

January 5, 2019

Local Church Budget

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

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

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

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

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

January 12, 2019

Local Conference Advance

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

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

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

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

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

January 19, 2019

Local Church Budget

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

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

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

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

January 26, 2019

Religious Liberty

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

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

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

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

February 2, 2019

Local Church Budget

Groundhog Day. Even Punxsutawney Phil has his day in the sun! As we consider this whimsical, legendary creature that supposedly makes his appearance each February and predicts the soon advent of Spring, we know that in some minds the groundhog or woodchuck is a nuisance, raiding gardens and leaving big holes in the ground. On the plus side, however, their abandoned dens provide homes for foxes and skunks that in turn eat mice and destructive field insects. And groundhogs are even used in biomedical research. Their susceptibility to a virus similar to human hepatitis B has made them valuable to researchers in finding a cure for the human affliction.

Who would have thought! But then, who would have thought that a church organization that began with a handful of believers in the mid-1800s would now number well over 20 million! This is all because of our wonderful Adventist message and our deep devotion to evangelism, both public and personal. And it is no doubt also due to our faithfulness in tithes and offerings, which fund the mission.

When you think about it, however, the early Christians in Acts 2 had no organizational infrastructure, but what they did have was lots of love for one another. They provided strongly for the needy among them, and they went forth preaching the Word in great faith.

Let us today demonstrate great faith and love as we return a faithful tithe and give liberally to the needs of our congregation.

February 9, 2019

Adventist Television Ministries

Back to “normal.” On February 14, 1991, a pastor received a phone call from another pastor inviting him to go as a translator on a mission trip to build a church in the Dominican Republic. Their other translator had had a change of plans, so he was asked to go with only two days’ notice.

After a week away from home living in rather primitive conditions, how good it felt to take a nice hot shower and crawl into one’s own clean bed! How nice to get back to “normal”!

However, “normal” for millions of the people of the world means living constantly on the edge of starvation; barely surviving, scraping by on only a few dollars per *year*; living in a tiny wooden cabin, eight or more people to a family; walls covered with newspaper; carrying water from the community faucet; washing “clothes” (maybe more like rags) by hand at the same faucet or in the nearby river.

And yet . . . one member of the mission group commented, “How can they be so happy?””

I encourage you today to support the World Budget, which includes Adventist Television Ministries such as Hope TV, *Faith for Today*, *Breath of Life*, *It is Written*, and others. These ministries help spread the Gospel to around the world. And let’s help these joyful people come to know the source of their joy!

February 16, 2019

Local Church Budget

Christian Parenting Day. While we have been called to go out into the world and make disciples for Jesus, we can't forget that we have a mission field inside the walls of our own home. Ellen G. White wrote in the book, *The Adventist Home*, "Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home... There is no missionary field more important than this" (p. 35).

As parents, we play the most important role in the life of our children as we disciple them to be followers of Jesus and accept His free gift of forgiveness and eternal life. While we may teach them, it is much more important that we *show* them what it means to be a disciple.

When you set aside the tithe and offerings, write a check and put it inside the envelope, or when you go online to do the same, invite your child to sit by you and explain to them what you're doing and why. Your example of gratitude for God's goodness, of joyfully giving, and financial support of the ministry of the church is critically important as they develop these same traits.

Today is Christian Parenting Day. Give your child the tithes and offerings you have brought and let them place them in the offering plate. Since today's offerings are for the local church budget, take the time to explain to your child what that means and what the funds will be used for. You will be planting in their minds the importance of supporting the ministry of your local church.—Claudio Consuegra, NAD Family Ministries

February 23, 2019

Local Conference Advance

President's Day. George Washington, the first U.S. President and "father of our country," was highly respected for his integrity, leadership, and strong character. While the story of his chopping down the cherry tree may be apocryphal, it does portray his honesty. His humility is shown in his reluctance to serve as President, despite having led his troops to victory in the Revolutionary War. And his true heart showed up in the fact that he was the only president to completely free his slaves at his death. He was the only President to enter office upon the unanimous vote of his electors.

Abraham Lincoln, also known as "Honest Abe," towered over his people not only physically but morally. He was a six-foot four-inch be a man of prayer. Stories of his honesty include the one about when he was a store clerk, and accidentally overcharged a customer by six cents. As the store was closing for the evening he discovered his mistake, and walked three miles to the customer's house to return the money.

Are we people of honesty and integrity? An "integer" is a whole number, as opposed to a fraction like one-half; so "integrity" can be said of one who "has it all together." Do these values show up in our stewardship of God's tithe and our offerings?

Our local conference is well deserving of our support, as it ministers to us through youth camps, camp meetings, church building programs, etc. Give generously today.

March 2, 2019

Local Church Budget

The water's edge. Pastor and Mrs. James Hoffer once lived in St. Joseph, Michigan, just a mile or so from Glenlord Beach on Lake Michigan. When they moved there in 1989, there was a nice swimming area and sandy beach. Now, due to shoreline erosion, there is nothing. Over the years, erosion has claimed whole houses and radically altered the landscape. Barriers prevent people from venturing too close.

What causes erosion? The gentle and incessant lapping of water, the prevailing westerly winds, the action of rain and snow beating down—all have their effect. When roots or foundations aren't deeply secure, the elements slowly but surely wreak disintegration, and sand, rocks, and even structures topple into the lake.

This process is exactly what happens when little indiscretions and the world's influences begin eating away at our Christian foundation. We don't notice the erosion until it's too late. That is why we are encouraged with these words: "Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him" (Col. 2:6, 7). It is the daily commitment and attention to your root system that will keep your life standing tall and strong.

Today's offering is for Local Church Budget. Help us help others come to Jesus and stay close to Him. And prevent spiritual erosion!

March 9, 2019

Adventist World Radio

Adventist World Radio. "Change was in the wind in 1989 when the Cold War ended, the Berlin Wall came down, and Romania was liberated. As Romania's Communist leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, and his wife fled for their lives, they were captured, tried, and executed.

"Ilie Radu and his wife, Lidia, felt free for the first time in their lives. Ilie began to search for answers to the questions that had been burning in his heart about God and about what happens when you die....

"After a few years, while studying the Bible, they discovered that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River and not sprinkled. Ilie immediately requested that his new church family baptize him. He was informed that he had been sprinkled as a baby and that was good enough. Feeling devastated, Ilie began again to search for truth....

"Then four years ago, Ilie was working as a switcher for the railroad.... One day he noticed that a fellow worker had a radio app on his cell phone, and when they had some downtime waiting on the trains, he would listen to the radio on his phone. That gave Ilie the idea to do the same, so he began listening to a Christian station while at work. The station he liked most was the very popular Radio Vocea Sperantei, an affiliate of Adventist World Radio!"

Would you like to know the rest of the story? Go to the Adventist World Radio website, www.awr.org. And please give liberally to AWR today!

March 16, 2019

Local Church Budget

God's care for His own. Swallows can fly 7,000 miles without a chart, compass, or radio beam and land at the place they left six months before.

Spiders can make a silken rope, creating materials in their own chemical laboratory, very fine but strong enough for their own transport through the air.

Beavers are engineers, constructing without the aid of tools, cement, or precision instruments, bridges, tunnels, roadways, canals, and dams that last for years.

Bees, wasps, and ants solve their housing problem by building well-ventilated, weatherproof, well-designed, and practical apartment houses.

A young squid travels by jet propulsion. He swims by pumping water through a tube along his thin, streamlined body. When pursued, he can gather great speed, and he always jets backwards. When he gets going fast enough, he can set his fins at an angle and take off into the air. He has been seen to fly as far as sixty yards with one takeoff, leaving his foes far behind.

Can a Creator God like that take care of you and me? Of course! And shouldn't we respond to His loving care, most of which we take for granted, by living just as close to Him as we can? Yes!

Let us praise God for His blessings and respond in loving gifts for Him today.

March 23, 2019

Local Conference Advance

Spring has sprung!

O little bee on the red-topped clover,
Aren't you tired, you busy rover,
Of doing the same thing over and over—
 Gathering honey all day long,
 Singing the same little humming song?
Aren't you tired, you golden rover,
Of doing the same thing over and over?

O busy heart, O toiling mother,
Aren't you tired of work and bother—
The same dull task and never another?
 Over and over you brew and bake,
 Over and over you mend and make.
Aren't you tired, O weary mother,
Of the same dull round and never another?

Sweet and calm and clear I heard:
 "Over and over God paints the skies,
 Over and over His sun doth rise,
 Over and over He tints the flowers,
 Over and over He sends the showers,
 Over and over He guides the stars,
 Over and over the dawn unbars.
If over and over God deigns to work,
Why should we faint, one duty shirk?
So over and over our tasks we do,
Sure of reward if our work be true."

As we contemplate the beauties of Spring, let's give today for Conference Advance, which helps youth and others know the love and care of God through its ministries.

March 30, 2019

NAD Evangelism

Not hungry! If one of your children were frequently not hungry at dinnertime, would you be concerned? Well, that's what happened to one family while serving as missionaries in Brazil.

Rick had just turned three, and often at mealtime he would not have much appetite. This puzzled his parents for some time, until one day his mother happened to mention this to some of the neighbor ladies in her apartment building. Comparing notes, they discovered that Rick had been going around to the other apartments during the day mooching food! He would go up to a door and knock, and holding up three fingers, he would say something like this: "Mrs. So-and-so, I'm so hungry! May I please have three cookies [or three bananas, or three of whatever]?" No wonder he wasn't hungry at mealtime!

So, the expression "three cookies" (or "tres bolachas" in Portuguese) became a family joke.

One reason why some people don't come to church is that they are not hungry. Ellen White speaks of them, "[They] are feeding on husks and will remain spiritual dwarfs as long as they gratify Satan. . . These persons forget the words of Christ: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you'" (1T 500).

Whatever we are feeding on that dulls our spiritual appetite must go. Please give to NAD Evangelism today so we can help people find Christ and feed on solid spiritual food.

April 6, 2019

Local Church Budget

Tax time! Through the years, the government has discussed whether to continue the deduction for charitable gifts. The day may come when this is no longer allowed. Questions in the minds of churches and other non-profits are, "How much would this affect their revenue?" and, "How much is this tax break an incentive in people's giving?"

We are used to the idea of the charitable deduction because of the countries in which we live, but many other countries don't have this benefit. Yet our people in these places are nevertheless faithful in their tithes and offerings.

A question to ask ourselves might be, "How does this affect *my* giving?"

Jesus tells us: "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matt. 6:2-4, NKJV).

So, let us enjoy the deduction while we have it, but continue to be faithful regardless of what governments do or don't do. Today's offerings is for Local Church Budget.

April 13, 2019

NAD Christian Record

Let's take a trip in our imaginations. Think ahead to what heaven and the New Earth might be like. Who from the Bible would you like to talk to first? Everyone will, of course, want to talk with Jesus, face-to-face. What's the first question you'd like to ask Jesus when you sit at His feet? Who is the first family member you hope to see?

All of us, I'm certain, will have questions to ask when we get to heaven. However, there's one question that many of us don't think too much about: "What will I see *when* I can see?"

Until that day comes, you and I have an opportunity to introduce our friends who are blind to Jesus through the programs and materials provided through Christian Record Services, Inc. You and I, through our World Budget offering gifts today, can put the Sabbath School lesson, Bible studies, magazines, and Christian library books into the hands of people who are blind. You can provide time in nature through National Camps for Blind Children, a Christian Record program for youth and adults. Your gift can start or nurture the spiritual journey of an individual who is blind.

Imagine it: Heaven, the New Earth, and time with our Savior, seeing and experiencing a new life with perfect eyesight and bodies that are healed and restored. What a day that will be! Thank you for your gifts today that plant seeds for the kingdom in the hearts of people who are blind.—Jeri Lyn Rogge, Communication Director, Christian Record Services, Inc.

April 20, 2019

Local Church Budget

Easter.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three;
One lived and died for self; one died for you and me.
The Greek died on a throne; the Jew died on a cross.
One's life a triumph seemed; the other but a loss.
One led vast armies forth; the other walked alone;
One shed a whole world's blood; the other gave His own.
One won the world in life and lost it all in death;
The other lost His life to win the whole world's faith.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three;
One died in Babylon; and one on Calvary.
One gained all for self; and one Himself He gave;
One conquered every throne; the other every grave.
The one made himself god; the God made Himself less;
The one lived but to blast; the other but to bless.
When died the Greek, forever fell his throne of swords;
But Jesus died to live forever Lord of lords.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three;
The Greek made all men slaves; the Jew made all men free.
One built a throne on blood; the other built on love;
The one was born of earth; the other from above.
One won all this earth, to lose all earth and heaven;
The other gave up all, that all to Him be given.
The Greek forever died; the Jew forever lives;
He loses all who gets, and wins all things who gives.

—Charles Ross Weede

April 27, 2019

Local Conference

The biggest little word. The 40 years of wandering in the wilderness were about to come to an end. Moses, because of his own disobedience, was prohibited from crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. Before transferring the leadership to Joshua, however, he wanted to admonish this new generation of Israelites regarding the two possible futures that awaited them. As you read his words in Deuteronomy 28, you will be struck by the fact that everything hinged on the biggest little word in the English language, “if.”

“If” you obey, great blessings will follow, and the world will flock to your doorstep, because they will sit up and take notice, and wonder how they can receive the same benefits. “If,” however, you rebel and become disobedient, the other nations will scorn and abuse you.

Despite this important sermon, not only spoken but written down for posterity, the Israelites spent hundreds of years of spiritual ups and downs. Over and over they succumbed to the cultural pressures around them, and soon became just like the other nations in so many ways. Following their exile in Babylon, some returned under Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild the nation and entered a period of great zeal for the Law, which by the time of Christ resulted in legalism. We’re not much different from them.

Today, Christ calls *us* to faithful obedience based on the Gospel. The choice is ours, “if.”

May 4, 2019

Local Church Budget

Lest we also forget. When London was being blitzed during World War II, this article appeared in one of the British newspapers:

“We have been a pleasure-loving people, dishonoring God’s day, picnicking and bathing. Now the seashore is barred—no picnics, no bathing.

“We have preferred motor travel to church going. Now there is a shortage of motor fuel.

“We have ignored the ringing of church bells calling us to worship. Now the bells cannot ring, except to warn us of an invasion.

“We have left our churches half empty when they should have been well filled with worshippers. Now they are in ruins.

“We would not listen to the way of peace. Now we are forced to listen to the way of war.

“The money we would not give to the Lord’s work, now is taken from us in higher taxes and the high cost of living.

“The food for which we refused to give God thanks, now is unobtainable.

“The service we refused to give to God, is now conscripted for our country.

“Lives we refused to live under God’s control are now under the nation’s control.

“Nights we would not spend watching unto prayer are now spent anxiously in air raid precautions.”

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”- Ps. 33:12

May 11, 2019

Disaster and Famine Relief

Adventist Community Services Disaster Response has been serving the community for years. In the small town of Beaumont, Texas, more than 50 percent of homes in some of the communities were destroyed as raging waters flooded the area. ACS DR visited one senior who pleaded that we come and look at the damage. We went into her home and the smell of mold and mildew permeated our nostrils. We stepped through the mud that still covered portions of the floor as she pointed to where the water had come in her home. As we looked at the damage, she pulled out her cell phone to show us the river-like stream that ran through the house directly where we stood. We couldn't help but notice the black mold moving its way up the walls of her home. Showing concern, we explained that it was not safe to live in a building under these types of conditions. She looked at us with earnest eyes and simply asked, "Where would you have me go?" We had no answer.

Experiencing these types of events convinced ACS DR that we needed to find additional ways to help in recoveries such as this one. Through many discussions with Union leadership, we created a Rebuild Program that is presently taking shape in both the Southern and Southwestern Unions. While this work is somewhat different from our norm, ACS DR is working to address needs in our Communities. –Derrick Lea, NAD Adventist Community Services

May 18, 2019

Local Church Budget

Adventist Single Adult Ministries Sabbath. Look around your church and you will notice church members and guests who have never been married, who are divorced, or who have lost their loved one. They are as important to the church as anyone else, and yet, often they feel forgotten or neglected by the church.

The apostle Paul wrote to the unmarried in the church at Corinth that not being married provides some opportunities that those who are married do not have. "I want all of you to be free from worry. An unmarried man worries about how to please the Lord. But a married man has more worries. He must worry about the things of this world, because he wants to please his wife. So, he is pulled in two directions. Unmarried women and women who have never been married worry only about pleasing the Lord, and they keep their bodies and minds pure. But a married woman worries about the things of this world, because she wants to please her husband. What I am saying is for your own good—it isn't to limit your freedom. I want to help you to live right and to love the Lord above all else," (1 Cor. 7:32-35, CEV).

Whether married or unmarried, we all can participate in the ministry of the church. Through our prayers, personal efforts, and financial support, we contribute and assume responsibility and ownership for the mission with which God has entrusted us. The offering today, which is designated for the local church budget, demonstrates our response to God's generosity to us.— Claudio Consuegra, NAD Family Ministries

May 25, 2019

Local Conference Advance

Praise the Lord for committees! This is a rather unusual title for an offertory reading, but we really mean it!

Part of the democratic process of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since the beginning has been committees. Yes, it does take longer to get things done, but it is really the only way to ensure that a proper system of checks and balances is in place.

On the local church level, it reminds us that no one is big enough or important enough to make all the decisions. We have committees to plan various forms of outreach, maintenance and building needs, programs, funding, membership issues, etc.

Yes, there is give and take, and free expression of opinions (99 percent of the time without hostility). And every committee is bathed in prayer and ultimately dependent, not on man's wisdom, but on God's.

So, while you are home in your easy chair some evening, remember that a brother or sister from the church may be sacrificing his or her personal time to make sure that the church runs well, and things get accomplished. Let's praise the Lord for all our wonderful volunteers and let's even praise the Lord for committees!

Our offering today is for Local Conference Advance. Let's continue to faithfully support God's work throughout our region.

June 1, 2019

Local Church Budget

Summertime dangers. Mosquitoes, flies, poison ivy, ticks—these are some of the nuisances that we may have to cope with during the warmer months. More serious are the dangers associated with sunburn (or even skin cancer), drowning, and increased risk of automobile injury due to the crowded highways.

But we should be even more concerned with the spiritual dangers that abound in summertime. Summer is when many spend more time in leisure activities, and sometimes because of travel and vacations our normal schedules are interrupted. It is much easier to neglect our personal devotions and attendance at our home church.

This can have a lasting negative impact on some people. Any time the patterns of our lives are interrupted, for whatever reason, there is potential for profound spiritual change.

On the positive side, summer presents wonderful opportunities for sharing our faith. We can stock our cars with literature and leave tracts in strategic places (inside of motel Bibles, in restrooms, for example). We can make new friends for Jesus in parks and camping areas and tourist sites.

Faithful members mail in their tithes and offerings even when they are away, because they understand that their church's needs continue in their absence. Thank you for remembering the needs of your local church family even when you're away.

June 8, 2019

Local Church Budget

Would you hesitate to ask? There was a roomful of doctors eating together on a certain occasion. One doctor got up from the table, left the room, and in minutes he was dead. A morsel of food had lodged in his windpipe, and so he choked to death.

The tragedy of this incident is heightened by the fact that probably any one of those doctors could have performed the Heimlich Maneuver, or, if need be, a tracheotomy to restore his breathing. But they did not know anything was wrong—he didn't tell them.

A lesson is here for those of us in the church. A member may have a problem in his (or her) life—a problem with marriage or the children, with alcohol, money, grief, loneliness, depression, or whatever. He feels embarrassed about the situation, so he does not tell his brothers and sisters in Christ that he is struggling. Instead, he absents himself or puts on a brave front and struggles all alone. Sometimes he is crushed beneath the load, and no one knew until it was too late.

The Scriptures say, “Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). That is one big reason why Christ in His wisdom placed us together in the church—to bear one another’s burdens. Of course, many problems cannot be solved as quickly as that of a choking victim, but most problems become more bearable when shared.

Our local church provides, among other things, help for our members in need as well as those in the community. I encourage you to give faithfully today!

June 15, 2019

Local Church Budget

Father’s Day. A pastor recounts: “Several years ago, I received a phone call from Mary, one of our church members. She sounded quite excited and wanted my wife and me to come by her house to hear a marvelous story. Her elderly mother and disabled brother had been living with Mary and her husband for several years, but the mother had recently died. Now, Mary was visiting the Social Security office to report her mother’s passing. Little did Mary know the surprise awaiting her:

“She handed over the death certificate and was going to make arrangements to halt her mother’s monthly payments and change her brother’s payments to herself. Then the lady said to Mary, ‘What about the benefits from your father?’ To which Mary replied, ‘My father has been dead for many years.’ Then the lady got a strange look on her face and said, ‘No, dear, your father is very much alive.’ Mary was totally shocked. Then the lady said, ‘Listen, I am not allowed to reveal his whereabouts, but if you will write a letter, we will forward it to him.’

“As it turned out, Mary’s parents had gone through a very bitter divorce when Mary and her brother were little, and her mother never told her about her father. Needless to say, a few days later her dad called from Chicago, and it brought an exceedingly happy reunion! And she was able to connect with half-sisters she never even knew about. God is so good.”

On Father’s Day weekend, let us remember our local church family needs, and look forward to one day seeing our heavenly Father face to face!

June 22, 2019

Local Conference Advance

Camp meeting memories. This is the time of year when many local conferences conduct their camp meetings, and what a blessing they are! Many of us have fond memories of camp meetings, and some have even met their future spouses there!

Many years ago, a local conference had a big tent for their main meetings (and some still do). At the back was a wooden structure that served as the sound booth and the main control point for public address across the campus. In the booth, there was a intercom telephone that was connected to the various outlying departments.

One of our pastors was on duty in the booth when a curious thing occurred. Just as someone on the platform was about to offer a prayer, the intercom phone rang, and the following situation took place: The pastor on the platform began with “Dear Lord...” and at that precise moment the pastor back in the booth, distracted, picked up the phone and in a rather strong stage whisper said “Ye-e-e-s.” Of course, everyone in the audience heard it and chuckled.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have such direct answers to our prayers!

Let us faithfully and generously support our local conference in our Conference Advance projects, which include camp meeting, and many other ministries.

June 29, 2019

Union Designated

Hoarding. One of the most striking parables of Jesus has to do with the rich farmer, who was enjoying a bumper harvest one year. What did he do? He said to himself, “You know what? I'm going to have to build bigger barns for this harvest!” He certainly had visions of living the good life. Only problem was, he didn't reckon with the fact that it was going to be his last day on earth.

Many of the Bible's parables deal with one or more aspects of stewardship. The rich young ruler, the widow's mite, Esau selling his birthright, Ananias and Sapphira—over and over we are given lessons about fixing our hopes on heavenly wealth, not on the earthly.

One of the saddest diseases is that of hoarding. One church member, who lived alone, was obviously a hoarder. In order for his pastor to enter his home, he had to turn his body sideways due to the huge stacks of newspapers and magazines in the living room, reaching to the ceiling. The place was a firetrap!

One of the roots to hoarding is a basic insecurity that causes him or her to store an inordinate amount of everything, and it hurts them greatly to throw anything away. In many cases, professional help is needed to overcome this disease.

When we learn to trust in Jesus, our great Provider, we can live a more wholesome life knowing that He will take care of all our needs—now and in the future.

July 6, 2019

Local Church Budget

Independence Day. In the year 2000, the General Conference session was held in Toronto, Canada. On July 4, the people of the city went to work and the General Conference did its normal business. You see, July 4 is not a holiday in Canada. It was a good reminder for us that “this world is not my home.”

It may surprise you to learn that the United States is one of the few countries where the national flag is displayed in the church sanctuary. Adventists in other countries feel that that would be mixing politics with religion. Americans, of course, consider that they have a spiritual heritage received from the founding fathers of the nation. Their patriotism has almost a spiritual feeling to it.

I personally have no problem displaying the flag or honoring our country, but the faithful Adventist always has in the back of his or her mind that someday even here the situation will change. Right now, we are prospering beyond measure and way too comfortable. Hopefully, we are taking full advantage of these conditions to be faithful in our stewardship and in sharing the gospel with others around us.

Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. As we celebrate the birth of our nation this month, let us also bear in mind our greater loyalty to Christ, and continue to strive for the coming of His kingdom. And let us support His kingdom work by giving to our local church this morning.

July 13, 2019

NAD Women’s Ministries

Women’s ministries. Today’s offering is for the North American Division (NAD) Women’s Ministries, which was first established in 1898 at the urging of Ellen G. White. In the book *Evangelism*, we find her marching orders to the women of the church: “The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty and labor under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed” (*Evangelism*, p. 464).

All across the North American Division, from the United States to Canada and from Bermuda to Guam-Micronesia, the women of the church are engaged in serving others. They give Bible studies, hold evangelistic series, and minister to those in shelters for battered and homeless women. They provide for the needs of families seeking refuge on our shores from oppressive regimes, teach classes in English as a second language, 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.

July 20, 2019

Local Church Budget

The Clear Word. Several years ago, a pastor was preparing to officiate at his son's wedding in Minnesota. It was Saturday evening after sunset, and all were at the church going through the rehearsal.

The groom, the best man, and the dad were up on the platform awaiting the entrance of the bridal party. The flower girl proceeded, pretending to scatter flower petals as she went. Next came the Bible boy, empty-handed, pretending to carry a Bible. So, the pastor remarked, "Hmm, an invisible Bible." Without missing a beat, the best man quipped, "Yes, it's the *Clear Word!*" And of course, everyone had a good laugh.

Many thousands have been blessed by Dr. Jack Blanco's Bible paraphrase, *The Clear Word*, as well as by his life story as a little boy in Germany. How clear is God's Word to you and me?

God has made it clear in His Word about returning tithe and giving offerings. His desire is for us to remember that He is our Great Provider for all of our needs.

Today's offering goes to our local church budget. At this midpoint of the year, please make it a matter of earnest prayer regarding your giving. God has tremendous blessings in store for you if you are faithful!

July 27, 2019

Local Conference Advance

What is the church? If you were to ask the average person on the street, "What is the church?", they might reply, "It's a building." We as Christians know that the church is much more than a building—it is a building made of people. First Peter 2:5 says that we are living stones being built into a spiritual building. The people are the building materials, and they are also the building. The Holy Spirit lives inside us. We are literally God's temple.

There are different types of buildings, and there are different types of building materials. There are foundation stones, and there are windows, and shingles, and many other parts, and in their place, they are irreplaceable. Shingles don't make good windows, and windows don't make good foundations, but in fulfilling their role they are indispensable. Paul related this in 1 Corinthians 12, using the metaphor of the body, each part with a different, but important role.

What would this building be without all of its valuable parts, and what if you were missing body parts? You would be impaired, less able to function. The same with the church, which is made up of people. Without everyone doing their part, we are not able to function as we could. And just as an arm or a leg would get weak and atrophy without exercise, so the individual Christian will grow weak without using their gifts.

Today, God is again giving us the opportunity to exercise the gift of generosity and faithfulness. Let us all give cheerfully.—
by Pastor Jason Brooks, adapted from a church newsletter.

August 3, 2019

Local Church Budget

Too early. A pastor in Ohio had a speaking appointment in Indiana one Sabbath morning. He calculated the travel time and left his home promptly to make sure of an on-time arrival.

As he drove into the church parking lot, he found himself to be the first one to arrive. So, he patiently waited, figuring that very soon he would begin to see other cars pulling in. As he waited and waited, he began to get upset. Where were the people? After a few more minutes, he became alarmed and then angry. Again, *where were the people?*

As his patience grew thinner, he considered returning home, when suddenly a few cars began to appear, and then more and more. He hadn't realized that he had crossed the line from Eastern time to Central time. He was an hour early.

How many times have you or I had to say "Oh!" when we have made a hasty judgment based on poor information? Sometimes it is better to be more patient and wait until we know the whole story.

Smooth human relations can sometimes be a challenge, but it is an important and necessary part of getting along as part of God's family. As decisions are made about important issues in the church, let us go with cooler heads and committed hearts, that God's work may go forward. Please give liberally to His work today.

August 10, 2019

Oakwood/Andrews/Loma Linda Universities

Our marvelous educational system. A Seventh-day Adventist man who went through our educational system wrote: "My parents became Seventh-day Adventists when I was 8 years old. My mother had been a Jehovah's Witness and my father a former Adventist. They were not attending any church at the time, but they allowed my brother and me to attend Sunday school with the neighborhood children. The day we came home from Sunday school with notions of going to heaven when you die was the day our parents got to thinking about their spiritual responsibilities. You see, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists have similar views on the state of the dead.

"A couple of years later we were enrolled in the local church school, and never again did we attend a non-Adventist school.

"I think back to that wonderful church school library, full of inspiring pioneer missionary stories; to our godly teachers and the Bible lessons through all levels of education; and to the lifelong friends we made along the way. Sadly, some of those friends have passed on, and some have left the faith of their childhood. But many of us have remained, and up into our later years still cherish our Adventist educational experience."

Our universities and other schools are not perfect, because people are not perfect. But they certainly deserve our support today as we render God's tithes and our offerings.

August 17, 2017

Local Church Budget

Anything for a buck. Commerce is an interesting phenomenon. There is a fine line between making money for our daily needs and making money because of greed. The human individual from day one is driven by thoughts of self-interest and self-benefit. It is in our very nature, and to some degree necessary for life but exploited by Satan to the extreme. From the baby crying because it is hungry to the business person pushing the envelope seeking to move upward, it is often about self.

Altruism and self-denial do not come naturally. Happy is the parent and blessed the child when by precept and example self-interest is suppressed and thinking of others is encouraged. A truly other-centered person is a miracle of God.

“The directions given by the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul in regard to gifts, present a principle that applies also to tithing: ‘Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.’ Parents *and children* are here included. Not only the rich, but the poor, are addressed. ‘Every man according as he purposeth in his heart [through the candid consideration of God’s prescribed plan], so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.’ The gifts are to be made in consideration of the great goodness of God to us”—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 80, emphasis ours.

Today we have another opportunity to demonstrate our faithfulness and the joy of altruistic living.

August 24, 2019

Local Conference Advance

Wayward children. Losing our children to Satan’s wiles may seem like a modern problem and getting worse, but it is as old as Cain, Esau, and the rebellious Israelites. Throughout history people have spurned their godly upbringing and turned their lives in the devil’s direction. And concerned parents have always lifted up these dear ones in prayer to the Lord.

A pastor had in one of his churches an elderly couple who grieved for their wayward children, and as time went on, the father died and then the mother, never seeing their prayers answered.

Following the mother’s passing, he called up the daughter and asked if it would be alright to visit her, and she said yes. When he entered the home, the smell of cigarettes was present. Other signs of spiritual need were evident in her home as well. But the visit went well and was pleasant, and finally he asked her, “Have you ever considered coming back into the church?” And wonder of wonders, she replied, “Yes, pastor, I have!” So, Bible studies began, she started attending church, and one by one the worldly ways fell by the wayside. Finally came the day of her baptism. Later she became the secretary of the local academy principal.

Can you picture that joyful reunion when Jesus comes, when those blessed parents find their daughter there?

As we give to Conference Advance today, some of our funds will be used for evangelism, and perhaps someone you know will be reclaimed for Jesus!

August 31, 2019

Local Church Budget

Moon Walk or Sabbath School? Astronaut James B. Irwin's wife gave a most impressive testimony on the importance of Sabbath observance and Christian responsibility on Sabbath, July 3, 1971.

Walter Cronkite, CBS news celebrity reporting on the moon shot, said, "Mrs. James B. Irwin did not watch her husband take his first ride and walk on the moon yesterday. She is a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and she had a Sabbath School class to teach. She said, "He has his mission and I have mine."

This significant statement was broadcast and telecast to the United States., the Congo, Europe, South America, and Canada. What an eloquent testimony this was to our faith!

Of course, we all agree that there are legitimate reasons for missing church—illness, for example. And no one would have faulted Mrs. Irwin had she took the time to watch her husband walk on the moon. But sometimes we allow little aches and pains, rain drops, or other minor things to keep us from the joy of fellowship.

Each local church has a mission for its members and the larger community. This morning, we have another opportunity to lift up our wonderful church by contributing, in addition to our faithful tithe, a generous and sacrificial offering for our local ministries. Thank you for supporting the mission!

September 7, 2019

Local Church Budget

Men's Ministry Day of Prayer. When Claudio Consuegra, the current Family Ministries Director of the North American Division, was a young man, he began attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church and was receiving Bible instruction by the local church pastor. When they studied what the Bible said about tithes and offerings, Claudio became concerned. He had not been careful about money management and had fallen into a bad habit. He would get paid on Thursday, but by Monday all his money would be gone. He would then borrow money from friends to hold him over until the next paycheck.

When he was taught that God expects that the first 10 percent of our income be returned, he figured that would not be possible. His paycheck now didn't even last a week so, surely, finances would be even tighter with 10 percent less to spend. When he told his pastor of his concern, the pastor challenged him to test God and claim His promises. Claudio prayed and put God to the test. The amazing thing is that the very first week he returned God's tithe, his paycheck lasted until the next paycheck, even after paying back his debts. Since that day, more than 40 years ago, he has been returning God's tithe and giving offerings faithfully, and God has shown His faithfulness and love to him and his family in many different ways.

His daughters witnessed their parents' faithfulness and now as married women they follow the same practice. His prayers and his obedience have shown them what it means to be a spiritual head of household, as men of God are called to be.

September 14, 2019

Local Church Budget

Misguided trust. Once there was a photographer for a national magazine who was assigned to “shoot” one of those big western forest fires. He was told that a small plane would be waiting to fly him over the fire.

When he got to the airport, sure enough, he found a little Cessna waiting. He jumped in with his equipment and yelled, “Let’s go!” The pilot, the plane, and the photographer were soon in the air.

“Fly over the north side of the fire and make several low passes,” the photographer shouted.

“Why?” the nervous pilot asked.

“Because I’m going to take pictures. I’m a photographer, and photographers take pictures,” was the reply.

After a long pause, the pilot tensely asked, “You mean you’re not the instructor?”

The pilot and the photographer both trusted someone to do something they could not do. Luckily, in this case, thanks to communication by the air traffic controller, they were able to get back to the airport.

In life, trust is often put in places, people, and things that are not worthy of such trust. I invite you this morning to faithfulness in returning tithes and giving offerings to Someone who is more than worthy of our trust!

September 21, 2019

Local Church Budget

Grandparent’s Day. Grandparents and grandchildren have a unique opportunity to learn lessons together across the generations. Grandparents have experienced the ups and downs of life, and can teach their grandchildren lessons of patience, planning, and perseverance so they can reach their goals in life.

Grandparents can teach their grandchildren about saving, investing, spending, and giving. Perhaps they have experienced the ups and downs of the economy, so they can tell them stories of what it’s like to have more some days and less at other times.

Because many grew up and lived without much of the technology that surrounds us today, grandparents can teach their grandchildren how to communicate face-to-face and the importance of placing healthy boundaries around all of the technological gadgets that consume our time. Grandparents and grandchildren can do service projects together to help others make this world a better place. One way to accomplish this is by volunteering on projects or activities in your church and community. As you spend time together, you can share principles and life lessons that will help your grandchildren grow to be healthy adults and committed Christians.

The offering today is for the local church budget. The church can serve as the vehicle where people of different ages come together for the common goal of sharing the message of love from God to His children who don’t know Him yet. Our generosity is a lesson to God’s younger children and a tangible way to help others.—Claudio Consuegra

September 28, 2019

Local Conference Advance

Holdup! Elder Wayne Olson, at the time the associate pastor of the Battle Creek Tabernacle church in Michigan, was out making pastoral visits. As he left one house and was going over his notes in the car, a man approached the open car window holding a gun and demanding his wallet. Pastor Olson reached for his wallet and handed it over, and the man started to leave. Suddenly the pastor said, “Wait, you forgot something.” When the surprised man returned, the pastor handed him a copy of *Steps to Christ*. We will never know the result of that bold deed, at least not here on earth, and Elder Olson drove away unharmed.

We almost shiver after hearing a story like that. What if it had been you or me?

Many years ago, Matthew Henry, a well-known Bible scholar, was once robbed of his wallet. Knowing that it was his duty to give thanks in everything, he meditated on this incident and recorded in his diary the following:

“Let me be thankful, first, because he never robbed me before; second, because although he took my purse, he did not take my life; third, because although he took all I possessed, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”

And, of course, we wouldn't want to be guilty of robbing God! So, let's faithfully set aside our tithes and offerings to bring to God's house each Sabbath.

October 5, 2019

Local Church Budget

Tornado! Some of us have seen major disasters and lived to tell about it. On June 8, 1953, the west side of Cleveland, Ohio, was hit by a major tornado. Pastor James Hoffer was a teenager at the time. The Hoffers' house was not seriously affected, other than a two-by-four sticking through the roof, a garage leaning almost off its foundation, and a yard full of glass shards. But houses down the street were completely destroyed, and neighborhood after neighborhood looked like a war zone. A baby near us was picked right out of her crib and smashed against a wall. All in all, many either died or were hurt.

The signs had been there—an eerie greenish hue to the sky, followed by golf-ball-sized hail and a massive storm. Fortunately, the Hoffer family was safe and sound as they fled to the basement.

Then, three years later a fire caused serious damage, and the same family had to move out into rented quarters for several months.

Our possessions are precious to us, but in perilous times our lives are of much more value. What value do you place on your possessions, your home, your vehicles, your income?

Jesus is coming soon. Let us send our wealth on ahead to His kingdom. Today, we're investing in His kingdom by giving to the Local Church Budget.

October 12, 2019

Voice of Prophecy/La Voz de la Esperanza

Radio Ministries. The Voice of Prophecy exists to proclaim the everlasting gospel of Christ—leading people to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.

A leader in religious broadcasting for more than 88 years, the Voice of Prophecy focuses on God's love and heralds the soon return of Christ—providing hope to broken people and guidance for daily living. Founded in 1929 by H.M.S. Richards, the ministry continues today under the leadership of Speaker/Director Shawn Boonstra and Associate Speaker Jean Boonstra.

The Voice of Prophecy can be heard in nearly three dozen languages, and Bible lessons are available in more than 70 languages. Local Discover Bible Schools have been established in 2,400 churches across North America, with hundreds more around the world. And humanitarian projects in countries such as India and Myanmar are meeting physical as well as spiritual needs. As the Voice of Prophecy looks to the future, it will continue to focus on sharing the love of Christ with a hurting world.—from the Voice of Prophecy website, <https://www.voiceofprophecy.com/about>

October 19, 2019

Local Church Budget

Working for Jesus. There is nothing in this world more wonderful than working for Jesus! This can be done vicariously, sustaining other workers with your prayers, offerings, and words of encouragement. But even more wonderful is to become a soul-winner yourself.

Perhaps you are picturing someone knocking on doors or preaching, and you can't see yourself in that picture. However, there are many more ways to win souls, and at least one of them is suited to you and your individual personality and gifts.

It can begin right in church, within the four walls of the building. How about this for a starter: "Everyone a greeter." Yes, we have our officially appointed greeters, and they do a wonderful job. But it was never meant for the rest of us to just fade into the woodwork. Each one of us should make a point of giving a friendly greeting to both visitors and fellow members. We should be proactive and intentional. And, where possible, even invite them to our homes for a fellowship meal, or sit with them in church.

Instead of viewing church passively, we should think of it as an evangelistic tool; it exists to draw the lost into our fellowship, rather than being an exclusive club for our members. Let us faithfully give our tithes and offerings but let us also give of ourselves!

October 26, 2019

Local Conference Advance

Dubious bargains. Have you noticed how things in the store are getting smaller and smaller, but their price remains the same? That the new “gallon” of ice cream is something like 56 ounces, and the candy bars have shrunk but the price hasn’t?

Have you noticed how early the stores are pushing all the holidays—putting out the Christmas merchandise even before Thanksgiving, the Valentine merchandise in early January, followed in quick succession by the Easter stuff?

Do you know why gum and candy and magazines are featured as you walk through the checkout line? And why a half-hour television program is 15 minutes of content and 15 minutes of commercials?

Welcome to the world of materialism, where consumers are victimized every day, and their likes and dislikes are even tracked by company computers.

It would seem to us that a big part of Christian stewardship should be smart shopping and awareness of the tricks of the trade; cutting back on, or even cutting up, our credit cards; and avoiding debt by not spending money we don’t have.

Today’s offering is for Local Conference Advance, which includes evangelism and youth programs. Rather than spend money we don’t have, let’s invest what we do have in God’s kingdom.

November 2, 2019

Local Church Budget

Divine counsel. “God is the source of life and light and joy to the universe. Like rays of light from the sun, like the streams of water bursting from a living spring, blessings flow out from Him to all His creatures. And wherever the life of God is in the hearts of men, it will flow out to others in love and blessing....

“So those who are the partakers of the grace of Christ will be ready to make any sacrifice, that others for whom He died may share the heavenly gift. They will do all they can to make the world better for their stay in it. This spirit is the sure outgrowth of a soul truly converted. No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. If we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are filled with the joy of His indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good we shall have something to tell. Like Philip when he found the Saviour, we shall invite others into His presence. We shall seek to present to them the attractions of Christ and the unseen realities of the world to come. There will be an intensity of desire to follow in the path that Jesus trod.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 77, 78.

Your giving today will help our church family remain a godly presence to those in our community.

November 9, 2019

Annual Sacrifice Global Mission

Veteran's Day. Today we give special honor to our military veterans those who have put their lives on the line to ensure our freedom. Whether in times of war or times of peace, our military are there for us, protecting our shores and skies.

As we ponder that, let's also remember that each one here is engaged in a fierce battle, a battle called "the great controversy," or, the struggle between good and evil. We already know from the Bible who will win this battle, but until such a time we are living in an embattled world.

We have many "soldiers" among us as well. They are our Global Mission pioneers, pushing back the frontiers of the spiritual world.

Global Mission is the frontline arm of Adventist Mission, an office of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's world headquarters. The organization sends volunteer missionaries, typically for one or two years, to reach people in areas of the world where there are no Seventh-day Adventist members. Together, Global Mission pioneers and cross-cultural Seventh-day Adventist missionaries are working to "Tell the World" about the love of Christ in some of the world's hardest-to-reach places.

Let's give them our support today. And above all, let us uphold them in prayer.

November 16, 2019

Local Church Budget

Rescued! The Hagerstown Seventh-day Adventist church in Maryland has had an annual tradition: a fund-raising yard sale for the public. Members and others donate items, some provide baked goods for sale, and the proceeds go for a special church project.

The venue for the sale has always been a prominent location along the main road through town, known as Dual Highway or Route 40. The lot slopes gently down to the road. The church chose that vacant lot so that the many passers-by would notice it.

At one of these sales a few years ago, a folding table was with the children's items, including a large inflated rubber ball. Of course, that caught the eye of a three-year old boy. He grabbed it and began kicking it around the area. Unfortunately, as it rolled toward the highway the little boy was scampering after it. Most everyone was preoccupied at the time and did not notice the potential tragedy. Just then, the pastor saw this out of the corner of his eye and yelled "Stop!" in his loudest voice. Fortunately, the child stopped just in time, and the ball rolled out right in front of a rapidly passing car and was demolished.

That little boy is now a handsome young man in his twenties. You may not rescue one of our youth in such a dramatic fashion, but you can rescue some today, young and old, by your faithful giving.

November 23, 2019

Local Conference Advance

Working together for Christ. The disciples were all so different! Can you imagine the “motley crew” that faced Jesus as He stood before them, or sat among them, day by day? Even Judas was accepted into the group. And foot-in-his-mouth Peter. And doubting Thomas. And introverted Andrew.

And then, even after Jesus ascended into heaven, they still had their differences. The book of Acts reveals more than one occasion when there was strong disagreement among them over various issues. But they still worked together, and great things were accomplished for Christ and the advancement of His kingdom.

It is still the same today. I’m so glad everyone doesn’t think just like me! Of course, sometimes it is frustrating, but mostly it is a great learning experience. And it causes one to marvel over the greatness and goodness of God; a God who lives and thrives on variety and diversity. Among other things, the church is God’s great social experiment! If it can’t work here, it can’t work anywhere. He has given us different personalities, thought patterns, and backgrounds.

What do I need to help make it happen? Let’s start with a dose of patience, love, and above all forgiveness. Next, for the sake of the kingdom, let us submerge our will in the will of God, asking Him to help us to be more kind and compassionate with others. Lastly, let us give of ourselves and our means.

November 30, 2019

Union Designated

Thanksgiving. In 1918, a Minnesota photographer heard a knock at his door. He opened the door and found a poor, elderly peddler standing there with a few articles to sell. The photographer, Eric Enstrom, said, “I am just ready to sit down at the table for dinner. Won’t you come in and join me?”

The shy, aged peddler hesitantly stepped into the house and soon was seated at the table. Then Enstrom’s mind lit up with a creative idea. “Before we eat our meal,” he said, “would you kindly pose over here at the smaller table?” The peddler was happy to cooperate with this man who had shown him such warm-hearted, Scandinavian hospitality.

Enstrom placed the elderly man before a small table on which was placed a large family Bible and on it a pair of spectacles. Beside the Bible, the photographer set a bowl of gruel, a loaf of bread, and a knife. “There,” he sighed with artistic satisfaction, “and now will you bow your head in prayer?”

The peddler did not need any coaching when it came to the matter of prayer. He folded his calloused hands together, rested his forehead on the thumbs, and silently returned thanks for the food set before him. When Mr. Enstrom developed the negative, he knew he had a very special picture—one that many of you have probably owned. It seemed to say, “This man does not have much of earthly goods, but he has more than most people—he has a thankful heart!”

December 7, 2019

Local Church Budget

Spiritual Frostbite. Frostbite is dangerous. As the mercury dips below the freezing mark, we must take extra precautions to keep our extremities warm. *Spiritual* frostbite is even more dangerous, as it can cause eternal damage. We have all been exposed to spiritual coldness at times, so we need to protect ourselves. The symptoms of spiritual frostbite in the church are the same as physical frostbite:

1. You begin to feel extreme coldness. We usually think it's everyone else who is cold. So, we think the church is not as friendly as it once was. The choir is not as good, and the message was cold and empty. Brother Tom didn't shake my hand today, etc.
2. The sensation of tingling takes place. You still have some spiritual memories of warmer days. Oh yes, once in a while you get a warm feeling, but you notice you don't respond as quickly as you used to; you begin to slow down.
3. Numbness begins to set in. There's no longer a concern for lost souls to be saved or much time for Bible study. You say the church needs a revival. The people just don't care anymore. Someone needs to do something—someone else, that is!
4. Then comes the loss of all feeling. Spiritual frostbite has taken its toll. Now you need to visit the Great Physician and let Him examine your heart.

December 14, 2019

NAD Adventist Community Services

What will you find? Jim Smith went to church one Sabbath morning. He heard the organist miss a note during the prelude and he winced. He saw a teenager talking when everybody was supposed to be bowed in silent prayer. He thought the deacon was watching to see what he put in the offering plate and it made him boil. He caught five grammatical errors in the sermon. As he slipped out through the side door during the closing hymn, he muttered to himself, “Never again! What a bunch of clods and hypocrites!”

Ron Jones went to church one Sabbath morning. He heard the organist play an arrangement of “A Mighty Fortress,” and he thrilled to the majesty of it. He heard a young girl take a moment in the service to speak of the difference her faith makes in her life. He was glad to see that his church was sharing in a special offering for the hungry children of Nigeria. He especially appreciated the sermon that Sabbath—it answered a question that had bothered him for a long time. He thought, as he walked out the doors of the church, “How can a man enter this place and not feel the presence of God?”

Both men went to the same church on the same Sabbath morning. Each found what he was looking for. What are you finding this Sabbath?

Let us give faithfully today, and especially uphold the work of our community service organization.

December 21, 2019

Local Church Budget

The Christmas tree. Pastor James Hoffer reports: Several years ago, when I was pastoring a church in Michigan, I re-baptized a godly lady who in earlier years had been a faithful member but had fallen away. All went well until Christmas rolled around, and she learned that the decorating committee was going to place a Christmas tree in the sanctuary. She strongly objected and said she would not be returning to church until January. Sure enough, when January came she was back on a regular basis—until the following December! But we respected her opinion. We certainly don't have to think alike on every issue.

Does Ellen White say anything about this? Yes, she does: “God would be well pleased if on Christmas each church would have a Christmas tree on which shall be hung offerings, great and small, for these houses of worship. Letters of inquiry have come to us asking, Shall we have a Christmas tree? Will it not be like the world? We answer, You can make it like the world if you have a disposition to do so, or you can make it as unlike the world as possible. There is no particular sin in selecting a fragrant evergreen and placing it in our churches, but the sin lies in the motive which prompts to action and the use which is made of the gifts placed upon the tree”—*Adventist Home*, p. 482.

Whether or not we have a Christmas tree in our church, let us bring our special gifts to Jesus today.

December 28, 2019

Local Conference Advance

Wrapping it up. As 2019 draws to its close, and 2020 is awaiting us just around the corner, let us take a few moments to reflect on the past and peek into the future.

On a personal level, did I grow closer to Jesus this year? Did I speak to someone about Jesus and about our wonderful Adventist message? Did God bring me through a difficult time or two? Did our church reach out into the community, and did we experience growth? Was I faithful to the Lord in reading my Bible, returning a faithful tithe, and giving generous offerings? Or do I need to do some catching up?

During 2020, we are no doubt going to hear about having 20-20 vision, a vision for what God can do for us individually, and for us as a local church and our denomination. It's time to dream of what God can do in and through us in the new year.

And 2020 is a General Conference year. We would strongly encourage each one to make plans to attend at least part of the session in Indianapolis, June 25 to July 4. There is nothing like rubbing shoulders with our brothers and sisters from around the world. It affords an awesome, up-close-and-personal view of the universal scope of the Adventist Church like nothing else.

Today is the final opportunity this year to bless the Lord with our faithful financial stewardship for Local Church Advance. Will you?