**Make giving regular, reliable and real**

I have a confession to make; I’m not a tither. After you get over the shock that the Director of Stewardship Development for the diocese of Toronto does not set aside ten percent of his gross or net income for the ministry of the church, let me qualify my statement. I am a proportionate giver. This is not some watered-down term to make tithing sound more acceptable to modern day Christians. It is a discipline rooted in scripture and intimately tied to our understanding of stewardship.

Many Christians support their churches and clergy with monetary contributions of one kind or another. Frequently this is called tithing whether or not it follows the ten percent rule of the Old Testament. However, as tithing was an ingrained Jewish custom by the time of Jesus, no specific command to tithe is found in the New Testament. Christians are not restricted in their giving to the Old Testament understanding of tithing. Instead they are to be challenged by New Testament guidelines which describe giving as proportionate to one’s income, and is consistent, sacrificial and joyful.

Jesus’ measure is actually a tougher one to follow than the one commanded under Mosaic Law. We are not just asked to give a part of what we have, but all that we have. We all have gifts – some obvious and others less so. Consider what Peter says in his first letter: “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” As stewards, we gladly share with others our time, our talent and our treasure without ceasing. “All that we have belongs to God,” Jesus would say. Life is God’s gift to us. How we live, is our gift to God.

So how can a newcomer to the church relate to our understanding of giving? Above all, make a commitment to give – your ability, your time, your prayers and your money. Make giving regular, reliable and real. Ensure that the gift is one that makes you feel like it is making a difference.

**What should I give?**

If you are being introduced to proportionate giving for the first time, consider donating one hour’s pay per week to church and a similar amount to charity. Those who are retired are encouraged to consider giving an equivalent amount (2.5%) from their retirement income. This approach can have two very positive outcomes: First, it makes the work week and the work of our hands holy because our act of giving is intimately tied to how we earn a living. Secondly, an hour’s pay is simple and profound and it may increase with time to reflect our progress in life.

**Does God expect me to give if I am facing serious financial burdens?**

Those who may be unemployed or facing serious financial burdens should consider how they might give of their time and talent to the church on a weekly basis and pray for the ministry of the Church. Everyone, regardless of income level, should be encouraged to give something. Even in our hardship we experience blessing.

**Is it okay to just give time and talent?**

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is the ultimate example of selflessness. Jesus gave everything and He gave it freely. As a disciple, sometimes we do things that are inconvenient. Scripture does not run away from what we should give. Time and talent are important (and often overlooked) aspects of stewardship, but without treasure, the teaching is incomplete. To be a Christian is to bear witness to a life of surrender and that includes our financial wealth as well.

**What is a pledge?**

A pledge is a spiritual commitment to giving of our time, talent and treasure, and it is based on our belief that we give because we receive. It serves as a helpful indicator to church leaders of what they might expect to receive from the congregation and it helps keep us focused on the needs of the church.

**Why should I pledge rather than simply drop money on the plate?**

All gifts demonstrate a Christian witness of the importance to give freely. A pledge however encourages the giver to consider the gift and its amount in a thoughtful and prayerful way. It encourages us to give of our first fruits as opposed to what is left over. In that way we are making the needs of God’s church and ministry a priority in our life and ensuring that our gift will be regular, reliable and real.

Our material goods are often the greatest barrier to our trust in God. Therefore, it is important to take the time to teach newcomers how and why we must change our attitude to wealth. It requires persistence and careful teaching to wean people away from the materialism of modern life to a true understanding of Christian generosity.