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THE MINISTRY

(2378) words)

## THE MONEY PROBLEM

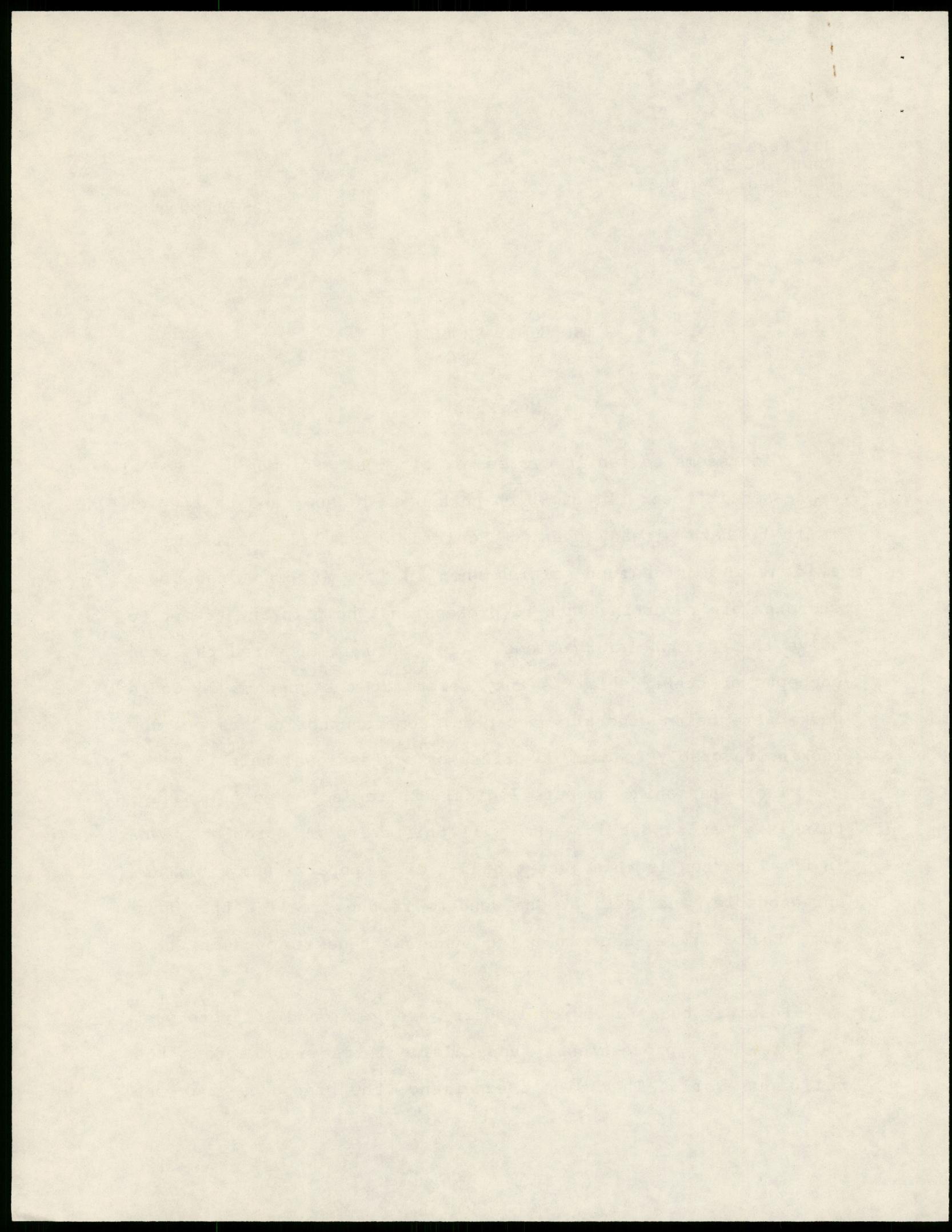
by

Mel Rees

Life seems to run in cycles--or circles. Solomon expressed it best. "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been." Ecclesiastes. 3:15 This is so evident in church fund-raising when in just 40 plus years some churches are reverting back to professional help in an attempt to solve their financial problems. Just when it appeared the true concepts of stewardship, as they relate to the support of God's work, were being generally accepted, some church leaders are now looking favorably to outside offers of professional help.

Their reasoning appears logical: there is a need for money; this is a way to get it. But, will this solve the problem? Or, in the long run is this just a band-aid: temporary, not biblical, unreasonable, ineffective. One wonders if they realize they have come full circle--back to using human methods to conduct God's work.

Possibly today's church leaders weren't around, or were just toddlers, when professional fund-raising firms swept across the religious world. They didn't experience the pressures, nor see



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some of the results of these "blitz" programs. To them, the glib salesmen with their colorful brochures filled with promises and testimonials might seem like a ray of sunshine on a overcast day--a panacea for the church's financial problems.

The mid-afternoon phone call from a church leader, asked my opinion about a certain fund-raising firm. I explained that my knowledge was limited to what I had read in a brochure, and a report I had from a church that had used their services. I asked why he was interested.

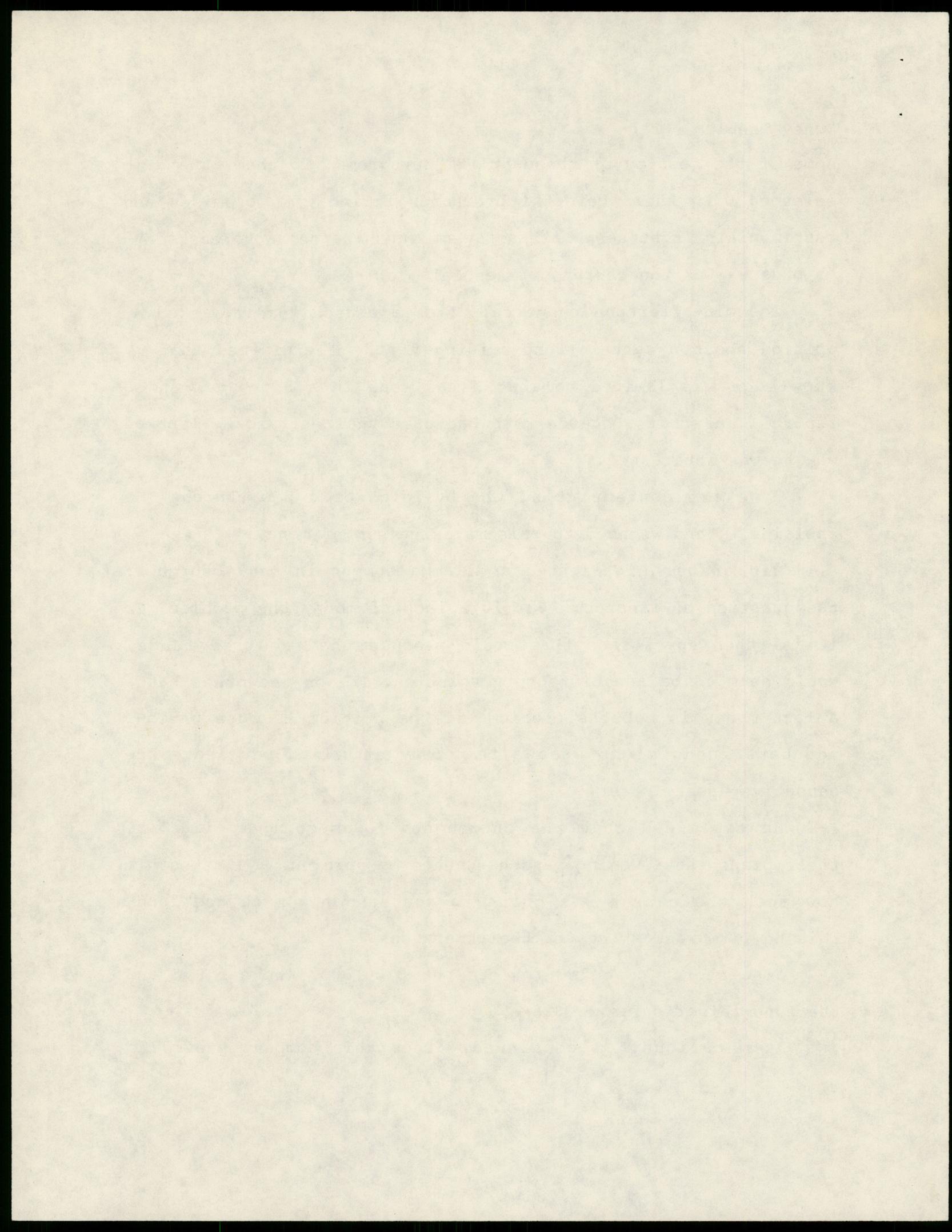
"We are contemplating the building of a new church," He explained, "and we need to raise a large sum of money."

His answer highlighted a dilemma common in many churches: the question of finance. But is a lack of money the problem? If it is, then any method that would produce the required funds, would seem to be a satisfactory solution. If, on the other hand, a lack money is not the problem--if the problem is more basic--adequate funds might ease a temporary situation but leave the causative agent intact.

He explained that the church board was going to finalize their plans that evening, and he wanted my opinion. I asked him how much the church was going to cost and how much the fund-raising firm was asking for their services.

"The church cost is projected at \$700,000," he said, " and the fund-raiser's fee is \$28,800."

"I'm curious." I continued, "Does this company provide a



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money machine, or where will this additional expense come from?"

There was a significant pause, then he replied, "I guess it comes out of our pockets."

"Really," I pointed out, "from a practical point of view, this doesn't make much sense to me. Instead of a \$700,000 project, you will now have one costing \$728,800! Have you thought this through? Have you considered the benefits versus the disadvantages?"

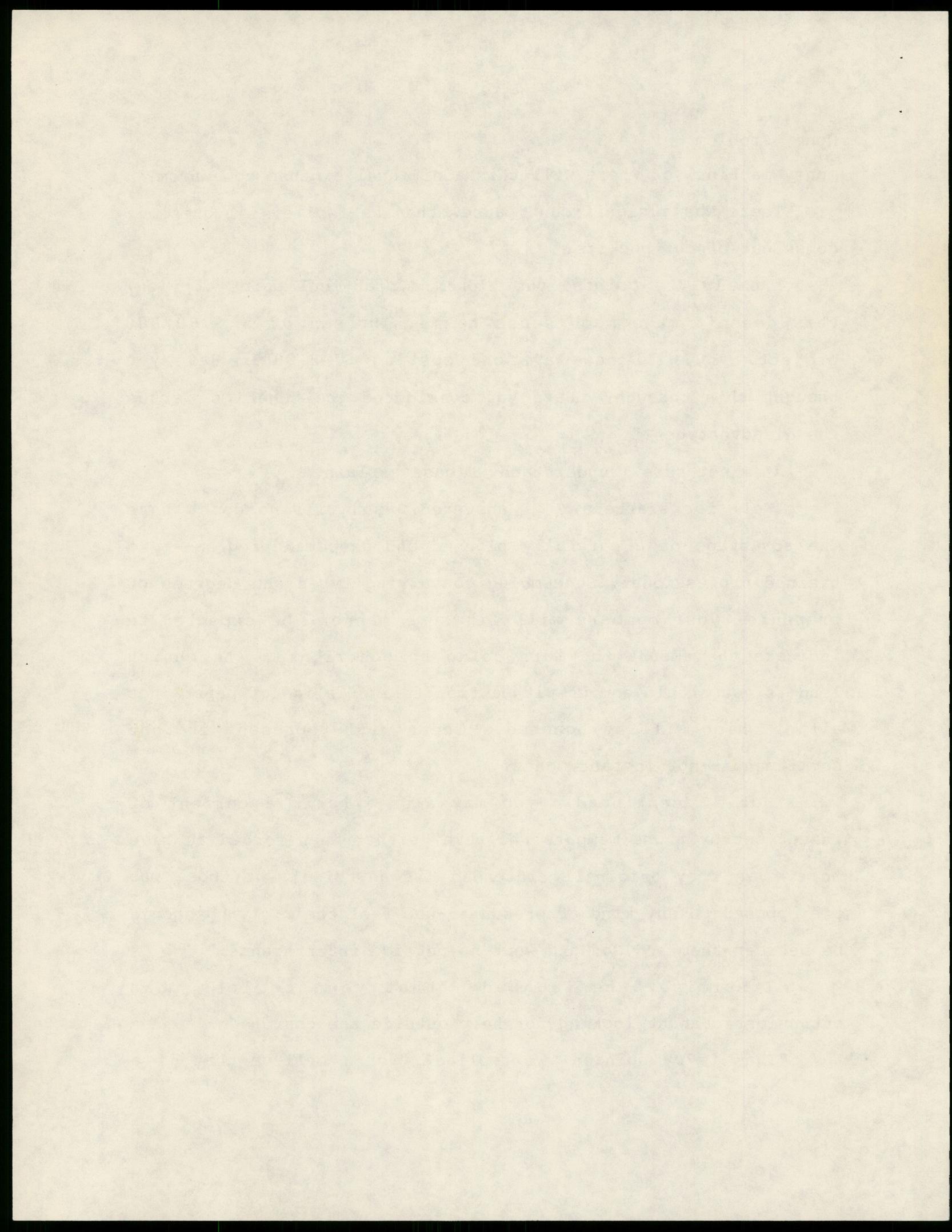
"I'm not sure I understand. Please explain."

"Well for starters," I answered, "you will no doubt have the advantage of a carefully planned and executed program--by a trained professional. Succumbing to varying types and degrees of pressure, your members will, in some manner, be expected to indicate the amount they are going to contribute. As church leaders you should end up with a fist full of slips of paper, not all of which will be honored. These will represent instant commitments--not instant money."

"But," I continued, "you may also inherit a current of resentment by those members who have, either been forced to give more than they originally intended (if anything), or those who are opposed to any kind of pressure--who feel their giving should be between them and God and want no outside interference."

"I surmise," he laughed, "that you are less than enthusiastic about looking for help outside the church."

"That is my opinion," I replied, "for I believe that if a



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congregation has to go outside for assistance in raising money to build a church they are not ready to build a house of God. A church is only an architectural design; but a house of God is a people worshipping together in love and unity, with common aims and objectives. To build a church requires a site, plans and money, but the requisites for preparing a house of God are, first, devotion to God, and second, a spirit of sacrifice.

"If your membership followed these requisites, it wouldn't be necessary to seek professional assistance; they would give eagerly and joyously, making such a plan unnecessary."

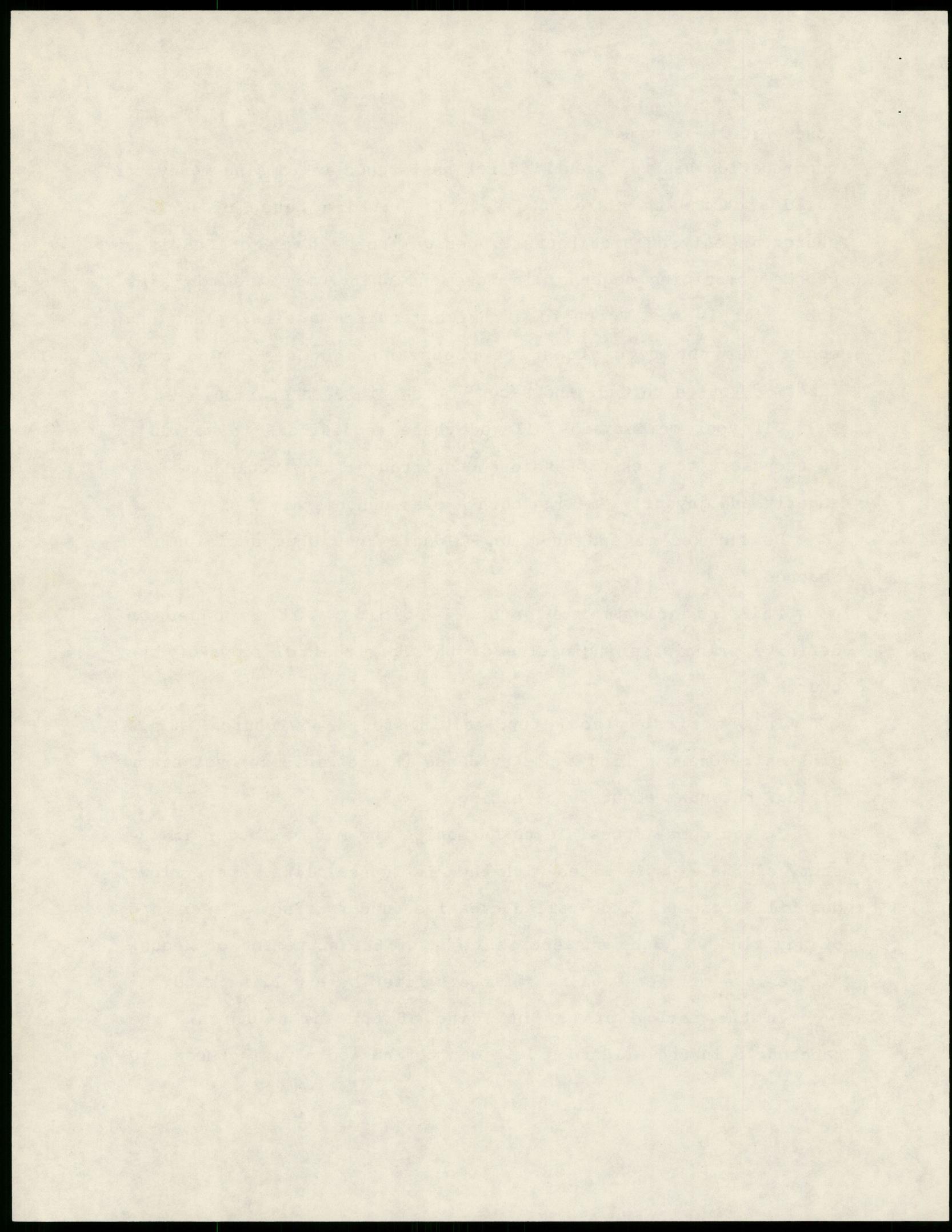
He thanked me and hung up. I don't know what decision was reached.

This is not just a personal opinion. It is based on definite principles indicative of the spiritual climate of the church.

In the first place, fund-raising for a new church is not biblical. One can find ample evidence in the Bible for voluntary giving, but none about fund-raising.

It would be impossible to harmonize the motive factor in the story of the widow's mites with the "influence, like water, flows downhill" concept in so-called creative fund-raising. Pressure of any kind would be suspect in light of the statement of Jesus, "if ye love me"; or Paul's, "if there first be a willing mind."

In the record of the building of the first church, (the tabernacle in the wilderness) we don't find God advising Moses to

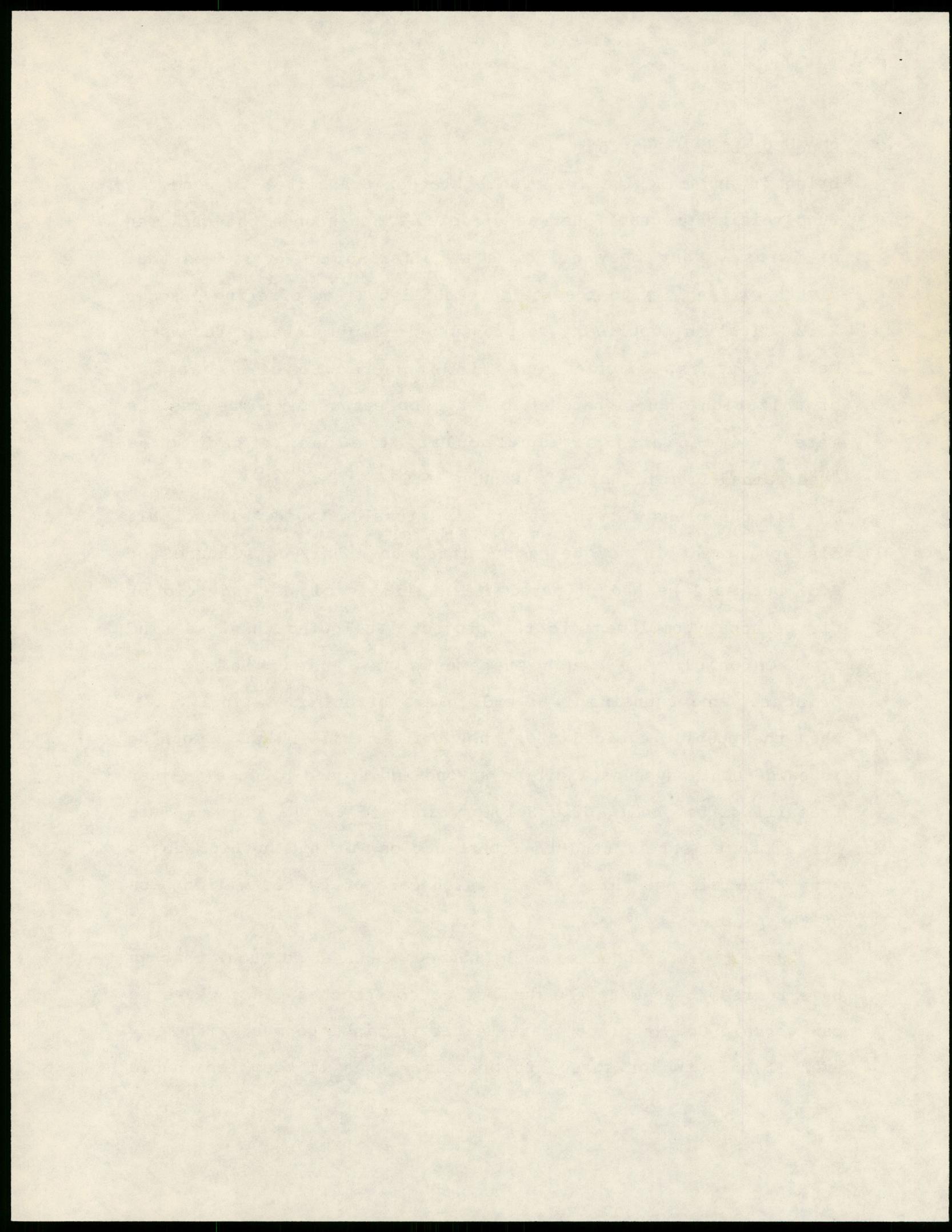


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bring in an Amalekite (or even a brother Ephramite) to head the fund raising program. He was directed, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth willingly with the heart ye shall take my offering. Exodus 25:2 (Italics supplied) No pressure is implied here; it was to be a heart experience. One finds no record of a canvass organization, nor a banquet to whip up enthusiasm. The results were so immediate, so spectacular, the people had to be "restrained from bringing." Exodus 36:6

In the plans for the temple at Jerusalem David tells of his disappointment in not being permitted to construct a house for God, but said he had prepared "with all his might" and told of his personal commitment to the project. Following this, we find in 1 Chronicles 29 such statements as, "the chiefs...and princes. .and captains. . . and rulers offering willingly. . . Then the people rejoiced, for they offered willingly." Nothing is said about anyone soliciting anyone--no signed pledges, --just freewill gifts. And, while Solomon did send to the king of Tyre for a man to superintend the construction, it had nothing to do with fund-raising--this was all taken care of by the willingness of the people.

Have times changed so much; have we changed so much, that we have to resort to man-made methods to construct a place where we can worship God--a place where He has promised to meet with us--even if only two or three are present? Does it seem reasonable



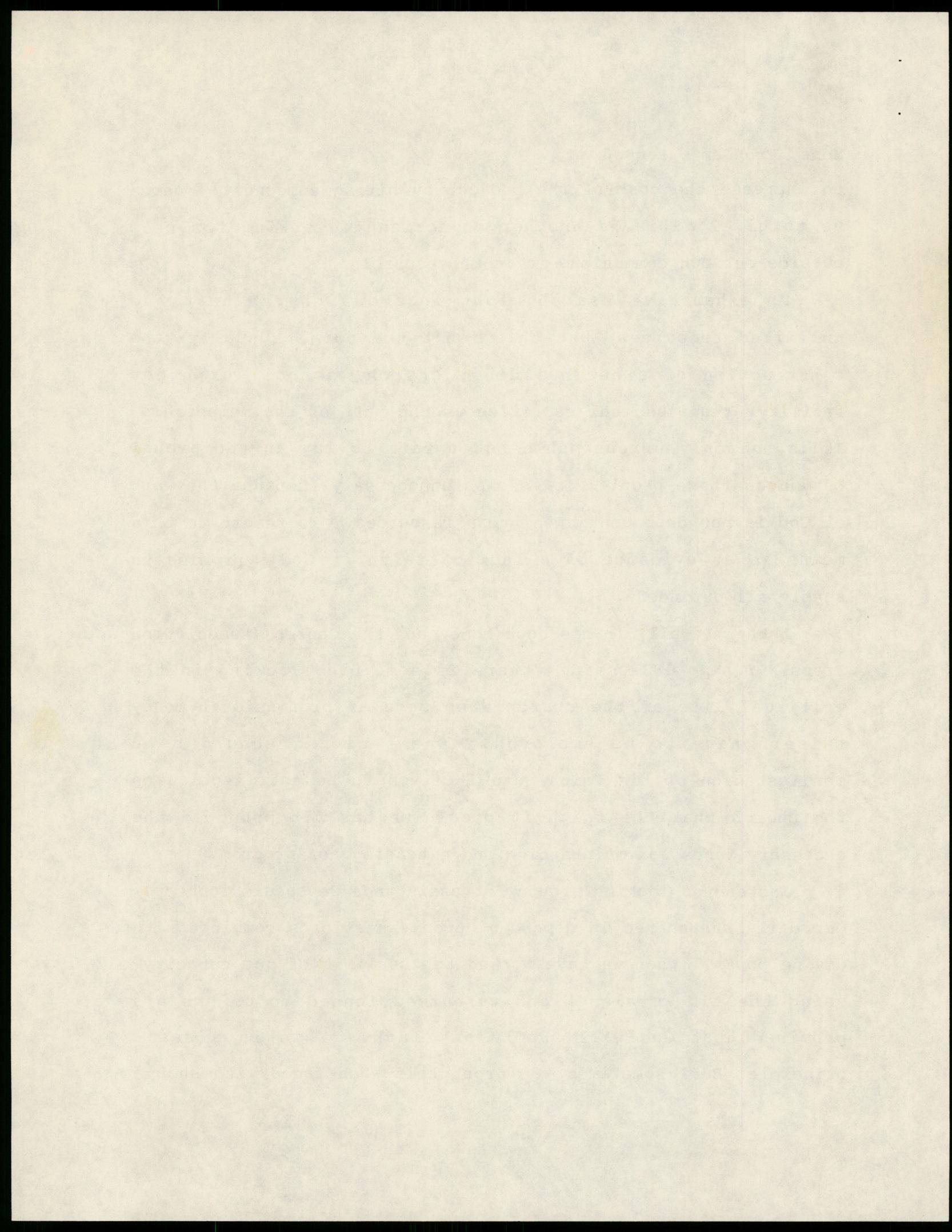
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to increase the cost of the project by hiring someone to coerce us to give? This is another objection to seeking for help outside our own communion--it is unreasonable.

An exhaustive search might locate a church that had unlimited resources, but this isn't the norm. Usually, the construction of a new building: church, school, or other facility, requires real sacrifice on the part of the membership. It is not only unreasonable but unfair to lay an additional burden on these people. It is also unnecessary, because the work of God is not dependent upon human resources. To resort to this means is an evidence of a lack of faith in God's promise to supply all our needs.

Luther Powell, in his book Money and the Church (Association Press, N.Y.) pp 182, said, "there is something lacking in the spiritual life of the church when secular professional money raisers have to be employed. One's giving should be a manifestation of his faith, and it seems to be a reflection on the church that the faith it proclaims has not produced the necessary funds for maintaining and extending her program."

Instead of looking around for assistance we should look up! Our daily sustenance is dependent upon our efforts combined with divine power. When we have worked to the limit of our capacity, using the time, talent, and resources loaned to us, we are promised that God will supply any lack. This is a basic principle. But, sometimes we forget this when faced with such a



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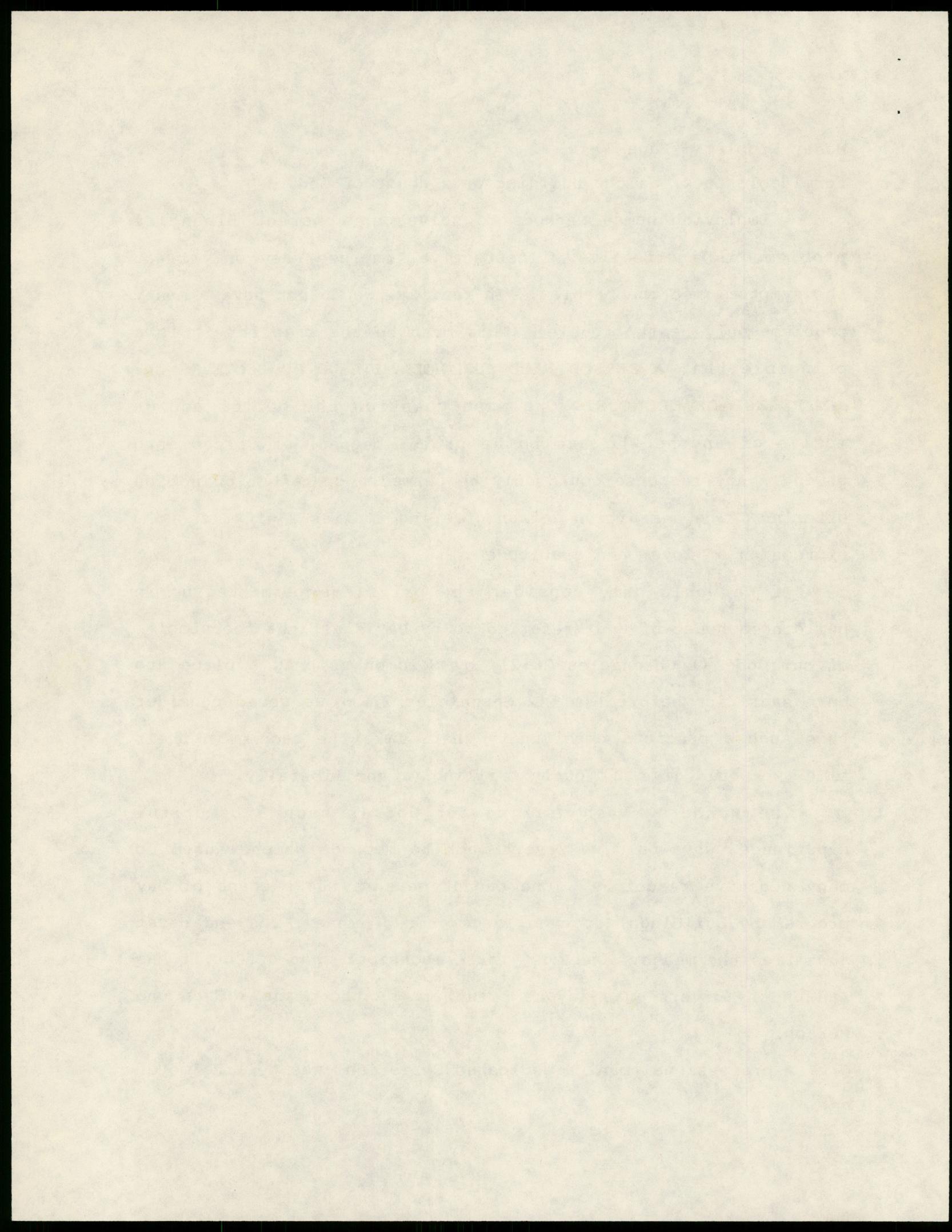
formidable task, as the building of a house of God.

Employing human methods to solve our apparent financial problems is ineffective. Ineffective, because they only treat the symptom, not the problem. In reality, we do not have a money problem--only heart trouble! This must be the case for it is a principle that A PERSON WILL SUPPORT ANYTHING HE BELIEVES IN, REGARDLESS OF THE COST. One must question the belief and/or motive of anyone who has to be urged, begged, or forced into giving. Any response could only be termed a contribution not an offering. The definition of an offering implies a gift: an expression of love, and gratitude .

If we would only consider the privilege permitted us in building a house of God, referred to by David as "the footstool of our God" (1 Chronicles 28:2); by Solomon as only a place "to burn sacrifice before him" (2 Chronicles 2:6), we would consider this such a precious opportunity that, like the people in their time, we would give "joyously, willingly, and liberally.

One wonders, when working for God is such a beautiful experience, why would we revert back to methods which caused so many negative reactions. One cannot measure the success of any program by buildings, or even large sums of money; the end never justifies the means. One must rather consider what effect it has had on the givers--has anyone been hurt by the means? Even one person.

A professional man, a dedicated Christian, was telling me of



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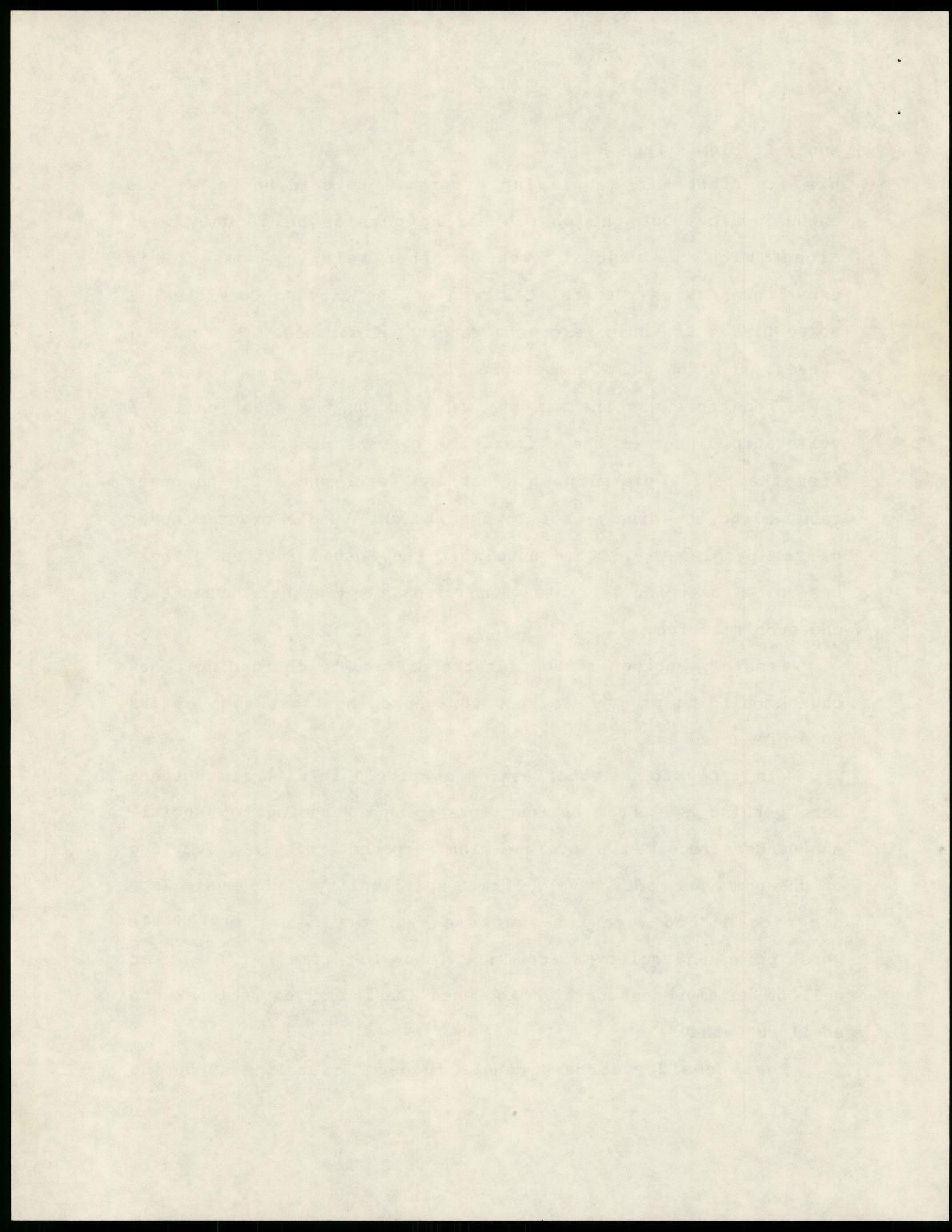
his experience in a building program. He said he wasn't too enthusiastic about the church hiring outside help, but "went along" with the majority vote. After relating some of his experiences as the General Chairman of the Canvass Committee, I asked him if he would welcome a repeat performance. He replied, "Never! I'd change my membership first!"

Then there was the man who was "put on the spot" during a fellowship dinner at the climax of a canvass program. He got up from the table, picked up his hat and coat, and left--he never returned to the dinner--nor to the church. God's program never drives people away. "Come unto me," the Master invites. There has to be something terrible wrong with any plan that causes even one such reaction.

Possibly another reason for the difficulty in funding a new church building program is that the church has lost some of its aura of sacredness.

In reply to a letter asking if people felt their churches were getting away from serious worship and becoming too social, Ann Landers received an overwhelming response. This is a sampling of the comments made: "very little spirituality", "the music is a disgrace", "too much fun-stuff in the service", "very little worshipping and quiet meditation", "show biz time", "might as well be an amusement park", "too much leaning on parishioners to shell out money", etc..

There could even be a danger in our "friendliness" during

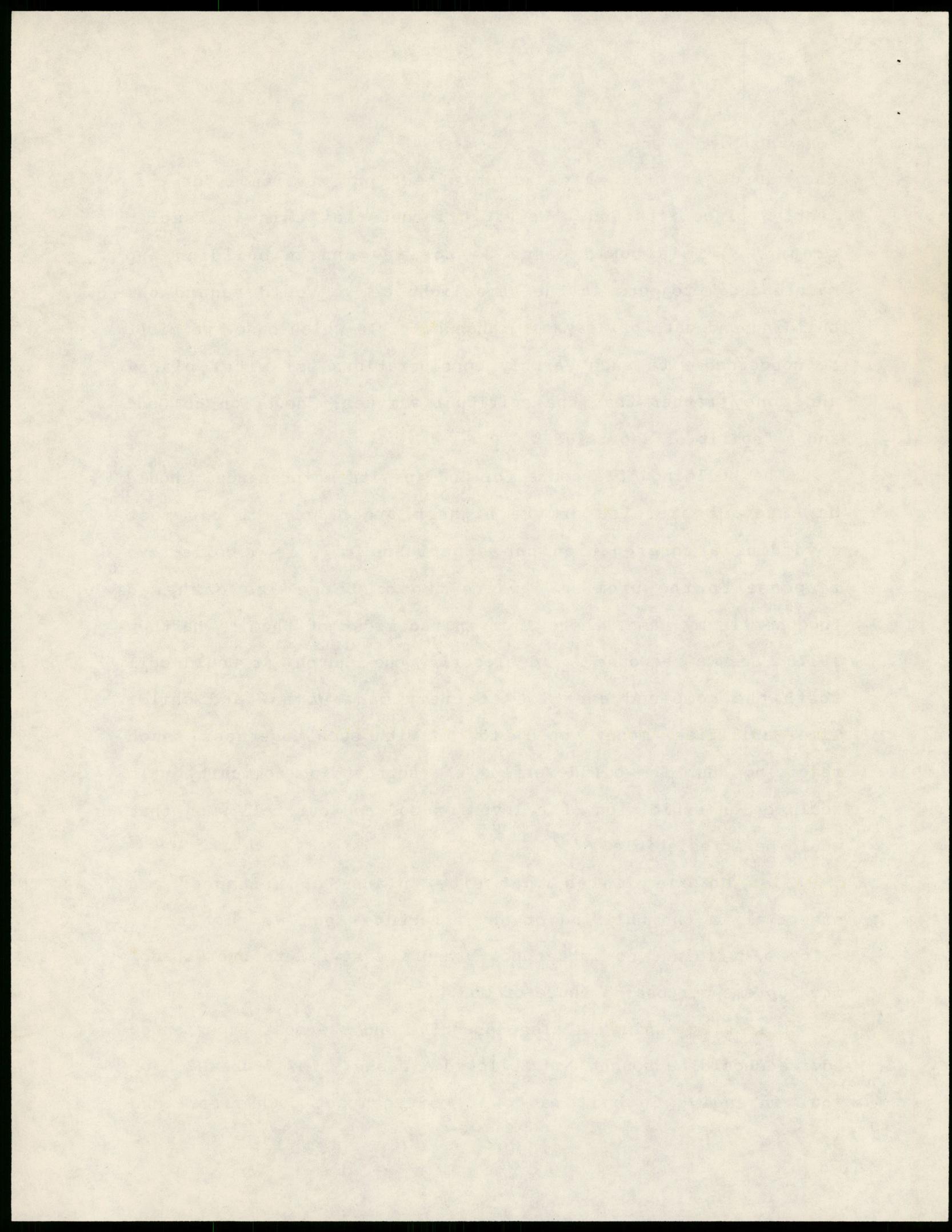


the church service which might affect our reverence for this meeting place with God. We might forget that this is "sacred ground". This could cause us to view church building and maintenance projects in the same light as we would regard the building and care of, say, a grange hall. In which case, we might be concerned with such earthly considerations as: site, plans, and money rather than the spiritual virtues: "devotion to God" and a "spirit of sacrifice."

The building of a house for God (or its maintenance) should be a devout exercise of the highest order, one of the most rewarding a congregation can experience. It is a collective response to the promise, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." Matthew 18:20 Such a response would electrify the church; it would call forth the combined energies of every man, woman, and child. Time, abilities, money would flow in with such eagerness, such rejoicing that it would overflow the surrounding community. It would be an exhibition of a love for God and our fellowmen that would be irresistible.

No one denies that site, plans, and finances are essential in the building of any structure, but we must never allow a building, no matter how grand its style, to over-shadow its supreme purpose: a house of God.

Careful planning is also essential and the most experienced advice should be sought and followed. Jesus said, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and



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counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Luke 14:28 Establishing a "rate of anticipated income" is also an element of good planning. However, in determining this, care must be used to be sure no pressure is involved. The decision must be between the individual and God--it must be anonymous, unless, of course, the individual chooses to reveal it..

All of these necessary procedures--preparing a site, planning the construction, evaluating the potential of the church--must be accomplished under Biblical guidelines. This, will not only result in the preparation of a house of God, it is the only way it can be prepared!

When, in our love and fervor for God we have worked and given to the limit of our individual and collective capacity, then we can expect the impossible for God never gives a work to be done without making provision for its accomplishment. We are limited to following directions: He is unlimited in producing the results.

Worshiping a God whose resources are inexhaustible, how could we ever have a money problem?--if there is a problem--it is heart trouble!

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