

OFFERING



2017

APPEALS

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 2017 English offertory readings were written by Nelson Silva. He is a native of Venezuela. Nelson earned his Doctoral degree in Ministry in Youth, Family and Culture. He currently serves as the Associate Youth Director for Young Adults, Public Campuses, and Hispanic Youth Ministries, in the Kentucky and Tennessee Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists.

This year we will not videotape the offertory readings, but you can find an extensive generic selection of videos emphasizing our various offering appeals, by visiting our website at www.iGiveSDA.org, under Offertory Materials.

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

John Mathews
Director

Bonita J. Shields
Associate Director



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 2017.



JANUARY

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

In many parts of the world, Christmas was not over until yesterday. In Spain, for instance, January 6 is “Three Kings Day.” Since 1885, Spain has organized an annual parade to honor Melchor, Gaspar, and Balthazar, who, according to tradition, brought presents to Jesus.¹ Many are glad for one more opportunity for gifts. Yet many people go into debt because of gifts, parties, and emergencies during the Christmas season. The average credit card debt for this holiday season is around \$1,000. Sixty percent of debt holders carry the balance, which translates into a 10-year debt when paying the minimum required. Forty-four percent reported being stressed over it.²

Many believers also struggle with debt due to family emergencies, good intentions, or bad decisions. When they live from paycheck to paycheck and feel that there is too much month at the end of their dollars, God’s cause suffers. Is there a better way? The answer is yes!

Recognizing one’s condition, praying for wisdom, and seeking help from God-fearing financial coaches could be a start.

Let’s pray, as the Apostle Paul, “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in His holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe” (Eph. 1:18–19, NIV). May you choose faithfulness to God in 2017.

¹ “Dia de Los Reyes Magos,” <http://www.enforex.com/culture/reyes-magos.html> (accessed on March, 20 2016).

² Eileen Alt Powell, “Lingering Christmas Bills Can Lead to Debt Woes,” New York, March 7, 2016. <http://abcnews.go.com/business/story> (accessed on December 15, 2015).

CONFERENCE ADVANCE

Timothy Aka, Associate Treasurer for the Seventh-day Adventist World Church®, explained that from the 1980's to the late 1990's a bubble economy was created that crashed in 2000 and again in 2008. Economists are expecting a recession in the near future as part of the financial cycle.³

Preparing for a recession may cause people, businesses, and even churches to hold on to cash, and stop investing and giving in order to weather the imminent storm. What should our attitude as believers be during this financial trial?

Peter warned believers not to be surprised at the painful trials they were going through as if something strange were happening (1 Pet. 4:12). Peter also shared that the key is on casting “all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7, NIV). Above everything, Peter shared three things believers should do in the light of trials and tribulations: 1) commit their souls to Him, 2) do good, and 3) rejoice for the privilege of partaking in Christ's sufferings (1 Pet. 4:13, 19).

Having an emergency fund is prudent; however, withholding tithes and offerings and not investing in missions shows a lack of faith. God's cause should advance in your local church, state, and the world. May your giving today be grounded in faith as your conference receives a liberal offering to help with evangelism, youth ministry, and education, among other needs.

³ Timothy Aka, “Economic Calm Before the Storm,” *Adventist Review*, Video Interview, March 2, 2016. <http://www.adventistreview.org/artv?id=3765> (accessed on March 22, 2016).

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

It was a typical Sabbath morning. Nancy Axelson, a retired nurse and prison ministry enthusiast, sat in the fellowship hall before Sabbath School with five letters on the table from inmates throughout the state of Indiana. She looked forward to receiving those letters every Sabbath. However, this particular Sabbath, her eyes opened up wide as she found a check printed by the State penitentiary for the amount of \$186.76, addressed to the Marion SDA Church.

Sister Nancy read the two-page letter to find a powerful testimony. An inmate had learned about tithing while reading the Bible from cover to cover. Although he had been sending tithe to the church for the last 18 months, he realized, like Zacchaeus, that he owed God back tithes from the 20 dollars he occasionally received from his mother over the last 10 years. With nine dollars left in his pocket, he sent all of his hard-earned money as tithe. He figured that he should not rob God anymore. He also turned down the opportunity of making three dollars a day because it would require him to work on Sabbath. He prefers to keep his job of cleaning toilets, making \$1.25 a week, rather than having to work on Sabbath.

His faithfulness in tithing and Sabbath-keeping are paired with his passion for sharing Christ. He has brought another inmate to Christ and constantly shares the Good News with others.

One day, may each one of us, along with this faithful inmate, hear Jesus say, "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).

JAN // 28

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

By Vialo Weis

Today's North America Division Offering goes toward Religious Liberty.

Scripture points to the day when we will not have religious liberty. That's why our offering today for Religious Liberty is important.

The Religious Liberty offering sends *Liberty* magazine to thought leaders in our community, including elected officials, judges, attorneys, and pastors of Sunday churches, among others. Many thought leaders have forgotten the lessons of history. Prophecy tells us that these lessons will be forgotten, which will result in church and state uniting again. Not only will sending *Liberty* to thought leaders inform them of important religious liberty principles, but the Holy Spirit can use *Liberty* to convict them of truth.

The Religious Liberty offering also funds litigating the cases of church members who lose their jobs because they are not willing to work on Sabbath. Litigation is not cheap, but it is important to establish positive legal precedents to protect our rights going forward. The cases of two Seventh-day Adventists, Adell Sherbert and Paula Hobbie, who lost their jobs over the Sabbath, went to the United States Supreme Court. In each case, the Supreme Court ruled in their favor, establishing positive legal precedents which benefitted other church members.

Let's take advantage of today's calm before the storm. Thank you for your generous offering today in support of Religious Liberty!



FEBRUARY

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Eph. 3:20).

Elder Robert Lister, past president of the Southwest Region Conference in Dallas, Texas, gives this personal testimony:

Promises are meant to be kept. It is easy for us to break them, but we always can depend on God to keep His.

Early in our ministry, my wife and I faced a big test: we had to choose whether we would return our tithe and give an offering or pay the house mortgage. There was enough money to pay only one or the other, not both. We decided before the other bills were paid to set aside in love the first fruits of our increase plus offerings and trust God to supply us with additional money to pay the mortgage.

The next Sabbath, we placed the tithe envelope in the offering plate with the joy of knowing that God was pleased with our faithfulness. As usual, we spent all day in church activities: Sabbath School, divine service, fellowship dinner, and missionary endeavors. It was a long but happy day.

When we got home, we received in the mail a brown envelope from the IRS with a refund check from an audit done on a return four years earlier. It was far more than the mortgage payment.

God keeps His promises!

WORLD BUDGET

By Bonita Joyner Shields

A portion of today's World Budget Offering goes toward NAD Adventist Television Ministries.

Adventist Television Ministries is comprised of several ministries, including: *Breath of Life*, which preaches the gospel in the context of the Three Angels' Messages found in Revelation 14; Esperanza TV, the official Spanish channel of the Seventh-Adventist Church; Hope Channel, which offers programs on wholistic Christian living; and *It Is Written*, which hit the airwaves on 13 stations in the spring of 1956. But I'd like to share a story from *Faith for Today*, the oldest religious telecast in North America, commencing its programming on May 21, 1950. This ministry includes *Lifestyle Magazine*, a program by Dr. John McDougall, and the show, *Mad About Marriage*, began by Mike and Gayle Tucker.

"My name is Joyce, I came to Christ as a direct influence of *Faith for Today*. It was in late 1957 to early 1958. Both of my children were younger than three-years-old. I turned the TV on around noon each day while rocking my baby to sleep. . . I was searching for truth. . . I asked the Lord, 'Is there a church anywhere that teaches truth as it is in your word?' I ordered the Bible lessons as given by Mrs. Fagal. I was halfway through the advanced course when someone knocked on my door. It was Mrs. Jackson from the Bonijay, Florida, church. I will never forget how her face shone when I saw her. She asked, 'How did the Lord ever find you way out here?' 'Through *Faith for Today*,' was my reply."

As you can see, the programming is diverse and reaches people where they are. Won't you consider contributing to these ministries that circle the globe to help fulfill the Gospel Commission?

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Stewardship could be summarized with four words: Time, Talents, Temple, and Treasure. These four “T’s” sound simple, but would harvest immense results if given some consideration. When believers realize that absolutely everything one has belongs to God and that life on this earth is short, life begins!

Solomon wrote: “. . .Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2). Yet he also explained that there is a time for everything (Eccl. 3:1), and that it is good to enjoy little things such as food, drink, and the spoils of life. Solomon assured his readers that this is a gift from God.⁴

Solomon closed his reflections by appealing to young people to consider the end of their lives, so that meaning and satisfaction can be found. “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Eccl. 12:13-14, NIV).

As good stewards of God’s gifts, let us reflect on how following the will of God will result in faithfulness in returning God’s tithes and giving liberal offerings. Using time wisely, making responsible decisions with our health, and using God-given talents for the common good should result in an abundant, faithful, and rewarding life of generosity. May God’s blessings be poured out on you as you prayerfully consider your local church’s needs today.

⁴ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Ecclesiastes: All Is Vanity* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2006), 33.

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

The Seventh-day Adventist Church follows a biblical model of organization. Jethro, by divine inspiration, encouraged Moses to set layers of leadership so overseeing people would be more efficient. Moses would focus on the most difficult and important situations of Israel (Ex. 18).

Some church members wonder what would happen if all the sacrificial and generous giving stayed in local congregations. That describes a congregational model of thinking in which very little to no accountability exists outside the immediate congregation.

In addition to the point of accountability, which is necessary for the leadership as well as the congregations, the mission of the church has flourished locally and globally, in part, because of this organizational model. Some congregations in your conference are not able to sustain a pastor's salary. Yet Paul declares, "... The laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Tim. 5:18). Because of the sisterhood of churches, small and poor congregations are blessed with pastoral ministry.

This is just one of the many benefits of having a Conference oversee the work of a region. Faithfulness and growth are often the result. God's work is local, regional, and global. Jesus said, "...you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

May your giving today reflect your commitment to support your local congregation as well as your conference so that God's kingdom advances throughout the Conference territory.



MARCH

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

A group of men were discussing a diverse number of topics when one of them declared, "Money can buy anything." An impulsive, wealthy businessman among them tossed out a challenge hoping no one could meet it. "If any of you are capable of naming four things money can't buy, I'll give you \$5,000." Immediately, one man in the group grabbed a piece of paper and wrote four simple lines in a matter of seconds. The businessman got the paper and read: 1) the smile of a child, 2) the love of a good woman, 3) youth once it's gone, and 4) entrance into heaven. The wealthy businessman grabbed his checkbook and wrote a check without further comment.⁵

The man who wrote the four simple lines was right: there are many things that can't be obtained with money. There have been times in the history of the world where people had money but could buy nothing. We also know that in the end time God's people won't be able to buy or sell; money will be useless (Rev. 13:17).

However, money is a tool needed for the advancement of God's work. Today, the offering given will be used for the combined budget of your local congregation. That budget covers the maintenance of your local church building and expenses for local ministry such as Sabbath School, Youth Ministry, and Evangelism. Remember to give as a commitment to God. Prayerfully decide what your level of giving will be, and do it systematically. May the Lord pour His blessings on you as you faithfully support the Seventh-day Adventist church locally, regionally, and globally.

⁵ Leslie B. Flynn, *Your God and Your Gold* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), 108.

WORLD BUDGET

By Shelley Nolan Freesland

A portion of today's World Budget Offering goes toward Adventist World Radio.

Adventist World Radio fills a unique role on the front lines of church outreach. Radio waves carry the Gospel to places where church workers would otherwise have a very difficult time entering. . . and people are listening!

From North Africa and Sudan to Bangladesh and China, people are hearing of God's love for the first time through Adventist World Radio's programs, and they are responding with testimonies of transformed lives. One new believer in Ethiopia wrote:

"I found your station accidentally. After listening to your programs for the last two years, I started to go to church. My life is changing gradually. I would like to tell you that many people are listening to your programs. God bless you!"

Adventist World Radio's programs can be heard in more than 100 languages through shortwave, local AM/FM radio, and podcasts. These broadcasts bypass harsh governments and hostile cultures, bringing hope directly into people's homes and hearts. But there are still millions of listeners who cannot hear the message of salvation in a language they can understand.

With your help, Adventist World Radio can add new languages and reach ever further into untouched territories. We invite you today to partner with Adventist World Radio in this vital ministry.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

In a culture where individualism is prevalent, the Bible stands at odds when encouraging believers to give. In fact, Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom..." (Luke 6:38).

Mark was driving his 1967 coupe on a wintery day in Wisconsin. He had to stop when the traffic light turned red, but to his surprise, his vehicle did not move forward when he accelerated. In fact, Mark's car began to drift sideways toward oncoming traffic. After a few seconds, people behind him began to feel desperate. They honked their horns in frustration since Mark's vehicle was not moving forward. Suddenly two men appeared out of nowhere and began to push the car off the black ice patch. In no time Mark was back on the road, and with much gratitude. It felt great to receive help!

Several days later, Mark was driving to his house when he noticed a car in a ditch full of ice and an elderly man giving assistance to the stuck car. Mark pulled in behind the car and jumped out to help. When both men pushed the car out of the ditch, the driver shouted words of gratitude, while motioning goodbye.

Mark did not need the thanks of the stranded driver; he was merely paying forward what someone already did for him. Will you exercise gratitude today for what the Lord has done for you by worshiping God with your generous giving?

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

A rich, young ruler ran up to Jesus, fell on his knees, and asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17, NIV). There is no more background to this story, but it says, “Jesus looked at him and loved him” (Mark 10:21, NIV). The man was concerned about his eternal life, but Jesus knew what he needed. He loved God, but loving his neighbor was just a theory. The man needed a lesson in practical Christianity.

We know Jesus came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). However, to hear that Jesus had compassion on a struggling rich man speaks volumes about the heart of God. Here was a man who had it all. One can speculate that he even attended church and kept the law, but was lost. Something was missing. “He did not love other men as much as he loved himself. Yet he felt he had ‘kept’ all these things.”⁶

Luke contrasted the story of the rich young ruler with a blind beggar and then with Zacchaeus. All three men knew what their problem was and what the solution was. What is more amazing is that Jesus had compassion on each one of them.

As believers, oftentimes we know what we are lacking. We know where the Lord could make the most good in our lives. It boils down to our application of Christianity: stewardship. The Lord looks with compassion on each one, while expecting a full accounting of our time, temple, talents, and treasure.

May you feel the Lord’s touch in your life today. May you choose to be a cheerful giver!

⁶ *Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Commentary*, vol. 5 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 457.



— APRIL —

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

The memoirs of Shantung Compound include Langdon Gilkey's account of sharing a prison camp with other foreigners in Japan's occupation of China during World War II. The food supply shrank until only 1200 calories a day were available to each prisoner: six slices of bread, boiled water, and a bowl of stew. Things changed drastically when the Red Cross brought a shipment of two hundred parcels. Each American received a fair amount of food, clothes, and even sweets. The American prisoners generously shared the excess with other prisoners. Soon conditions deteriorated even more when the provisions went low. Winter was around the corner and six months without receiving any provisions felt like an eternity.

When a much-anticipated shipment arrived after Christmas on trained donkeys, the parcels were too numerous to count. The low morale of the camp soon went up. When the Japanese commandant cataloged the shipment, he realized that there was enough for each prisoner and then a half additional parcel for the Americans. On the following day, when the prisoners anticipated receiving their parcels, bad news was shared. No parcels would be distributed because a handful of American prisoners had complained that it was unfair to give all the prisoners the parcels rightfully sent to the American prisoners.⁷

Greed affects everyone, rich or poor. Solomon declares, "there is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty" (Prov. 11:24). May generosity fill the life of every believer as your local congregation's needs are met through your giving.

⁷ Phillips Yancey, *Rumors of Another World: What on Earth Are We Missing?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 109.

WORLD BUDGET

By Jerry Lyn Rogge

A portion of today's World Budget Offering goes toward NAD Christian Record.

How often do you think about breathing? Perhaps now that it has been mentioned, you are more conscious of your intake and exhalation of air. You likely think about your breathing more when recovering from illness or during exercise.

Vision is another aspect of life that is frequently taken for granted. In fact, most of us don't think about our eyesight until there's a problem—text becomes fuzzy or driving at night is difficult.

Christian Record Services for the Blind is an official ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for people who are blind. Christian Record works behind the scenes to offer free publications in audio, braille, and large print. The organization also distributes Bibles and Bible study guides and sponsors summer and winter camps.

Christian Record's clients do not take these services for granted. Melissa receives reading services and attends summer camp through National Camps for Blind Children. "Christian Record is essential to giving blind people the opportunity to read great books," says Melissa.

Today is the Christian Record Annual Day of Giving. As you give generously, consider the many ways you can help support Christian Record's ongoing outreach to people who cannot see. To learn more, visit www.ChristianRecord.org.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Easter and Christmas are two occasions when churches receive the most visitors, yet the culture has managed to secularize both celebrations. Easter, for instance, has become more about bunnies, eggs, and food than about Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. In the midst of it all, there is a Savior still willing to give His love, mercy, and grace (Eph. 2:4-7).

One particular year, things were different for a Midwest congregation on Easter Sabbath. During its testimony time, a man stood up and unfolded a paper he took out of his pocket. He was just released from prison and needed to make public amends while praising God for His goodness. That testimony triggered a series of statements from church members who had struggled with addictions and now follow Jesus Christ. At the end of the service, a church member walked a gentleman to the front and said, "He also has a story to tell." As it turns out, this man had driven by the church for the last 20 years; he knew the Seventh-day Adventist church had the true message. After his health worsened, he made a decision to return to God. He wasn't planning on staying for church; he just stopped by for a tithe envelope. Jerry decided to return to the church with his tithe later that morning. "I have to honor God first," he said.

Ellen White said, "It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones."⁸ May your tithe and liberal offerings today reflect your gratitude toward God who sent His beloved son to pay a ransom for many.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Ca: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940) 83.

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

A young lady in a youth camp was puzzled over an abstract question. “How can I tangibly love God? He is not visible. I cannot physically attend to His needs. How can I give God money?” Those are valid questions. Even Jesus encouraged believers to bank in heaven where the moth and rust don’t corrupt and thieves don’t steal (Matt. 6:20), but how do we do it?

A Canadian man wanted to purchase a book in New York many years ago. The money exchange rules prevented him from sending money to New York where his son lived. The Canadian man came up with an idea, which he communicated to his son. “If you take some of your money and order that book to be sent to me, when you come to Canada this summer I’ll have the money waiting for you.”⁹

In a similar way, God is asking believers to use their money on earth to do God’s work. He, in return, will make a deposit in heaven. The bank in heaven is rustproof, burglarproof, failure-proof, storm-proof, disaster-proof, and death-proof. But we must first open a bank account by accepting the blood of the lamb, repenting from our sins, and walking by faith so that our names can be written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.¹⁰

Tithe and freewill offerings are one example of how believers can love God. Your offerings today will give your local conference an opportunity to do God’s work in your territory. Thus, others may have a chance to know God, repent from their sins, and begin a trusting relationship with Him.

⁹ Leslie Flynn, *Your God and Your Gold* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), 132.

¹⁰ Ibid.

NAD EVANGELISM

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.¹¹

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 freight 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.'" ¹²

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" (Matt. 4:19). May each believer give sacrificially so others around North America who don't know the Lord get an opportunity to make a decision for Jesus.

¹¹ USS Benevolence (AH-13). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Benevolence, AH-13 (accessed on April 1, 2016).

¹² Kenneth Wood, *Meditations for Moderns: Three-Minute Devotional Readings for Daily Inspiration* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1963) 59.



MAY

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Martin was a monk in an Italian monastery. His task was to beg daily in town at various stores to help the poor and the church. He noted that most contributions came from the poor. They gave cheerfully. A lawyer in town, Mr. Grubbs, owned many poorly run rental properties. Rumor had it that most of his wealth came from those properties at the expense of the poorest of the poor. Martin always skipped his office when asking for offerings since Martin didn't expect much from him. The lawyer went to the monastery to complain, "I'm an important man in this community! Your novice treats me like trash!"

Martin visited Mr. Grubbs with two empty sacks. Mr. Grubbs filled both sacks while sharing how honest and God-fearing he was. As Martin returned to the monastery, people noted a trail of blood. Because of the blood, people expected the sacks to be full of meat; but, mysteriously, they were not. Martin stated, "All that Mr. Grubbs has given comes from the blood of the poor people he has robbed." ¹³

Isaiah 1 speaks of a people whose offerings were meaningless to God. "Your hands are full of blood" (v. 15). However, God's words come with an appeal: "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool'" (Isaiah 1:18). God encouraged Israel to care for the poor, the widow, and the orphan. As we worship today by bringing tithes and offerings to God, let's reflect on how our actions should align with God's will.

¹³ William R. White, *Stories for the Journey: A Sourcebook for Christian Storytellers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 94.

WORLD BUDGET

By Wynelle Stevens

A portion of today's World Budget Offering goes toward Disaster & Famine Relief (Adventist Community Services).

Almost daily, Adventist Community Services volunteers compassionately respond to disasters throughout the area served by the North American Division. They serve by collecting and distributing cleaning buckets, personal care kits, clothing, food, and much more through collection centers, warehouses, distribution centers, and mobile distribution units.

No matter how large or small the event, individuals are trained and locally deployed to provide physical relief as well as emotional and spiritual care to the survivors of these disasters. As Adventists, we are compelled to do our very best to provide assistance to each survivor. Isaiah 52:7 says, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news." Our combined offerings and service enable us to act as Christ's hands and feet to fulfill that purpose.

Today, your offering will be gratefully received to support Adventist Community Services in the North American Division 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 to provide disaster relief.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Mr. Beaman wrote a letter to Ellen White asking for advice. This man was a piano tuner who lived in the city. He also owned a wagon for colporteur work. The work of tuning pianos brought such instability to his nervous system that even the noise of clashing dishes would affect him deeply. He was irritable and his wife and mother-in-law aggravated the condition by constant criticism and lack of understanding of Mr. Beaman's condition.

Sister White advised the Beamans to make several changes in their life to help the emotional stability of this man. First, she encouraged the family to move out of the city and work outdoors in contact with nature. Second, she advised them to watch their diet and be considerate with Mr. Beaman's tolerance of noises and criticisms. Third, she advised the Beamans to sell the colporteur wagon to the Conference in order to get out of debt. Finally, she concluded, "When you have done all you can, trust in God. Get out of debt, and never again go into debt. Live so economically that you will not have to feel the galling burden of debt." ¹⁴

How true is Solomon's observation, "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7). Debt allows furnishing an apartment, going on a trip, or buying a vehicle without the discipline of keeping to a budget, saving, or delayed gratification. The results are a life with stress, inability to pursue God's calling in life, or even to give for God's cause. May our time, treasure, talents, and temple be in harmony to honor God.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Release No. 1526*, p. 134..

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

Helen Keller is the most famous deaf-blind person who overcame such a challenge thanks to the persistent and loving efforts of her teacher, Anne Sullivan, “the miracle worker.”

The deaf use their hands to communicate. People without disabilities also use hand gestures to express feelings. Some of those gestures are cross-cultural, universal, and of common knowledge.

The Bible speaks of hands in many contexts. In the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, Jesus said that when giving, your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing. In other words, don't make public your good works in order to exalt yourself (Matt. 6:1-4). Solomon says that whatever comes to your hands to do, do it according to the strength the Lord has given you (Eccl. 9:10). Hands symbolize opportunity in this context. Hands on the head symbolize defeat (Jer. 2:37). You can use your hands to bless others or to fight others.

Deuteronomy 15, verses 7 and 8, speak of two hand signs: tightfisted and openhanded. Moses encouraged the Israelites to be openhanded toward those in need. “ Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to” (Deut. 15:10, NIV). What a great opportunity we have in front of us to receive God's blessings by giving to our local congregation and the regional work through your local Conference.

May you choose to be openhanded when it comes to mission.



JUNE

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Ellen White, commenting on the beatitudes, wrote, “He who has given his life to God in ministry to His children is linked with Him who has all the resources of the universe at His command... The Lord will not fail him in the hour of suffering and need.” ¹⁵

The story of Heinrich Jung-Stilling, a German ophthalmologist, inspires believers to trust in God completely. He wanted to serve others and prayed that God would lead him into a service profession. He was convicted to start medical school. However, he needed \$1,000 of which he only had \$46. A neighbor heard of Stilling’s plans and offered to give him a ride to Strasburg, where the medical school was situated. That divine providence was repeated time and time again. For instance, Stilling ran into a merchant in Frankfurt when money was almost gone. This merchant gave him \$33. Once in Strasburg, with his rent and tuition due, Stilling found himself again penniless. His landlord, instead of asking for the rent, gave him \$40. “His entire career was a series of minor miracles.” ¹⁶

Stilling thanked God by becoming a benefactor. He performed eye surgeries and restored the sight of many, even those who could not afford surgery. Stilling is an example of stewardship. Paul suggested that believers should imitate God’s life of generosity; God loved and gave Himself as a ransom to many (Phil. 2:1-11; 1 Tim. 2:6). May we also choose to give of what the Lord has given us. May generosity be the real trademark of every believer.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1956), 24.

¹⁶ Donald Ernest Mansell, *New Every Morning* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 219.

WORLD BUDGET

A portion of today's World Budget Offering goes toward NAD Multilingual and Chaplaincy Ministries.

Ernest Castillo, Director of Multilingual Ministries, reflects: "The North American Division is in a strategic position to evangelize to refugees and train workers from nearly every country of the world, including many countries currently closed to the gospel." Ellen White wrote, "Great benefits would come to the cause of God in the regions beyond if faithful effort were put forth on behalf of the foreigners in the cities of our homeland. Among these men and women are some who, upon accepting the truth, could soon be fitted to labor for their own people in this country and in other countries. Many might return to the places from which they came, in the hope of winning their friends to the truth. They could search out their kinsfolk and neighbors, and communicate to them a knowledge of the third angel's message."¹⁷

Paul Anderson, director of Chaplaincy Ministries, reminds us that "SDA 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 the 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.... Your generosity will be appreciated and used directly to support the ministry that our Chaplains do in their mission field, wherever it might be."

Keep in mind these two NAD Ministries as you give offerings today as the Lord has blessed you this week.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1956), 24.

¹⁶ Donald Ernest Mansell, *New Every Morning* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 219.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

By Victor Jaeger

The most powerful passage in the Old Testament concerning giving can be found in Malachi 3:8-10, where God accused the Israelites of robbing Him. God's chosen people questioned this claim and asked, "How do we rob You?" God's response was, "By not making the payments of the tenth and the contributions." God then went on to make a powerful challenge: "Test Me in this. . . and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it" (v. 10). That is a powerful promise from our gracious, giving God!

The Hebrew word used by the prophet Malachi is *Bachan* (בָּחַן). That word has gotten my attention many times through the years. It simply means "test" or "to examine."

Recently I had the opportunity to do a test. I came back from the mission field in 2014. When we departed from Texas we sold what we could; however, when returning to the United States, we gave away "all our stuff." We returned with limited money. Five months after our arrival, while visiting church members, I found a school to study; however, I could not afford it. I had no money. Regardless, a voice inside of me insisted that I go inside the university and check things out. To make a long story short, I had the opportunity to start and finish a PhD program. Despite my financial limitations, the Lord provided every step of the way. I received an academic scholarship of 50%, which allowed me to pursue this dream. All of this happened because of my faithfulness in the tithes and offerings. God is faithful ...just try it. "Less with God's blessings is more in believers' hands." May the Lord show His abundant love and providential ways to meet your needs.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), 570.

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

“Mr. William Coats. Head of Cotton Firm dead. London, August 21.” This little headline was found in major newspapers around the world in 1928. An Australian newspaper additionally shared, “Sir William Hodge Coats, the head of the great cotton firm of J. & P. Coats, died today at the age of 62. Mr. Coats was one of the richest members of the Coats family. The family has had twelve millionaires since the business started 104 years ago.”¹⁸ Nothing else was shared about the life of this businessman. Did he enjoy life? Did he help people? Did he believe in God? The fact is that just like a poor individual, Mr. Coats could not take anything with him to the grave. Job said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there” (Job 1:21).

John Wesley was asked once to render an account of his possessions in order to pay taxes. He replied, “I have two silver spoons in London, and two Bristols, and I shall buy no more while the poor want bread.” When Wesley died, one historian said, John Wesley “left a good library, a well-worn clergyman’s gown, a much-abused reputation, and the Methodist Church.” He left much.¹⁹

May the blessings you have received in material possessions, money, time, health, and talents be used for the Lord’s cause while you are alive. May we plan ahead so God’s work may continue even if we are called to rest in the Lord until He returns.

¹⁸ The Advertiser (Adelaide, SA: 1889 – 1931), Thursday 23, August 1928, page 13 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/29291001> (accessed on April 1, 2016).

¹⁹ Charles L. Paddock, *God’s Minutes: A Classic Collection of Short Inspired Stories* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1990), 125.



JULY

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 answered, "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." "It'll be easier if people get a fixed quota," someone else commented. Richard wondered, "what about the money I give my widowed mother, or the money I donate to not-for-profit organizations, is that tithing?"²⁰

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).

²⁰ C. W. Hatch, *Stewardship Enriches Life* (Anderson, IN: The Warner Press, 1956), 7.

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

By Carla Baker

Today's offering goes toward Women's Ministries, shared among Conference, Union, and Division.

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."²¹

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 to affirm their work and ministry.

²¹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), 464.

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 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.

LOCAL 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.²²

Each one of us has a golden opportunity today to partner with God in mission—locally as well as regionally. After returning tithe and giving offerings for your local church's combined budget, would you consider a generous offering for your Conference? 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.

²² EC. W. Hatch, *Stewardship Enriches Life* (Anderson, IN: The Warner Press, 1956), 57.

UNION DESIGNATED

A pastor and spouse were received in their new district with a surprise welcome party. Each member brought a present for the new couple. Amidst the celebration and laughter, one member shouted from the back of the room, “Preacher, you are welcome to stay in our district only if you promise to preach at least one sermon on stewardship.” The church member went on to say that preachers avoided this particular topic in the past.

Unsure whether the whole congregation shared this church member’s opinion on the preaching agenda for the church, the preacher was aware that speaking about stewardship is a difficult and touchy subject for many pastors and members alike. Regardless of the particular situation of believers, stewardship is where the rubber meets the road. Stewardship is practical theology. Some congregations highlight different areas of stewardship according to the local culture, the dominant socioeconomic status of its members, and the local ministry focus. For instance, a wealthy community may define stewardship as giving money for the Lord’s work but might be challenged in giving of their time for ministry purposes. Other congregations may not have resources, but its members are big on volunteering for local causes.

The spiritual aim of stewardship “is to help people deepen their faith and growth in grace by giving in response to the Gospel.”²³ I encourage you to consider personal stewardship today by reflecting on what the Lord is asking you to do, change, or modify in your life. May the Lord help us to become faithful stewards for His glory.

²³ Craig A. Satterlee, *Preaching and Stewardship: Proclaiming God’s Invitation to Grow* (Herdon, VA: Alban, 2011), 12.



AUGUST

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

A pastor once called one of his wealthy parishioners to ask for a donation to a worthy cause. The businessman replied by exclaiming, "Give! Give! Give! Is that all the church thinks about?" To which the pastor replied, "Thank you, Sir, for giving me the best definition of Christianity I've ever heard!" ²⁴

Contrary to this, another businessman was honored with a reception recognizing his great spirit of philanthropy, his fair and honest business practices, and the pleasant man he was. After many of his friends stood up and gave their testimony of the multiple causes the businessman supported and how his business practices had benefited many, he stood up to thank everyone for their kindness. He said that all he had done was be a faithful steward. He did not claim the success of his company as his own doing. The one thing that motivated his business and religious life was that "he held nothing back from God." ²⁵

Two different positions on stewardship and giving: one person perceived it as a grievous task while the other understood it as a core value of his life. God is not merely asking for a believer's money. God is asking for a total surrender of life: time, talents, and treasure. He is inviting us to lose our lives so we can find them (Matt. 10:39).

Jesus gave His life as a ransom for many. He gave healing, forgiveness, and salvation. May we respond in gratitude today.

²⁴ M. Lunn, *Treasures in Heaven: The Abundant Life of Stewardship* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1963), 71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

WORLD BUDGET

By Fernando Ortiz

A portion of today's World Budget Offering goes toward Oakwood University/Andrews University/Loma Linda University.

Henrique is a Master of Divinity student at Andrews University. Recently, he went to the bank where he was offered financial advice and was asked to summarize his income and all of his expenses. When the financial counselor saw all of his expenses and meager income, he said, "You definitely need a second job"! And he added, "I see a line item in your budget of 10 percent for tithe; you should get rid of it. God will understand that you need to pay utilities and food, wouldn't He?"

Henrique quickly explained that tithe was non-negotiable and that he had a commitment with God to return what was His. The banker then said: "I don't know how you are able to meet your commitments. You seem to have more expenses than income." Henrique then answered, "I have a deal with God. I'm faithful to Him and He is faithful to me. I don't need a second job and I don't need to cut any line item from my budget. I simply work for God, who is rich, and He blesses me. Isn't that a better deal?" Henrique gave a powerful testimony that no matter how meager your salary is, being faithful to God is non-negotiable. It is not because it is an obligation, but it is because we love the One who gave all for us. "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24).

Your offering today will allow students like Henrique to continue with their education in order to serve others. May your generous and cheerful offering today return to you blessings from above.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Not too long ago a newly baptized member was wondering about tithing. She was questioning the nice cars and the house of the pastor in comparison to hers and most church members in that congregation. Many, especially new believers, struggle with this idea. There are times when mishandling of funds or even bad ministerial practices take place. Should believers stop tithing because of these or other reasons? Perhaps a better question would be, "Why should believers tithe?" Ellen White, our church's co-founder, supports five biblical reasons for tithing:

- 1. Salvation.** God saved the human race by giving Jesus as the substitute for anyone who accepts this free gift. Therefore, the motivation for giving should be a response to salvation.
- 2. Everything belongs to God.** Believers understand their roles as managers of time, talents, and treasure. Therefore, believers should give because they are grateful.
- 3. Moral.** The paying of tithe is a religious and moral duty. It is explained in the Bible in Malachi 3. Withholding tithes is robbing God. Still, believers must acknowledge God as Savior and Lord first.
- 4. Mission.** In order for the Gospel to be preached in all the world, believers are called to dedicate their lives to this sacred task. Tithing allows all believers to share in this mission.
- 5. Blessings.** Tithing is the result of God's blessings. If God had not blessed believers it would have been impossible to tithe.

We are called to be faithful to God and let Him deal with human deviations from God's mission. May we choose to be faithful today by returning God's tithes and giving freewill offerings for the sustainment of this building and local mission.

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

A circus athlete made his living showing great feats of strength to the crowds. To close his act, he usually got an orange and squeezed it with one hand until all the juice came out of it and just the skin was left. To make his part more dramatic, he would challenge anyone from the audience to come down and try to get one drop of juice out of what was left of the orange. The story says that on one occasion a very small man took the challenge. As this man made his way to the stage, the crowd laughed at the contrast of the two men. The circus athlete was big and muscular, while the man from the audience was small and weak. As the man from the audience took what was left of the orange with his right hand, he slowly but firmly began to squeeze it with all the strength he had. Suddenly the crowd stopped laughing and began focusing on what was happening. The man was not as weak as he appeared to be. In silence, the crowd watched as a drop of juice was forming on the man's hand, soon dropping to the dusty floor. The crowd went wild observing such demonstration of strength.

The circus man asked the man how it was possible that he had such a strong hand. The man replied jokingly, "It was not a big deal. I'm the treasurer of the local church. I practiced by arm twisting and squeezing every penny from people's pockets."

Although a comical anecdote, it loses its light tone when considering what many congregations do in order to awaken a sense of response from people's pockets. May we give today to our local mission of education, evangelism, and other things from a sense of gratitude and as an act of worship.



— SEPTEMBER —

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Mary was on the phone at work and then suddenly left with no explanation. Her coworkers wondered what had happened to put the distraught expression on her face.

The next day, Mary returned with a happy expression. She had just purchased a brand new SUV. She elaborated: "I shop whenever I'm stressed, angry, or sad. Yesterday, my husband decided to leave me and I felt devastated. However, after purchasing this new vehicle, I feel much better." Apparently, the bigger the problem, the bigger the shopping experience. This is not an isolated situation. It is known as "Retail Therapy." Shopping gives people a high; it stimulates the brain chemical called dopamine, which makes people feel better.²⁷

There is nothing wrong with enjoying life, having nice things, or developing oneself as long as those things are under God's guidelines.²⁸ For many, a temptation exists to deal with problems through shopping, addictions, or lust. But the true solution is Jesus Christ. The enemy of souls watches people's needs and weaknesses closely so he can affect the believer and, consequently, God's cause.

The more a person spends on wants or addictions the less that can be given for God's work locally and globally. Shall we pray for accountability and self-control as we choose today to be good stewards for God's glory?

²⁷ Tara Parker-Pope, "This is Your Brain at the Mall: Why Shopping Makes You Feel Good?" WSJ. December 6, 2015 <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB113382650575214543> (accessed on April 11, 2016).

²⁸ Charles Stanley, *When the Enemy Strikes: The Keys to Winning Your Spiritual Battles* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 110-117

WORLD BUDGET

Written by Walter Alred

A portion of today's World Budget Offering goes toward Fall Mission Appeal

Jesus said in Luke 12:34, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In this passage we see how the underlying principle of giving impacts our hearts. When we give to build God's kingdom our hearts follow; we resonate with the heart of God. "For God so loved the world that He gave. . ." (John 3:16).

A small church with a dozen members could not afford to keep the lights on, but the leaders prayed and claimed the promise, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom" (Luke 6:38). The church committed to sacrifice for God's work. God blessed in the form of a trust maturing and the local church received \$37,000 as a result.

Another church was struggling to afford evangelistic meetings. God's promises were claimed. In a little more than a month, a dear saint passed away and left \$77,000 to the local church.

A few years later, another church had ambitious plans for soul-winning, but not many funds. This time two brothers stepped forward who had been impressed by the Holy Spirit and donated \$22,000.

Commit to giving sacrificially for evangelism and watch God's blessings flow in your life and in the church.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

A census taker once asked a little child, “How many people live in this house?” He replied, “We are five.” The census taker further questioned him, “Who are they?” The little boy began to name each one of the family members: “My dad, my mom, my sister and I.” The census taker noticed that the calculations of the child were off by one. The child counted again, “My dad, my mom, my sister and I.” Realizing that his math was off again, he frowned and then cleverly shouted, “and God.”²⁹

God should be part of every family. However, a census taker might not look favorably on such a family addition since God cannot be seen. The first human family, however, had the blessing to count God among its family members. Adam and Eve enjoyed direct communion with their Father. But then sin was introduced to the world and Adam, Eve, and their children observed the Garden of Eden from a distance, forbidden its enjoyment by angels with flaming swords guarding the entrance (Gen. 3:24). They must have been devastated with the separation from God, not to mention the stewardship privileges of the garden now taken away from them.

Abel gives believers the first lesson of stewardship. He was faithful to God's command by bringing an acceptable offering to God, a lamb. Cain, however, disregarded God's command and followed the line of disobedience of his parents. Stewardship is obedience to God even when it does not make sense. May you choose today, like Abel, to be faithful as a steward of God's grace in your local church.

²⁹ John E. Simpson, *Great Stewards of the Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1946), 14.

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

Had you been born in ancient Egypt, you would have used onions and beans as a means of exchange. Siberia, on the other hand, used garlic. Think about this the next time you are eating a bowl of chili! You are eating what others considered of much value. Other primitive societies used beetle legs as currency. As garage sale enthusiasts might say, “One person’s junk is another person’s treasure!”

Talking about money is very personal in many but not all cultures. In China, for instance, common questions among acquaintances are, “How old are you?” “How much money do you make?” Both questions would be considered inappropriate for most people in the United States. Money can even be considered of more value than relationships. For example, a person might move across the United States or the world if the right amount of money were offered. For other cultures, however, no amount of money would be enough to entice them to live away from family and friends.³⁰

Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21). The heart is important. He knew that many things compete for believers’ hearts. In the competition for the heart, treasure is the defining factor. Where is our heart and treasure today? Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). May we open our hearts today to our Savior and Lord as we give to the ministry needs in our local conference.

³⁰ John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *At Ease: Discussing Money and Values in Small Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: The Alban Institute, 1994), 31, 32.

UNION DESIGNATED

Worship and giving are linked in God's heart. "Our love for God falls short if its only gift is in words of praise."³¹

Two individuals visited a Seventh-day Adventist church after years of struggling with returning tithe to God. Drastic events happened in their lives that made them take that final step. One fell twice in the parking lot of a convenience store while getting his medication, which led to multiple fractured ribs and other complications. The other man had a long struggle with addictions, to the point of its leading to a separation from his wife. The man found himself alone, away from his loved ones, and wondering what to do next.

The men had almost nothing in common: one was old while the other was young; one was Caucasian and the other Hispanic; one had been baptized in the church more than 30 years ago, while the other never got close enough to the church to make that decision. Almost immediately after visiting the church they knew that returning to God meant faithfulness in all areas of their lives, including tithing. Both remembered teachings on tithing. They were compelled to give to God as a sign of their commitment and thankfulness.

What is your commitment to God today? May your faithfulness be not only in words but also in actions. May the Lord bless you as you respond with generosity to God's unselfish love.

³¹ John E. Simpson, *Great Stewards of the Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1946), 29.



OCTOBER

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

A father wanted to teach his pre-school son the value of work and money, so he would have his youngster perform simple tasks and then pay him a nickel or a dime. One day, after the father emptied the contents of his pocket on the table, his son inquired about the relationship between the bills and coins. "If I get enough coins, can I have a bill?" he inquired. Proud of his son's sudden interest in math, his father informed him that either 20 nickels or ten dimes would make one dollar. The following week the son sat at the table in front of his father and displayed all "Can I have one dollar?" he asked. Proudly, the man handed over a dollar bill. However, the boy began to gather the dimes. The father quickly said, "Son, you don't get to have both, the dimes and the bill." The little boy broke out in wailing, declaring the unfairness of the situation.³²

This boy learned a lesson that many adults struggle to grasp. Credit cards, 90 days same as cash, and lines of credit are examples of acquiring things artificially. When the money is spent, it is gone; but people use credit to artificially feel like they saved "the bills *and* the coins."

However, God's math defies logic. The Lord says, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this. . . If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:10). God can do more with less. Let us partner with the Lord today to meet our local church needs according to His math.

³² John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *At Ease: Discussing Money and Values in Small Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: The Alban Institute, 1994), 45, 46.

WORLD BUDGET

By Tanya Huethe

A portion of today's World Budget Offering goes toward NAD Voice of Prophecy/La Voz de la Esperanza.

The radio and TV broadcasts of the *Voice of Prophecy* and *La Voz de la Esperanza* (for the Spanish-speaking population) reach millions of people each year with the Gospel. But how this is accomplished is changing in exciting ways!

For instance, Shawn Boonstra's new Bible-based weekly program, *Disclosure*, is tackling current issues in a way that sparks curiosity and conversation. Also, an increasing emphasis on programming is readily available on personal electronic devices. The recent four-part Shadow Empire event about the life of Constantine was part of VOP Local. This initiative provides churches with programming, tools, training, and resources to help reach friends and neighbors with the Gospel.

The *Voice of Prophecy* also operates the largest Bible correspondence school in the denomination. The Discover Bible School has affiliate schools across North America and in more than 120 countries, with lessons offered in more than 80 languages and dialects. Other exciting ministry projects include a special church-building project in the Arctic, as well as a rehabilitation home in India, where young girls rescued from human trafficking are given a new life and hope in Jesus.

Your offering today will support the ministries of the *Voice of Prophecy* and *La Voz de la Esperanza*. Thanks to your support, millions of people will be introduced to a loving Savior, and lives will be transformed.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

A clerk at the register of a convenience store witnessed a heartwarming situation between two little girls.

The girls wanted to buy candy. Each one had her selection and was ready to pay for it. The first little girl put the candy on the counter and then proceeded to count the coins after the clerk announced the amount. She counted once, and then again. Unfortunately, the coins did not match the required amount needed to complete the purchase.

The second little girl, who was just behind her in line, offered the first little girl all her coins. When the clerk got the coins and completed the sale, she returned the change to the first little girl, who in turn gave it to the second little girl. Now it was the turn of the second little girl to purchase her candy. The same routine was repeated with the same results. The second little girl counted out her coins twice, only to find that she was short. When the clerk figured out what was happening, she said, "I'm buying this one for you." Loving others can transform all those around us. ^{33t}

In the simple pure actions of one girl, we can see the reflection of the Gospel. God loved the world so much that He gave. . . His giving has displayed a worldwide, unending movement that for more than two thousand years has only become bigger.

May God's generosity spark in every believer's heart the spirit needed to not only finish God's work globally, but also locally, as we collect today for the local church budget.

³³ John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, *At Ease: Discussing Money and Values in Small Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: The Alban Institute, 1994), 60.

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

It was a typical summer morning. It had been a busy week, so putting gas in the car was put off for a few days. But this particular morning the car needed gas—or else! So, John asked his wife to follow him in her car to the nearest gas station.

Something else had been bothering John, though. He had decided to complete a Master in Divinity degree so he could be a full-time pastor. John knew that going into debt was not an option. So if the Lord wanted John in full-time church ministry, He would have to make it very clear.

Two things happened almost simultaneously. A few miles from their residence, a man was exiting an intersection but didn't stop to yield to the oncoming traffic. He collided with John's car on the passenger's side. It was not a big accident, but it certainly changed John's day—and life! It turned out that the insurance company totaled John's vehicle, giving him enough money to pay for school that summer while still able to keep the car. John never fixed the side door collision. It was a visible testimony of God's provision.

The second miracle was that John, within days of this accident, received a job offer. This job came with a raise and summers off. The miracle happened! John received the money and the time off to pursue God's calling in his life.

Our inability is God's opportunity! May we choose to trust God in every circumstance of life. For He is able to change situations, provide resources, and even allow accidents to happen so His purposes become true for your life, your family, your congregation, and your local conference.



— NOVEMBER —

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

There is an all-time favorite fable that illustrates what is important in life. The story says that a very skilled salesman had a conversation with God about being able to keep a little of all he had with him when going to heaven. God allowed him to take only two suitcases. The salesman sold everything he had and accumulated all his possessions into gold bars that fit in the two bags. On resurrection morning, the man showed up in heaven with his bags but was stopped at the gate by Peter. “Brother,” Peter kindly commented, “no belongings from earth are allowed in heaven.” The salesman quickly replied that he had arranged things with God Himself. When Peter looked at the content of the bags, he went from serious to puzzled, and exclaimed, “Why would you bring pavement to heaven?”³⁴

Ellen White affirms that the character is the only thing believers will carry to heaven.³⁵ People value many things on this earth that have no eternal value. Whether it is possessions, family, or career, nothing should cloud the vision, as Paul wrote, “. . . One thing I do. . . I press toward the goal for the prize. . .” (Phil. 3: 13-14).

Believers study, work, save, invest, enjoy life, and do much more. But let’s keep in perspective what is important in this life as we prepare for the one to come. May you continue being faithful to God with your tithes and give generously to your local church today.

³⁴ John and Sylvia Ronssvalle, *At Ease: Discussing Money and Values in Small Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: The Alban Institute, 1994), 7.

³⁵ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940), 332.

WORLD BUDGET

A portion of today's World Budget Offering goes toward Annual Sacrifice (Global Mission).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church values the Three Angels' Messages as the center of its theology (Rev. 14:6-12). The reader of Revelation 14 knows this is the final message to be proclaimed. It is an imagery of the end of the world as presented by Jesus in the explanation of the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:38, 39). The implications of this message in missiology are profound for Adventism. It lifts up the centrality of the Gospel and its worldwide proclamation preceding the Second Coming of Christ. Therefore, the everlasting Gospel and mission are central to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The proclamation of the Gospel in North America has encountered many challenges. Growth in many cities has been possible due to immigration. It is not a racial problem, but an indigenous one. As immigrants acculturate and subsequent generations assimilate into the mainstream, God loses relevancy. Science, wealth, and relativism take precedence over truth. "History and experience also discourage the idea that scientific progress will necessarily lead to a better world. It has become obvious that a rising standard of living does not necessarily result in personal happiness. Wealth has proven to be no shield against dysfunction, addiction, and crime. Instead, increased affluence has led to increased stress and anxiety."³⁶

Ellen White reminds the church that "New life into old methods of labor is needed," as well as new plans and methods of evangelism.³⁷ Let's fund the mission to finish the work.

³⁶ Jon Paulien, *Everlasting Gospel, Ever Changing World: Introducing Jesus to a Skeptical Generation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2008), 49.

³⁷ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship: A Compilation from the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940), 190.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

Since 1810, the city of Munich located in Bavaria, Germany, has celebrated “Oktoberfest” every year from mid- or late-September to the first weekend of October. According to tradition, King Ludwig I began the celebrations when inviting the citizens of Munich to attend his wedding. For about 16 days, the inhabitants of Bavaria spend their nights and most days on the fairgrounds of Munich eating, listening to live music, and drinking lots of beer.³⁸

The Seventh-day Adventist church in Germany celebrates a Harvest day as a counter-cultural response to “Oktoberfest.” Churches decorate their platforms with bread, cheese, and produce from their gardens. Believers thank God for providing for their sustainment. What a great opportunity to “Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow.”³⁹

Bringing offerings to the altar is one great way to thank God for His providence. Helping someone in need is another way. Thanksgiving should move believers deeply. What a great opportunity in this season of Thanksgiving to adopt a person, a family, or even a community, blessing them with words of encouragement, acts of kindness, and gifts of appreciation.

May every believer, family, or group reflect on ways God's love can be incarnated through their actions. And may this church receive a generous offering to continue the proclamation of the Three Angels' Messages in this community.

³⁸ Oktoberfest, Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oktoberfest> (accessed on May, 8 2016).

³⁹ Hymn #694 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985).

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

The children of Israel had a difficult journey through the desert after leaving Egypt. Although the Lord was willing to bless them, often their decisions brought pain and suffering. Yet there were moments when they responded with passion to the Lord's commands. For instance, when the tabernacle was under construction, a need for skilled men and women existed. The whole camp became passionately involved, and gold, silver, yarn, and other materials were brought to the artisans.

It must have been a glorious scene of unity and commitment. "The children of Israel brought a freewill offering to the LORD, all the men and women whose hearts were willing to bring material for all kinds of work which the LORD, by the hand of Moses, had commanded to be done" (Ex. 35:29). The skilled men stopped doing their work to meet with Moses in order to communicate that the people had come morning after morning "bringing more than enough" (Ex. 36:5).

Their generosity exceeded all expectations. "Their devotion, their zeal and liberality, are an example worthy of imitation. All who love the worship of God and prize the blessing of His sacred presence will manifest the same spirit of sacrifice in preparing a house where He may meet with them. They will desire to bring to the Lord an offering of the very best that they possess. A house built for God should not be left in debt, for He is thereby dishonored. An amount sufficient to accomplish the work should be freely given..."⁴⁰

May the Lord's blessings allow you to give like the Israelites.

⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 344.



— DECEMBER —

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

A young man once found a dollar bill on the street. From that time on he walked with his eyes on the ground. After 40 years, he had accumulated 29,516 buttons, 54,172 pins, 7 pennies, a bent back, and a stingy disposition. “All of this as a result of finding a tattered dollar bill.”⁴¹

It seems we live in a society that values success with dollar figures. Solomon owned 40,000 stalls of horses, 1,400 chariots, and 12,000 horsemen. Had John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford lived around Solomon’s time, Rockefeller would have been Solomon’s yardman, while Henry Ford his chauffeur.⁴²

Yet Solomon didn’t achieve success. He declared, “all is vanity and grasping for the wind” (Eccl. 2:17). He reflected on what was important in life when affirming, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is man’s all” (Eccl. 12:13).

Money used for God’s glory can be a blessing locally, regionally, and globally. People in need can be ministered to. Real purpose in life can be achieved. Money can be a tool for good in the hands of people who fear God. “Don’t bargain with God. Take Him at face value. Forget the coin but remember the motto, ‘In God We Trust.’”⁴³ As you worship today in giving, pray that the Lord uses your tithes and freewill offerings to enhance His kingdom by equipping the saints for ministry and evangelism.

⁴¹ J. O. Iversen, *Teen Talks* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1963), 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15.

WORLD BUDGET

By Wynelle Stevens

A portion of today's World Budget Offering goes toward NAD Adventist Community Services.

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me' (Matt. 25:34-36).

The World Budget today supports Adventist Community Services (ACS) in the North American Division. By supporting ACS, you can make a lasting impact in your community and beyond, whether it's volunteering your time, donating goods, or contributing financially. By touching one heart, one family, one community, we can transform the world!

Jesus lived His life as a humble servant: "Just as 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 servants of God. Adventist Community Services provides you with opportunities to be a servant of God in your own communities. 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.

LOCAL CHURCH BUDGET

A young man, newly arrived to the United States, received a phone call from the pastor's wife. She expressed her desire to help this young man acquire some basic necessities. After a few hours of expert bargaining with sales associates, several new articles of clothing were purchased. Back in the vehicle, she told him, "Today is my birthday. I learned from my dad to help someone in need on my birthday." That was a life changing experience for this young man.

Some families who struggle to bring a gift to God's cause purchase expensive furniture or costly clothing. "Our birthday anniversaries and Christmas and Thanksgiving festivals are too often devoted to selfish gratification, when the mind should be directed to the mercy and loving-kindness of God. God is displeased that His goodness, His constant care, His unceasing love, are not brought to mind on these anniversary occasions." ⁴⁴

The year 2017 is about to pass to the annals of history. More celebrations are around the corner. Families will gather, trips will be taken, and gifts will be given to friends and loved ones. What could your family, small group, or church do differently to honor the Lord in a unique way this year? Maybe a family in need can be adopted, or a special offering can be brought to church, or the education of an orphan can be covered overseas.

What is the Lord telling you to do? May you be blessed as you give generously to your local congregation and consider becoming a channel of blessing to others.

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship: A Compilation from the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940),. 295.

LOCAL CONFERENCE ADVANCE

Stephen N. Haskell was teaching from the book of Daniel. He was a deep thinker and great exegete of God's word. Elder Haskell made a statement in class, which was questioned by one of his students. "Every part of Scripture," Elder Haskell affirmed, "has a valuable spiritual lesson." The student raised his voice in skepticism, doubting the true value of that statement. When challenged to provide a portion of Scripture which appears to have purely material significance, the student quoted 2 Timothy 4:13, "Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments." Elder Haskell replied without hesitation, "The apostle Paul had brought the imperishable riches of heaven to thousands of souls; yet he was so poor in this world's goods that he preferred to wait an indefinite length of time while Timothy made the uncertain journey from Troas to Rome, rather than to have money expended in purchasing a new coat and writing materials."⁴⁵

The Apostle Paul made many sacrifices for the sake of the Gospel. In 2 Corinthians 6:10, Paul admitted to his situational poverty, including his lack of earthly possessions. Regardless, he taught believers that contentment comes from a close relationship with God. "...But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13, 14).

May the Lord help believers live a life focused on Christ as good stewards of temple, time, talents, and treasure.

⁴⁵ James R. Nix, *Passion Purpose and Power: Recapturing the Spirit of the Adventist Pioneers Today* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2013), 28.

UNION DESIGNATED

Today, Sabbath keepers around the world will be celebrating the last Sabbath of 2017. 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. Their wealth came from clothing manufacturing and banking. Laodicea was also well known for their medical school, which treated eye diseases.⁴⁶

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

How has the Lord blessed you in 2017? Have you understood and embraced your dependence on Him? 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.

⁴⁶ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 144.

THIRTEENTH SABBATH OFFERINGS 2017

Trans-European Division	March 25*
West-Central Africa Division	June 24*
Southern Asia Division	September 30*
Euro-Asia Division	December 30*

MISSION INVESTMENT PROJECTS 2017

Pacific Union*
Mid-America Union*

* Special Project Development

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