give as a weekly pledge.

A lay person hurried to the pastor, concerned with the results. One member had suggested that the minister put down \$20 a week—quite a large sum for the time. The lay person considered this pledge a cruel insult since the minister had a minimal salary. To his amazement, the minister felt flattered. “Imagine someone in the congregation feeling that I can return to God in praise and thanksgiving such a large expression of gratitude for the love that God has shown me” (Ben G. Smillie, *Blunt Questions in Stewardship Have Theological Answers*, 64).

He who loves little gives little. But he who loves much gives much. Jesus saw the widow’s sacrifice as she gave all she had. Jesus praised her action because it came from her heart. Ellen White commented, “Tears of joy filled [the widow’s] eyes as she felt that her act was understood and appreciated. Her heart went with her gift ... its value was estimated, not by the worth of the coin, but by the love to God and the interest in His work that had prompted the deed” (Ellen G. White *Desire of Ages*, 615).

God reminded Samuel, “For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). We must give today as if Jesus Himself were accepting our offerings. No human should interfere in this act of worship. As you give, pray that your offering is acceptable and blessed by the One who gave it all first.

May your unselfish giving be a blessing to your local conference as funds are used to advance God’s kingdom.

5 NOVEMBER

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Words of encouragement are one of the five love languages that Gary Chapman highlights in his famous book by the same title. Furthermore, Chapman believes that God uses those five languages to convey a simple message to humankind: "I Love you" (Gary Chapman, *The Love Languages of God*, 32).

Scripture vastly exemplifies God's words of affirmation. Believers long to hear Jesus say: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21). This phrase is repeated twice in the context of the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Any churchgoer has heard this parable multiple times. Jesus equated the kingdom of God with a man who went on a journey and left three servants in charge of his property.

Many suggest that while Matthew 24 gives the signs of the end times, Matthew 25 helps the believer know how to be disciples in the context of the end times. Believers must seek the Holy Spirit, realize the talents given, and use them for ministry. Moreover, talents are given according to ability. "This phrase indicates that this is not a parable about talents as abilities but about trusteeship or the use of abilities; it is a parable about opportunities to use abilities" (Charles E. Dietze, *God's Trustees*, 82).

In addition to retuning tithes, let us recognize God's ownership by blessing this congregation with liberal offerings. May you one day hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matt. 25:23).

ANNUAL SACRIFICE (GLOBAL MISSION)

A missionary couple decided to live among the Sawi, a group of tree-dwellers in Irian Jaya, New Guinea. After becoming friends and learning their language, the opportunity came to present the Gospel to the tribe. Interestingly, no response resulted from a heartfelt, passionate, and clear presentation of the Gospel. However, the tribe connected with Judas, the betrayer. In the Sawi culture, treachery was highly honored. The villain became the hero of the story!

War broke out between tribes. Discouraged and frustrated, the missionaries decided to move on to another tribe, which caused a commotion among the Sawi. They didn't want to lose the economic benefits that the missionaries had brought. Their solution astounded the missionaries. A warrior from each tribe sorrowfully chose one of his own children to be offered to the other tribe as a gift of peace. A peace child was the only way to stop the betraying and killing among the tribes. As long as the peace child lived, there would be peace among the tribes (Don Richardson, *Peace Child*, 175).

Christ is a gift, a true Peace Child. Believers accept the gift of God when they cheerfully and sacrificially give tithes and offerings in symbolic recognition of God's ownership. "God gave Him to the world, and He graciously takes the gifts entrusted to His human agents for the advancement of His work in the world" (*Counsels on Stewardship*, 198).

Knowing that God sent His son as a ransom for many, what is your response today? The mission is local as well as global! Fund the mission to finish the Work!

2
NOVEMBER

19
NOVEMBER

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

There is a song that combines a simple tune with a timeless truth. The listener can picture Adam in the Garden of Eden discovering the functions of his hands, his heart, and his voice. The song concludes each stanza with this sentence: "my hand/heart/voice is a gift from God to me" (Elly and Steve Kupferschmid, *I Can Love: A Song of Stewardship and Thanksgiving*, 1989).

God not only gave Adam and Eve a phenomenal body, but also a purpose: to rule over creation (Gen. 1:26, 28, NIV). God entrusted the newly created world to His crown of creation man and woman. As good managers, they were to enjoy, as the song suggests, but also to benefit from it tangibly.

After one realizes how good, generous, and merciful God is, "what can I do to thank him?" the song rhetorically asks. The question is difficult. What can be given to One who has it all? The answer is simple: "I can love." Love brings the believer to Jesus's summary of the law: "Love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-40).

Today, we have an opportunity to express our love to God and our neighbor as we return God's tithes and our offerings. Our lives, time, and possessions belong to God. What a privilege it is to be able to thank Him through this act of Love.

Today's offering will benefit our local church budget, which blesses us and the community in which we live.

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

Why should the believer give tithes and offerings? This question has many answers. Many would give a utilitarian and self-centered answer to the question: "What's in it for me?"

"Don't give until it hurts, give until it stops hurting" is an altruistic approach to fundraising. "Give to the cancer fund, for you may be next." "Be kind to your heart, give to the Heart Fund." These appeals highlight selfish motives for giving. Churches also highlight the material benefit of tithing when sharing stories of profitable enterprises as a result of God's blessings to those who tithe. Why should the believer give? Is it because God commands it? Is it to avoid a curse that may fall upon the disobedient? Is it because the church needs a new roof or the conference needs a new office?

Ben G. Smillie suggests that believers should not give because they seek salvation, for salvation has already been provided by Christ alone, by grace alone, and through faith alone. Martin Luther said, "Sinners are not loved because they are lovely, they are lovely because they are loved" (Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God*, 69).

Faith, therefore, is the human response to Christ's sacrifice and loving kindness. Believers trust God with their salvation, their life, and their resources (Ben G. Smillie, *Blunt Questions in Stewardship Have Theological Answers*, 55-63).

Obedience is the external manifestation of trusting God. "Why shouldn't believers give?" is perhaps the more appropriate question. May your giving today reflect God's liberal gift of salvation. May not only a tenth of our increase be given, but a generous offering to advance the outreach of our local conference.

26
NOVEMBER

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Jacob went through a series of events that prompted his sudden departure from his father's house. The Lord appeared to Jacob at night with a message of comfort, assurance, and glory. Jacob saw a stairwell with angels walking up and down and the Lord at the top. He called the place Bethel—house of God. Jacob acknowledged God as a giver of material blessings and promised to tithe as the Lord prospered him (Gen. 28).

The tithe acknowledges God as the owner of all, including the ninety percent that is left after tithe has been removed. Believers consecrate the total amount through the act of tithing. With such a perspective in mind, believers should spend, save, and give with reverence.

For instance, money spent for clothing, food, and entertainment should be done in a way that reflects its real owner. The believer should ask, "Am I honoring the Lord with these clothes? Are they modest, affordable, and of good quality? Is this food honoring the Holy Spirit as the One who lives within me? Am I being renewed with this choice of entertainment? Can I be a witness for Christ in this place?"

"The way we earn our money, the way we spend our money, and the attitude we have concerning our money determines whether we are dishonoring Him who gives us the power to obtain wealth or whether we, as faithful stewards, are investing in the Lord's living causes and bearing fruitful testimony for Him" (Virginia Elly, *Stewardship: Witnessing for Christ*, 62).

Let us be good stewards by acknowledging God's ownership through our tithes and offerings.

ADVENTIST COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Psalmist reminds us of God's abounding love for the vulnerable in our communities. "But God will never forget the needy; the hope of the afflicted will never perish" (Ps. 9:18, NIV). Christian love motivates us to serve those in need in our communities. Rich and poor alike struggle with situations from which they cry out for help. People may be prisoners of addictions, limited by health issues, and suffering from economic challenges, language barriers, and education. The list goes on. Each barrier prevents them from reaching the full potential that God designed for them as His children.

Through the World Budget today your offering will support Adventist Community Services (ACS) in the North American Division and ADRA worldwide. By supporting ACS, you can make a lasting impact in your community and beyond, whether it's volunteering your time, donating goods, or making financial contributions. When we touch one heart, one family, one community, together we are helping to transform the lives of people.

Jesus lived His life as a humble servant: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28, NIV). Therefore, the bottom line of the Christian journey is to be a servant of God.

Adventist Community Services provides you with opportunities to be a servant of God in your own community. They lend their support and assistance in disaster relief ministries, elder care, crisis care, urban ministries, tutoring, mentoring, Hope for Humanity, and Youth and Young Adults Empowered to Serve.

Your financial gifts to the Adventist Community Services offering will make it possible to continue transforming communities one life at a time.

10
DECEMBER

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

There is a stretch of water in the Pacific Ocean near Vancouver Island off the coast of Canada that is acoustically dead. It is known as "the zone of silence." The depths of these waters hold many ships that, oblivious to the dangerous cliffs ahead, crashed and sank. No siren or bell can be heard in this area, so ships cannot be alerted to the imminent danger. The zone of silence is a death trap. Similarly, many professed Christians seem to be uncomfortable with the subject of money and giving. They are acoustically dead on this subject.

On his way to Jerusalem, Paul stopped by Ephesus and called the church elders for a final message. Acts 20:35 captures Paul's words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It has been suggested that this was Paul's own summary of Jesus's teachings. Giving is central to the Christian message as opposed to selfishness and greed. Receiving without giving is self-defeating.

Happiness comes when believers are on the giving side instead of the receiving side, regardless of how much or little one has. Believers receive more by giving, since a giving life is a joyous life. It is only by giving that believers come to understand the fuller meaning of the Gospel—and find the fullest joy of life. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). If believers are skeptics, they should try it sometime! (Charles M. Crowe, *Stewardship Sermons*, 121–130).

What a joy it is to exercise the gift of giving. Your giving today blesses this congregation and helps to fund the mission.

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

Nelson's shoes were falling apart. The insole had been lost, making walking painful. One day after school, Nelson was surprised to receive some used clothes and a pair of shoes. The shoes were made of a sky-blue material with white soles—the very pair that Nelson had wanted. Now walking wouldn't be so painful, he thought. However, the excitement was short lived. The shoes were too tight!

At that time, Nelson had signed up for a gift exchange game at school. He knew the family had no money for gifts; however, the idea of a gift exchange sounded exciting. Nelson remembers wondering what to give when suddenly an idea came to mind. Perhaps, it was the Holy Spirit whispering in his ear: Give the shoes! Reluctantly, Nelson prepared a box with the cleaned and barely used shoes inside. Will the boy accept them? he wondered. When the friend opened the box his eyes became as big as saucers. He laughed, cried, and shouted, "Thank you! Thank you!"

Experiencing the joy of giving freely was wonderful. The shoes were just the beginning. Nelson gave clothes, toys, and anything he could get a hold of to others. God's word was fulfilled, "One man gives freely, yet gains even more" (Prov. 11:24, NIV). May we experience the gift of Christmas in a special way today by giving freely. It's about imitating Christ Jesus, the ultimate giver (Phil. 2:5).

As you give today, keep in mind how your offering will make it possible to disciple young people so they too experience the joy of giving freely.

24
DECEMBER

UNION DESIGNATED

Today Sabbathkeepers around the world are privileged to see another year pass into the records of time as the Sabbath is closed and a new week and new year is welcomed. It will happen again in 2022 and then in 2033 (Time and Date.com).

This is a prime opportunity to take an inventory of our life—looking at the past, evaluating the present, and contemplating the future. Perhaps Revelation 3:14–22 can help with this spiritual assessment.

Laodicea was enormously wealthy and proud of it. History records that the region suffered an earthquake in A.D. 60 that devastated the city. Laodiceans had enough wealth to rebuild the city without imperial help. Their wealth came from clothing manufacturing and banking. Laodicea was also well known for its medical school, which treated eye diseases (Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 144).

The Laodiceans seemed to have reflected more on the world around them than the Gospel. Their wealth was causing a dangerous independency from God, which resulted in spiritual blindness, poverty, and nakedness. In short, they were pitiful, wretched, and lukewarm. The worse part was that they didn't know it.

How has the Lord blessed you in 2016? Have you been faithful with your tithes and offerings? What will you do today and next year? Jesus stands at the door and knocks. He is willing to visit, listen, and forgive. Let us worship God today by joyfully giving to the Lord as we allow His robe of righteousness to cover us.

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11
JUNE

MULTILINGUAL MINISTRIES

by Terri Saelee

Jesus is eager to come and take us home, but so many people still have not heard the gospel! Nearly 3 billion people are from language groups still unreached by the good news we know.

But God is bringing many of them right here among us as refugees, immigrants, tourists, and international students from some of the least reached parts of the world! He has them here to learn the truth from us so they can share it with their own people!

Let God use you to reach the unreached. Give generously today, and watch for opportunities to talk to everyone you meet, including those from other countries, about the love of Jesus.



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