

# *Faces of Faith*



*A Steward's  
Book of Prayers*

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This document has been prepared by the Standing Commission on Stewardship and Development for the 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church.



## Foreword

As part of its report to the 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota, July 29–August 8, 2003, the Standing Commission on Stewardship and Development (SCSD) identified as one of its goals to

“Continue to encourage the teaching of Holy Habits (tithing, prayer, Sabbath time), the development of Stewardship Statements at all dimensions of our church’s life, and the telling of our stewardship stories.”

One of the ways we chose to begin this “telling of our stewardship stories” was by collecting giving stories and prayers from throughout the church and sharing them by way of this *Faces of Faith—A Steward’s Book of Prayers* document in the context of the 74th General Convention.

We are indebted to the following members of the SCSD for their role (as noted below) in making this publication possible. Without their volunteer efforts, this publication would not have happened.

For serving on the sub-committee for collecting stories:

Susan Erdey	Joan Kline
Tom Gossen	Blanca Rivera

For serving on the sub-committee for collecting prayers:

Richard Aguilar	Sharon Davenport
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For serving as the venue for inviting and receiving responses:

Tom Gossen and The Episcopal Network for Stewardship

For completing the monumental effort of editing the materials and composing the final product:

Susan Erdey



We are also, in no small way, indebted to those who responded to the published requests by sending touching stories and prayers to share in this way with the entire church. Thank you.

This material will remain available in electronic format on various websites, including

- the Stewardship section of the Episcopal Church website [www.episcopalchurch.org/congr/Stewardship/index.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/congr/Stewardship/index.htm)
- the website for TENS (The Episcopal Network for Stewardship) <http://tens.org>.

Active members of the Standing Commission on Stewardship and Development for the 2000–2003 triennium included:

The Rev. Richard J. Aguilar, *2003*  
 Canon Sharon L. Davenport, *2006*  
 Ms. Susan T. Erdey, *2006, secretary*  
 Mr. Thomas R. Gossen, *2003, co-chair*  
 The Very Rev. Dr. W. Richard Hamlin, *2006*  
 Mrs. Joan O. Kline, *2003*  
 The Rt. Rev. Henry N. Parsley, Jr., *2003, co-chair*  
 Ms. Blanca Rivera, *2006*  
 The Rt. Rev. Gordon Paul Scruton, *2006*  
 Mr. Walter Virden III, *2003*

Needless to say, all the members of SCSD extend their heartfelt gratitude to those individuals who responded to our request to submit stories and prayers in order that this publication might be possible. Unfortunately, it was not possible to include everyone's offering, but the vast majority have been incorporated into this final product. Thank you, one and all!

Mr. Thomas R. Gossen, *co-chair*  
 The Rt. Rev. Henry N. Parsley, Jr., *co-chair*



## A Stewardship Prayer

Dear God,

We believe that all things are possible if we allow your Holy Spirit to empower us.

Send your Holy Spirit, we pray, upon each of us individually and upon this committee here gathered to assist us—to empower us—in responding to you in thanksgiving for your love.

We acknowledge that all we have has come from you as gifts of your love for us.

We want to respond to this love by gratefully returning a small portion to further your good works here on earth; to help others find and love you.

So, we formed this committee, hoping to help others to become good stewards of your bounty.

Empower us, Lord, to work together, united in our common goal, fruitfully to help St. Albanites become good stewards in thanksgiving for your numerous gifts and blessings.

Empower us to devise and carry out an effective campaign to allow all to participate out of love for you.

Empower us to ignore or overcome obstacles that hinder our work, especially personal grievances.

Empower us to not minimize the work required of us but strengthen us for the task.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

*Morrie Tardiff  
St. Alban's Episcopal Church  
Indianapolis, Indiana*



## *Giving Until It Feels Good*

Before I became aware of a theology of stewardship, I was, as the wonderful woman to whom I am married would say, a *miserly banker*. I was employed by a bank, and I was a bit of a miser. I had no understanding about generosity, especially when it came to money. I thought my money was mine since I had worked hard for it and had earned it. I believed in the old adage *give until it hurts*. I gave little away because I had a low pain threshold. More importantly, I thought security and happiness came about through acquiring and holding on to money. All that has changed, and I am so thankful to God that it did!

For me, now, stewardship has everything to do with my relationship with God. Before, I had no real relationship with God. My spiritual life was dead. To the extent that I was an effective banker, it was because acquiring and holding on to money was very important to me.

Then God broke through in my life in a most miraculous way. God sent messengers into my life who witnessed to me about their rich spiritual lives and about the close, loving relationship they had with God. They described *tithing*, by first becoming an intentional proportionate giver, as an essential discipline in their spiritual journeys.

The power of their witness started me on my spiritual journey. I knew they had something very precious, something I did not have. I wanted the same kind of rich, spiritual relationship with God they had. So I embraced the discipline of becoming an intentional proportionate giver. I became a tither, not because it says to in the Bible, but because that level of giving began to express my level of love and thanks to God.



I believe that stewardship is everything I do after I say, “I believe.” It begins with my acknowledgment that all that I have and all that I am is a gift from God. Life is a gift from the loving God. Each day is a new gift from the generous God, a new opportunity in my journey to strive to be more faithful each day. My talents, those things I enjoy doing and do well, those are a gift from God. Stewardship means discovering these gifts from God, developing them, and deploying them for God’s use in the world. Finally, even my money, that money for which I seemingly worked so hard, that is also a gift from God. To prevent money from controlling me, I need to offer God the first 10% of my money, as an offering of love, sacrifice, and thanksgiving. When I make offerings to God, I am drawn into a closer relationship with God.

The spiritual life that was once dead and nonexistent grows richer each day. I feel the Grace of God in miraculous new ways in my life. I know Jesus Christ to be my Savior, and I feel Christ walking beside me in life each and every day. I feel empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit as God gently pulls me out of “my comfort zone,” helps me use my gifts to do God’s work.

My spiritual journey, this wonderful gift for which I thank God every day, would never have started if some other loving Christians had not given me the most precious gift one person of faith can give to another. They gave me the gift of their story, their faith journey. The power of those stories empowered me to begin my own journey. I thank God for those wonderful messengers, those evangelists. I thank God for God’s love, generosity, and forgiveness.

One last thing. I no longer believe in the adage *give until it hurts*. I now believe in *giving until it feels good*. It feels good to give generously. It feels good to make joyful offerings to God.

Bruce Rockwell  
Springfield, Massachusetts



## *A Prayer for Holy Habits*

Lord, give us the habit of prayer, study, fellowship and giving.

Help us to grow in love and grace.

May we offer ourselves and our lives as a living sacrifice to you.

Amen.

*Helen Forshaw  
Trinity Episcopal Church  
Easton, PA*





## *Things You Don't Talk About*

In my very Southern family, there were lots of things you didn't talk about. I'm fairly certain, in fact, that for years I believed that flatulence was one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

And of course, there was the big unspeakable: money. I think we had some, although I remember a period in which my mother whipped butter flavoring into the margarine to satisfy both her higher sensibilities and budget restraints. All in all, however, with help from grandparents and my parents' good educations, I think we did just fine in the money department, but who would really know? You never asked and were never told.

I tell my kids all about money, all of the time. I spell it out for them in excruciating detail.

"Do you have any idea how much that shirt wadded up on the floor costs?" I shriek in horror. "Maybe if you had to pay the \$30 yourself you'd treat it better."

Ha. These are kids living with a multi-trillion dollar deficit. They hear of gargantuan sums of money tossed around like candy wrappers every day, and it means nothing to them. But it makes me feel better, somehow, to drum it into their heads how much everything costs and how hard we work to acquire it.

The reason, I think, that I talk about money so much to my kids is because I am scared to death of it. It is a subject that I speak of with a mixture of awe and terror. Between my blissfully naïve childhood and my painfully aware adulthood, I have had some really bad experiences with money.

My first bank account as an adult ended rather quickly in



an amount of returned check charges that far surpassed the original balance. My generous nature as a roommate in college combined with an utter lack of funds resulted in even more financial ruin.

My merry denial of facts continued trustingly into my first marriage and eventually resulted in standing on courthouse steps, newborn infant in my arms, watching my home be auctioned off to the highest bidder at a foreclosure sale.

At that point in my life, with no home, no money and no marriage to speak of, I, in my best Scarlett O'Hara imitation, vowed that I would never be so powerless again. Because that is how I have always felt about money. That it is about power.

For me, having money means feeling safe. I love paying my bills every month, because I can.

Having money means freedom. Having money means I will never have to stand on the courthouse steps, never have to put on my dress of curtains, never have to spend day after day suffering the shame of bill collectors calling me and making me feel like a speck of worthless nothing.

And yet, if I look back even five years ago, I wonder, "How did we do it?" Todd and I had just had our third child, we lived in a house that cost more than the one we have now, I was not working, and we were bringing in about half of the income we have now.

And, indeed, how did we do it? I suspect that many of you know the answer, one that I have just learned in the last few years. We did it with God's help. There is no other explanation. In fact, we didn't really do it at all. We simply benefited from the blessings that came our way, much needed, always in time.

I did not know this then. I want to believe it now. I want to believe that only when I can let go of my money will I truly be free. I want to trust that God will provide for me and mine when I give back to Him what I know deep down is already



His. I want to give the power to God, let myself be free of the feelings of need and dependence I have about money.

Yet in some ways, I feel like the person who has reached the peak of his life, only to find out he has a terminal disease. “What do you mean?” I want to scream, “I’m finally getting the money thing straight—what do you mean I have to give it away!?” Well, the diagnosis is clear in my case—the patient will not survive without the right prescription.

It is time for me to let my money go. And just when I was starting to have some, I have to say goodbye to it. Oh, I know it’s the right thing to do. I know that the money is not really mine in the first place. I know as I lie deep in the night what God wants for me. I wish I could tell you that I am joyful and ready to give all to Him. But I am afraid.

I am really, really afraid. I have looked into the abyss of without, and I don’t want to be there again. I don’t want to feel powerless, but I know I must, because until and unless I make this leap of faith, I will never be free.

I give thanks to God for putting me in this great church where I am able to witness joyful giving and good works and let my heart be opened to His will.

I will give unto Him what is His, both in thanksgiving for what he has given me, and because that Southern upbringing reminds me to do the right thing. And it is so very right. And a good and joyful thing.

*Alyson Anderson  
St. David's Episcopal Church  
Austin, Texas*



## *Prayers on Bargaining With God*

I.

Oh, Heavenly Father,

This is the year I plan to volunteer. Lead me to just the right ministry to spread your light. I can't come Tuesday afternoons or Thursday evening, nor any mornings because of previous commitments. But please, Father, lead me into the ministry that is just right for me.

Maybe Stephen ministry. Well, but I can't come to their meetings. Or any meetings on Wednesday nights. But, Father, my church has so many worthwhile ministries, I leave it in your hands—oh, but I just don't have the knack for singing. Altar Guild is out because of Saturday morning. I don't think...

Yes, Father? ... yes, 10% ... of gross!

If you will, show me what I could do.

Yes, I could do that.

And that.

Would I do it for You?!



II.

Hello, God.

If you had your choice which would you want more, my money or my time? You do have a choice? ... And you want both ... 10%.

But, Father, if I may ask, if everyone gave as you are asking me to give, there would be so much money. Much more than we are even asking this year. Maybe some of us who have less could cut down the percentage. Nevermind! Pretend you didn't hear that! Well, we could get a new organ, new robes for the priests, maybe a new bus.

Yes, Lord? ... You know I love you Lord ... Feed your sheep?!

So much to do, Lord, I wouldn't even know where to start ... When did I see you, Lord?

Whatever I did for the hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison.

Anything I did for one of these, however humble, I did for You.

*Patricia Boyce*



## *Why Are You Making Me Do This?*

In 1980 we bought a derelict house in a very iffy neighborhood on the North Shore of Staten Island. The large Victorian houses had been converted into apartments or rooming houses by slumlords who milked them dry, left them vacant, and then sold them to urban homesteaders. “Move in condition” in the neighborhood meant that an ancient furnace could be coaxed into working; it did not imply that any plumbing or electrical systems were operable. The man who sold us our house held a private mortgage because no bank would make loans in that area. He thought the people buying his properties were fools.

By December I was wondering if he was right, because we could not make it. My partner, a priest and artist, was not working as a priest and made next to nothing from his art. The wind blew against the sheets of plastic we’d stapled to windows we couldn’t afford to repair. The oil company demanded cash for its deliveries, so the tank was often dry. My job paid me once a month, so we were broke three weeks out of four. I had already taken a second job as the organist at a parish in nearby Bayonne, but we still had to borrow money from a friend that month. We were pledging what I thought was a generous amount, but we had fallen behind in our weekly pledge. It was just one more bill we couldn’t pay. I had done all I could do, and it wasn’t enough.

At an Advent Evensong, the rector took a liberty with the lectionary and preached on Malachi 3:8ff, in which the prophet brings God’s accusation of theft against the people. “You are robbing me...Bring the full tithe into the storehouse...and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of



hosts. See if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.”

I remembered my childhood. My mother had brought us up to tithe. I asked her once through gritted teeth as I was putting ten percent of my allowance into the envelope, “Why are you making me do this?”

“I’m making you do this now so that you’ll do it when you grow up,” she answered.

“Okay, God,” I said, “okay. I’ll put you to the test.” When I got paid at the end of the month, I wrote a check to our parish for ten percent of what I put into the bank. It worked out to a little more than twice our weekly pledge. I turned in the check and held my breath.

Nothing happened. That is to say, the windows of heaven did not open to pour money down on us, and our windows were still covered with plastic. However, something else also didn’t happen. We did not go deeper into the hole. We were somehow, and don’t ask me how, better able to make ends meet on 90% of our income than we had been on 100%.

In reality, everything happened, and it happened in us. Giving away more money than you know you can afford has a powerful effect on you. It forces you to realize that money is just a tool; it’s just a means, not an end. Everything goes wrong with our attitudes toward money when we think of money as an end. If money is the end, then people and relationships become means to that end. If money is just a means, then people and relationships can become ends in themselves.

And that’s where we’ve been growing in the twenty-two years since. The check to the church is always the first one written after a deposit. And it’s always on the gross. If we’re not going to rob God, why chisel Him?

Besides, then the tax refund is free money that’s already been tithed on.



After we became accustomed to giving away the basic tithe, we realized that it's easy to add generous occasional offerings for all kinds of things on top of that.

During the years John was rector of a parish on Staten Island, we came to realize more and more how easy it is to give money, time, attention—whatever you have at your disposal.

So thank you, Mother; thank you, drafty old house; thank you, Malachi; thank you, Bayonne; for leading me to make the adult decision to tithe.

It's not a decision one can regret. How could one regret coming to rely on God's promises and providence?

*The Rev. Gerald W. Keucher  
New York, New York*





## *A Leader's Prayer*

O God, put us in the midst of what you are doing; make us acutely mindful of your passion for us and for the world; and help us to bless what you are creating here and now. We pray this in the presence of Jesus, our life and hope. Amen.

*Bill Easum and Tom Bandy  
revised by Rich Winters and Mary Jo Schuetz  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
Indianapolis, Indiana*



## *What Do I Need?*

- I need my money.
- I am the only one footing my bill.
- I don't make very much money.
- I am good with my money—frugal and deliberate.
- I like the freedom of self-reliance.
- It is important to take care of myself and not be a burden to others.

These are my thoughts when I start to consider giving my money away.

I remember a different time, though; I remember my Daddy's big soft hand holding mine as he would pass me a dollar. I knew what it was for. I was to hold on to it until they brought us the bowl. I would put that dollar in with all the others. This was the routine, and out of obedience to my father I would do it. I loved that routine. I felt so important—so connected. I might think about how the church would help people far away and my little dollar might travel on this great mission.

What about that dollar? Why did my Daddy put that money in my hand? Sure, the church can always use a buck, but that wasn't his pledge, his real gift to the church—or was it?

Maybe he knew that I needed to give; he knew that I needed to feel significant. He knew that I needed to understand the responsibilities of funding the ministry, and he knew that I would need ministering. He wanted to trust me to put the money in the bowl. I learned to trust him to provide the gift. He knew that this silly routine made us closer, my Daddy and me.



As I got older this routine changed. I let the obedience slip by pocketing the money for a coke in Sunday School.

Now I am older and the routine is changing still. I don't have to sneak coke money. I can make all my own decisions about giving, spending and saving. I have become good at evaluating the needs and worth of the many organizations wanting a piece of my discretionary pie. Sometimes I am emotional, other times I am objective about this process. That is why my church pledge stands alone. This is a gift out of obedience, not merit or emotion.

- I give to the church because God asks.
- He doesn't ask me to measure the worth of the church.
- He doesn't ask for my very good excuses.
- He wants my love and that is simple obedience.

I may have been taught this lesson of obedience early but the mastery of this lesson is still a struggle.

So I limit my struggle as best I can by making a yearly pledge—a financial promise of support, which doesn't change if the sermon is boring or if I am out of town. I am faithful to my promise.

It reminds me that although I need my money, I need to be free of it even more. I need to feel significant in the ministry of the church. I need to be connected more than I need self-reliance. I need to trust my Father to provide the gift, to let me hold the money for a while and then, out of obedience, I put it in the bowl with all the others. And this routine makes us closer, my Father and me.

If I sit next to my Daddy in church he'll still slip me a buck half-way through the service. He thinks it's cute. It is part of our routine.

*Cissy Warner  
St. David's Episcopal Church  
Austin, Texas*



## *Prayer for a Stewardship Conference or Meeting*

O God, our creator—the source of life and  
all we have and all we are—

We are aware of your grace and generosity  
always at work in our lives.

We recognize our need to be here for  
renewal and refreshment.

We thank you for our diversity and our  
unity, and for the good work you  
have given us to do; and we praise  
you for trusting us to do this work.

We thank you for all persons, known  
and unknown, who have made it  
possible for us to be here; and we  
give thanks for past and present leadership  
of the stewardship program of the  
Episcopal Church.

We thank you for our conference leaders and their  
work in making the detailed arrangements  
for our meeting together.

We thank you for the gifts that each of us enjoys: our  
minds, bodies, spirits, abilities, the  
communities of which we are a part,  
our families, friends and all our supporting  
relationships.

We thank you for those in the parishes we serve.

We ask your Holy Spirit to be present with  
us in our work and to give us strength,  
guidance and open minds.



We pray for the health of the Episcopal Church  
under the leadership of our Presiding Bishop,  
and our stewardship role in your Church.

We offer our personal petitions and thanksgivings  
in silence or spoken aloud.

We ask these things in the name of the one  
through whom we all are one,  
Jesus Christ, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

*John LesCallet*  
*Edwina Simpson*  
*Nancy Berry*  
*Greg Rickel*  
*Charles Gearing*  
*Beverly Ludford*



## *An Illustration of Tithing*

Sermon for Pentecost 21

Proper 25-C

I've always tried to identify myself with the tax collector (or publican) in the parable Jesus told in today's Gospel. More often than not, I suspect, I behave like the Pharisee. And I'm afraid I'm going to sound like the Pharisee this morning. I don't mean to. But I do want to share with you some of my own experience about learning to tithe, because it has really changed my life. It can also change yours—if you will let it. Let me tell you how tithing has transformed my life.

I graduated from seminary when I was 28 years old. I was married. My wife's name was Eloise. We had one child three and a half years old, and another on the way. We went to a small church in a small town in our home diocese of Oklahoma. As part of our compensation, the church there provided us with a home—unfurnished. Since we had no furniture, we went to the furniture store and the department store and the hardware store and purchased (on credit) what we needed to get started. I also needed some clerical clothes, and my wife needed some clothing, and so did our son. We found a friendly grocery store where we could charge our groceries so we wouldn't go hungry—at least not this month.

One evening a year or so later, we went to a diocesan meeting and heard a presentation on the meaning of stewardship. The speaker walked to the podium carrying a grocery sack that he placed on a table near the podium. He began speaking about tithing. To illustrate his subject, he reached into the grocery sack and pulled out a large, Red Delicious



apple. Well, of all the fruits I had ever eaten, my very favorite was large, Red Delicious apples. As he laid that apple on the edge of the podium in front of him, he had my full attention. He described this as one of the gifts that God has given to us for living in this world. It represented the gift of *life*.

Then he reached into the sack and took out another apple. “This is the gift of *companionship and community*,” he said. I figured out that he was talking about Adam and Eve. He placed this apple next to the one on the podium in front of him.

He took out a third apple—the gift of *personality and personhood*. Adam and Eve knew each other as persons—different, as Genesis says, “. . .In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27)—but they are real persons who could live together in relation with each other in purity and innocence; as Genesis says, “The man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” (Genesis 2:25)

Then there was the gift of the *natural resources* of the universe. This represented the Garden of Eden as symbol of the friendly environment of the earth. He put this next to the other apples on the podium.

He continued taking apples out of his grocery sack, describing each of them as one of the gifts God has given us in his creation.

The gift of *knowledge*: how to use the natural resources of creation—and how not to use them. I thought of the apple tree: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man: ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’” (Genesis 2:15-17)



Then there was the gift of *family*, the gift of *love*, the gift of *parenthood*—all of which reminded me of the story of Cain and Abel.

And the greatest gift of all—the gift of *freedom* to use all these things any way we choose.

He placed each of them on the podium in front of him until he had nine big, beautiful Red Delicious apples surrounding him on the podium.

When he came to the tenth apple, he held it up and said, “This is the gift of *charity and generosity*. What God asks is that we simply return one apple as an offering in thanks for all God has done for us.” He replaced the apple in the sack. “Do what you want with the other nine. They’re yours.”

Well, we went home that night “hooked” on the idea of tithing. I checked our finances and discovered that we were giving to our church and other charitable purposes a total of one-half of one percent of our gross income. And we owed *everybody* in town.

Living in a small town, it is not a good thing for a congregation if their preacher is known as someone who doesn’t pay his bills. But, somehow, we were convinced we had to become tithers *and* pay our bills.

So, little by little, we began. The first thing we paid off was our grocery bill. And we’ve never again bought groceries on credit. Then we began paying a little bit on each of our other debts. And as each debt was paid, we did not obligate ourselves for anything else until we increased our pledge. As our debts decreased, our giving increased.

It took us seven years to accomplish this, and for the first time in our lives, we were giving away a tithe of our gross income. It was the second year we moved to Kansas. And we have continued tithing ever since. The only difference is that





our giving has increased beyond the tithe, and financially we have never been better off than we are now.

When I say “we,” let me explain.

For twenty-five years, after we moved to Topeka, we were close friends with Don and Mary Curry. They were long-time members of St. David's Church in Topeka, where I was rector for nine of those twenty-five years. Their children and our children went to the same high school; our sons were acolytes together and our children (all seven of them) participated together in church youth programs. Mary and Eloise were both musicians, and for years made wonderful music together.

Eloise died of cancer eleven years ago. We had been married forty-two years. Mary's husband, Don, had died of cancer a few months before Eloise. They had been married thirty-eight years. Between us we had eighty years of marriage experience; we decided we knew how to do it. So we were married a year after Eloise died, and the rest is history—most of which you know and some of which you have shared.

Let me know share with you what we have experienced over these years, in the name of God and for the love of our sisters and brothers:

1. *The sense of incredible joy of having accomplished our objective*—it's like what I imagine a woman must feel when she gives birth to a healthy, robust child. It's the joy of children.

I have vivid memories of the birth of our three children. This was in the days when husbands were not welcome in the birthing room, and mothers were completely sedated with anesthetics.

Our first son, Les, was born early in the morning, after Eloise had spent a long night in labor. The only problem was that when the nurse brought him in to present him to his mother, he was the wrong child. It seems that the nurse had



entered the wrong room with another mother's newborn child. But our son soon appeared and we both shared the joy of seeing for the first time a child of our own creation.

Our second son, Brian, was born on Thanksgiving Day, which deprived us of Thanksgiving dinner with our extended family. But that was all right. When the nurse brought him in to his mother for the first time, he looked up out of his swaddling clothes and uttered his first word: "WAAAAAAGH!!!"

Then came the third child. After delivery I went in to see Eloise and tenderly told her that our newest child was a daughter, whom we named Cathy. And the tears of happiness streamed down her cheeks as she experienced the sheer joy that she had given birth to a lovely daughter.

What joy there is in successfully accomplishing a task that we began so long ago. For us it was true in becoming parents; it also has been true in our experience of tithing.

2. *The more we give, the more resources we have to give.* I can't explain this. I just know it's true—it has been and still is true in our life. It's one of the miracles of stewardship—living with an attitude of abundance rather than scarcity.

3. *The more often we give, the more ways we find to be able to give.* I can't explain this, either. I just know that in addition to tithing to our church, we also contribute to twenty-three other charitable organizations. And we have never been in better economic circumstances. In addition to this, Mary has made a significant gift to the church of her childhood in Kingman, Kansas.

All of this has happened since we began to believe that we live with an attitude of abundance, rather than scarcity, and that nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39)

This has been true and still is true in our lives. It can be true in your life. And I know that many of you are on your



way. If you're not, now is the time to begin the journey of learning to tithe. So, as the psalmist says: "The blessing of the Lord be upon you! We wish you good luck, in the Name of the Lord." (Psalm 129:8b—1928 *Book of Common Prayer*)

*The Rev. Frank Cohoon  
Topeka, Kansas*



## *Prayer to God the Creator*

Blessed are you Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for all you have given us, and especially for this time together. May these moments in this space make us more aware of the riches you have given each and every person here and may the Spirit of God continue to inspire us to share these same gifts with each other and the world. For to You and to God the Creator and to the Holy Spirit, we cannot help but offer all the praise and thanksgiving. Amen.

*Tracy Andrés  
New York, New York*



## *Journey into Stewardship*

All my life I have searched for God. I wanted to know Him, to hear Him, to feel His presence. I considered myself a good Christian—I regularly went to church, read and studied the Bible, spent time in prayer, and always tried to do good. But He had eluded me. I saw the look in the eyes of those that knew Him. There was a certain “glow” and “peacefulness” about their demeanor. I wanted that very much. So I earnestly prayed for God to come into my heart. I asked Jesus to help me find my way to the Father.

Then one day I began a journey that started with a simple phone call. My rector called and asked me to become a co-chair for our annual appeal. He caught me completely off-guard and I responded with the ever faithful, “I’ll have to pray about it and I will call you in a few days.”

Well, I did pray about it. I prayed very fervently. I explained to God that He couldn’t possibly expect me to do this job because I certainly wasn’t qualified. I was just an ordinary parishioner that couldn’t lead a hungry cat to his food bowl let alone try to talk to people about parting with their money. And besides, I didn’t know the first thing about organizing and conducting an annual appeal. Oh, I complained and pleaded and moaned and groaned—but I still felt that God wanted me to do this. No, felt is a poor choice of words—I *knew* that He wanted me to do this.

I was desperate. I had to confess a secret that I kept buried deep within my heart—one that I thought was hidden from Him. “Lord,” I prayed, “I have always given generously, but I can’t possibly talk to people about money in church because—



here it comes, Lord—because I don’t think you should ever *talk* about *money* in church.” I secretly criticized those people that talked about money in church. And now He wanted me to be one of those people! I continued, “Jesus never passed the plate. Jesus didn’t build churches and parish halls. We are not supposed to be concerned with material things so why—I’m just being honest, Lord—would you ever ask me to talk to other people about giving their money? I just can’t do it, Lord.”

Let me interject a few facts here. When I first joined the Episcopal Church, I wanted to understand the tithe. So I asked the rector to explain it to me. He said that we should try to give ten percent of all that we receive back to the Lord. I had to steady myself to keep from *passing right out!* “*Ten percent?*” I heard myself shout. “Are you crazy?” “I can’t give ten percent—I *have bills* to pay!” Well, the rector calmly told me that I didn’t have to start at ten percent—I just had to start. So I calculated that if I gradually increased my giving every year, that before I *died* I would be able to reach ten percent and check that one off my “things to do before I depart” list.

Having said that, back to the phone call from the rector. As I said, I pleaded with God for days, but deep down inside I kept hearing that little voice that said, “Just do it!” Finally, I surrendered. I was extremely skeptical and reluctant, but I called the rector and told him “yes.” Then, I had the audacity to tell God that if He expected me to do this job, He had better be prepared to do some miracles to help me.

And so I began the most wonderful journey of my life—my journey into stewardship. I examined my resistance to the topic of money in church. I read what the Bible had to say about this topic. I learned that Jesus talked about this more than any other topic in the Bible. I examined my fears and my reluctance to make a commitment. I began to look at how I spent my money and my priorities. I realized the real price that I paid for each and everything that I spent my money on. I rec-



ognized that I had been saying all my life, “My Lord, I love you. I give you my life but please don’t touch my money.” My perception of the world changed. I was forever changed. I didn’t look at things in the same light as I had before. The words of the Bible came to life for me. Suddenly I understood. I knew what His words really meant! I knew what it was like to “lose my life and save it.” To know the meaning of the words, “Where a man’s treasure is there goes his heart.” I wish that I could tell you everything that has happened to me. I cannot believe that I was so blind and so deaf! I always thought that I had given my life to the Lord and surrendered my will. But I realized that there was a whole part of my being that I still needed to control. I saw all of my “excuses” for what they really were—my fear and lack of faith. I was afraid to give ten percent because I might not have enough. All that the Lord gives me, how could I ever have told Him that ninety percent was simply not enough?

I wanted to share my story with everyone I met. I wanted to tell them how my journey into stewardship had changed my life. I wanted them to hear and see and not make the same mistakes I had made. I wanted them to know the Lord, really know the Lord and feel His presence the way that I did. But they did not want to hear. They said they were sick of all this money talk in church. They said that money talk was certainly not holy talk. I couldn’t believe it. I was so sad. Oh God, I cried, why won’t they listen? I asked myself, “Why didn’t I listen?”

I realized that I thought of stewardship in terms of fundraising. “We have to raise funds to pay the church bills.” “We have to have pledges to make the budget.” “We need more money to expand the physical plant and the outreach programs.” I had heard these phrases many times. *Money, money, money*—we need money—your money.

How can I tell you that stewardship is not fundraising?



Well, stewardship raises funds. But it is more than that—it's a way of living. It's a way of thinking. It's about rejoicing in the ninety percent of God's blessings and joyfully offering Him a small gift of only ten percent. It's heart to heart. It's coming home. It's living through giving. It's learning to share. It's love. It's an abundance of grace. It's feeling free. It's being called and saying, "Yes, my Lord." It's admitting, "I'm afraid, but I have faith that You are with me," and then *really* believing it.

If you ever have a few hours to talk about stewardship, please call me. It's forever changed my life. Praise God. Amen.

*Debbie Hudson*





## *Stewardship Prayers of the People*

### *Officiant*

Nurturing God, your love is free, your compassion unconditional, and your mercy infinite. You shower upon us gifts abundant. Grant that we may know and trust these gifts, that we may discover the joy they bring, and inspire us to serve and to love out of that joy.

Open our lips, O God, that we may proclaim your benevolent truth and your call for justice in our communities, in our congregations, and in the world.

*Gracious God, open our lips.*

Open our minds, O God, that we might dream a Church reconciled, a Church that knows only your love so abundantly that it bursts with a passion for ministry, a desire to give completely, and a sense of stewardship that seeks only to give back.

*Gracious God, open our minds.*

Open our hearts, O God, to be transformed by the mighty outpouring of your compassion, so that our will to serve others with humility, integrity, and urgency is your desired will for us, your servants.

*Gracious God, open our hearts*

Open our eyes, O God, to the hurts and needs of others that call us to ministry. Teach us to see where our own abilities and resources—and the world's deep hunger—meet.

*Gracious God, open our eyes.*

Open our hands, O God, to be your instruments of witness. Help us to work without hesitation, serve without recognition, to do justice, to love kindness, and to serve humbly with you, our God.



*Gracious God, open our hands.*

Open our memories, O God, as we remember those who have died. *(Please add your petitions, silently or aloud)*. Help us honor the wisdom of those who devoted their lives to your service, and who generously gave of their time and treasure.

*Gracious God, open our memories.*

*Celebrant*

Nurturing God, your love is free, your compassion unconditional, and your mercy infinite. You shower upon us gifts abundant. Grant that we may know and trust these gifts, that we may discover the joy they bring, and inspire us to serve and love out of that joy. In the name of the Risen Christ we pray.  
*Amen.*

*Prayers written by the Rev. Devon Anderson (Diocese of Minnesota),  
the Very Rev. Ernesto Medina (Diocese of Los Angeles),  
and Michael Cunningham (Diocese of Los Angeles)  
for the 1998 Diocese of Michigan convention,  
whose theme that year was stewardship.*

*These prayers also appear in  
Women's Uncommon Prayers (Morehouse, 2000).*



## *Total Stewardship*

My understanding of stewardship, of a covenant of faith and trust between a loving and generous God and we God's children, made in the image and likeness of the divine, began to form several years ago. At my previous parish, over the course of a few Sundays in the autumn, lay members were given the opportunity to speak about their experiences of stewardship, specifically about the blessings that they received as a result of beginning to tithe. I was touched by the common bond that they all shared—that by setting aside the first fruits of their paychecks, by writing the first check to the church, before any bills were paid—their needs always were met. That is not to say that there weren't times of difficulty, for there were; but through their faith in the boundless generosity of God, things just seemed to come out all right.

So my wife Annette and I, after prayer and discussion, began to give a tenth of our income back to God: five percent to the church and five percent to other charities. Were there times of struggle? Certainly. But we remained faithful and we remained fruitful. And there sat my idea of stewardship, in a comfortable and safe spot, for a time.

Life, that most precious gift of God, became fair game for stewardship some years later. Through a period of slow and steady then quick and intense discernment, I uncovered a long-hidden desire to pursue a vocation to the ordained priesthood. One result of this discovery process led me to look for a short-term career change, a job to be the bridge between my past as a buyer and manager in a clothing store and my future as a priest. The result of this search led me to Dégagé Ministries, a street mission focused on building relationships and



meeting physical needs of the residents of the Heartside Neighborhood, one of my city's poorest and with the highest concentration of mental illness, physical disability, homelessness, and drug and alcohol addiction. I started part-time, two evenings a week, while still working at my day job. I loved it from the moment I walked through the door. A few months later, I had the opportunity to work there full-time as the development director, bringing our message and our ministry to our donor base to encourage their stewardship. But there was a catch. A thirty-three percent pay cut, to be exact. That and Annette's own work as a professional storyteller, a calling that she felt strongly enough about to leave her full-time job a couple of years earlier, was fulfilling but did not provide a steady income. So we were faced with a challenge. Could we trust enough to know that God would provide, even as we made these moves in seemingly the right direction? And could we continue to give that first tenth back to God, even as we made significantly less money?

Well, to answer those questions, we can and we do. Annette continues to find work as a storyteller and has since been hired at Aquinas College in the admissions department, and this fall will teach a class at the college on storytelling. Our family of six moved into a new house with a close family friend and has been able to divide many of the household expenses into more manageable portions. And I continue to thrive at Dégagé as I work towards postulancy. The first check of the week still goes to the church, and I give a portion of my salary back to Dégagé through payroll deduction. And yes, things are tight, but we are making it.

I have been blessed by coming to know that stewardship goes beyond just money. Sure, our money is a gift from God and we are, or should be, compelled to give some back in thanksgiving. But now I believe that God wants, God needs, maybe God even prefers that we give more, differently, totally. I believe that we are called to go beyond these gifts of time,



talent, and treasure. Called to recognize that these are but components of a life of total stewardship. Called to delight in emptying ourselves and opening ourselves completely to God. Called to trust that God will provide, will fill not only our material needs, but also our spiritual ones. Called to know that there will be times of fear, sorrow, and pain. And called to know that they will be followed by confidence, happiness, and salvation. The greatest gift that I have received since working toward this total stewardship is the understanding of its possibilities and the joy in trying to get there.

Good and gracious God, the limitless source of all that is good—you made us so that we might share in the delight that you feel when you create, when you give completely and selflessly of yourself by making us co-creators and stewards of this Earth and all that it contains: may we be wise, courageous, and faithful as we empty ourselves of that which would hold us back and may we open our entire beings to receive the full expression of your love. Amen.

*Dan Scheid  
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
Grand Rapids, Michigan*



## *Inseparable*

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Romans 8:38-39*

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

*John 15:5*



## *A Tenth From the Least of These*

Recently I had the privilege of experiencing an inspirational moment with one of our Representative Payee Program clients. This client was meeting with me to discuss his weekly money. He told me he had been thinking about tithing, but wasn't quite sure of the meaning until he looked up the meaning in his dictionary, and found it to mean a tenth. He made the decision to give St. Matthew's Church a tenth of each of his weekly checks.

His only income is his Social Security check, which is \$590 per month. His weekly check varies from \$45 to \$60, which has to be used for food, personal items, laundry, clothing, etc.

St. Matthew's Church has now received twelve weekly checks from him. This client's decision is a true example of stewardship.

*Betty Swendson  
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church  
Newton, Kansas*



## *Prayer Over Pledge Cards*

Gracious and loving God, giver of all that is good and true and beautiful and life-giving. These cards represent our sweat, they represent our lives, they represent our dreams. The pledges which we make on them are but tokens of the awesome gifts that have been given to us and they are pledged in thanksgiving for all we have received, for all we have been inspired to be, for all we are challenged to become, in this place. May they be the first fruits of all we have and not what we have left over, so that we may live out as closely as possible how you give to us. May we see them as our offering to you, sacred, holy, yet earthy, filled with possibilities. May we hold this image in our hearts and minds so as we watch our offerings each week come to this table, we can see our very selves being part of this offering, it is us on the table, living sacrifices to you. Amen.

*The Rev. Greg Rickel  
St. James' Episcopal Church  
Austin, Texas*





## Seeing With New Eyes

Stewardship testimonies this Sunday.

Tithers' Appreciation Day.

Pledge Day.

I have no trouble recalling the annual stewardship campaign, as an active member of another denomination. And the recollections are not with fondness and happiness. Most all my association with that vocabulary is negative. Not because I did not believe I should be a good steward, or even that I should tithe, and certainly not because I did not believe that all life was a gift from God. But belief in my head was not belief in my heart, and certainly not action in my hands or wallet. Not a few of the sermons, and some of the testimonies, created guilt—guilt that I did not do more and did not give more. But it was only guilt; not motivation to act differently and certainly not desire to be different.

When as an adult I found my way to the Episcopal Church and began to discover a different—and, for me—more satisfying way to live out my commitment to God, I must confess that I was unable to leave behind many associations, deep-seated feelings, and prejudices that I had already formed in church and about church. One prejudice was my negative, even hostile, attitude toward the idea of stewardship. My theological vocabulary included the word *steward*. I believed we are called to be stewards of God's creation. And I knew we must support the Church with our financial gifts. But when I heard the word "stewardship," my body and mind seemed to tighten and I prepared for the "hard sale." I did not want to hear more testimonies about being a cheerful giver. I did not want to hear



how tithing made someone more successful in business. And I did not want to feel that guilt was being used to motivate me to give.

I was initially drawn to the Episcopal Church by its rich expression of the Eucharist. The whole Eucharistic experience was the vehicle that reconnected me to God. It was not many weeks after I first attended that I began hearing and seeing something new each time I was in church. Not that something new was done each time, but the newness that comes from seeing anew. It was the same as last Sunday, but today I saw—really saw—or heard and sensed something new. Something that I had “heard” before or “seen” before, but now heard and saw with the eyes of my deepest thinking, the eyes of my soul.

One Sunday, this “new seeing” happened when I heard the priest say, “Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God. Let us with gladness present the offerings and oblations of our life and labor to the Lord.” To be honest, I don’t remember if the priest that Sunday used both offertory sentences, or the two statements came together in my mind, but I know that when I saw and heard the sentences together, something changed. My perspective on my involvement in the Eucharist changed. When that change happened I was not thinking about stewardship. But I heard the words anew and then I saw something. The members of the congregation walked forward with the empty offering plates and with the Eucharistic elements. For the first time I saw this as a whole. My giving an offering was not separated from the offering of the Eucharistic elements. My participation in offering something on the offering plate was not to be a separate act from my going to the communion rail. It was all one whole. It did not take guilt or a new theology of stewardship or an anything but my “seeing” that my offering could be and must be part of the entire offering of myself to God and God offering Christ to me. I saw the event of Eucharist as a whole. Maybe until that time, I had gone to the service and to



the communion rail to “get” something from God. Now I saw that I was to bring—and could not help bringing—something to the event. It was not money that God wanted from me, or the church wanted from me, it was that I participate in the event, in the service, in the Eucharist, in the thanksgiving that can be the Church.

Since that day, I see my placing an envelope or check or cash in the “offering” plate in a new way. It is something of me that is presented at the altar. It represents more of my “life and labor” that I give to God. It makes me more of a participant in the service of the day. It acknowledges more the claim of God on my life to be faithfully a child of God.

Make no mistake; I am still learning the lesson each day, but the world has not looked the same since I heard the words spoken by the priest that day, and I have become a participant and not just an observer in the Eucharist; not just a receiver but a giver.

*Charles B. Gambrell  
All Saints Episcopal Church  
Mobile, Alabama*



## *Prayer Over Food for the Food Bank*

Blessed Jesus, in feeding those that we and the world often consider the least of your brothers and sisters we know we feed you, and we are helped to recognize they are not the least, but equals, in the kingdom of God: accept the gift of this food which represents the fruit of our labors and bless it with your presence, that those who eat it will be nourished in spirit as well as in body and recognize that they are loved and cared for by you; who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*The Rev. Greg Rickel  
St. James' Episcopal Church  
Austin, Texas*



## *The Missing Peace*

Truth be told, I am by nature a pretty selfish person. It's not that I have a cold heart. I've always been able to make friends and consider myself a basically good person. But growing up as the last child in a family split by divorce, I wasn't really taught how to be nurturing. Instead, I learned early on that the best way to get by in life was to keep to myself, make straight A's, and not to expect a lot from people. Of course, never having had the benefit of involved parents, or a church family to take their place, reaffirmed my basic belief that relying on myself and working hard was the obvious path to success and happiness in life.

Where did God fit into all this? Well, I always had a basic understanding that He was there. As long as I wasn't making any grave transgressions against the Ten Commandments, or the "big" ones at least, I figured He and I were okay. I prayed when I needed to and even started going to church after my kids were born. I must have had some vague sense that my kids would somehow get something from it that I had missed. It was in the middle of an ugly northern February that I began to realize what that was.

We had been going to a small Episcopal country church made up of a young, novice priest and about thirty families. It was two months after my second child was born that Barbara from the church came by. My husband was away for a month and my father had just been diagnosed with cancer. Barbara brought me food and a card and offered to go the store to get things I needed for the baby. Honestly, it was a little awkward. Barbara wasn't a stranger, but I don't think I had ever said more to her than "Peace" when I shook her hand just before



the announcements at church.

In the following weeks, there were others from the church who brought food and ran errands for me, saving me the trouble of lugging a newborn and a toddler out into the snow for a gallon of milk. One woman even made the hour drive to the inner-city to hold my infant for me while I shared a twenty-minute visit with my father on a chemotherapy ward that didn't allow children.

It was around this time that things started to change between God and me.

I don't know whether it was a sense of obligation, or simply gratitude, but I began to volunteer for the church in simple ways—ways that didn't take a lot of time or commitment or money. I helped out at coffee hour. I paid for altar flowers a few times. I got a donation of a changing table for the day school. Not exactly Mother Theresa kind of work, but it was the first time in my life I started thinking about church other than on Sunday morning.

When I finally accepted an invitation to teach a kindergarten Sunday school class, I felt like “the blind leading the young.” I had never made it a point to read the Bible before, but in those months, I'm sure I taught myself more than the kids in my class.

In the spring of that year, my father, newly released and in remission, surprised me by showing up in that little country church on Easter morning for the baptism of my son. As I listened to the congregation reading their part in the baptismal vows, I looked around at these ordinary, yet extraordinary people, who had helped me and prayed for my dad, and I felt something new. I realized that by giving back to them...to God...I had become part of something. A divine connection had somehow evolved. Church had become my unbroken family. But more than that, I discovered a rooted peace with God...a presence with the Ultimate Father. He was there with



me, like always, but I was able to accept and experience His grace because I had taken the risk of involving myself in His work, with His people.

Two years have passed since that time. We had to move later that year because of a job change and I lost my father to cancer four months after that Easter. It was a lot of loss and change to deal with in a short time. Through the worst of it though, I discovered a newfound sense of tranquil perseverance that could only be described as the gift of faith.

It's a faith that upholds me still...a faith that I see blossoming in the hearts of my children when I take them to Sunday school and pray with them at bedtime. In a way it's become a relentless yearning. It instills in me an aching desire to fulfill a call to do more and give more to a God whom I have come to know as gracious beyond measure and unconditionally loving. Simply, it is a faith that was...and continues to be...forged out of the simplest of actions, yet it fills my life with an irreplaceable peace.

No, I'll never be Mother Theresa by a long shot. And I admit there are many times when it feels as though keeping my feet on that solid spiritual ground is more a challenge than a certainty. But even so, what a blessing it is to have lived at least part of my life experiencing the joy that comes with a giving heart.

Go ahead. Risk sharing your time and your self. You'll be amazed at what you find.

*Deidre Cooper*



## *For the Seven Gifts of the Spirit*

Lord Jesus, as God's Spirit came down and rested upon you, may the same Spirit rest upon us, bestowing his sevenfold gifts.

First, grant us the gift of understanding, by which your precepts may enlighten our minds.

Second, grant us counsel, by which we may follow in your footsteps on the path of righteousness.

Third, grant us courage, by which we may ward off the Enemy's attacks.

Fourth, grant us knowledge, by which we can distinguish good from evil.

Fifth, grant us piety, by which we may acquire compassionate hearts.

Sixth, grant us fear, by which we may draw back from evil and submit to what is good.

Seventh, grant us wisdom, that we may taste fully the life-giving sweetness of your life.

*Bonaventura (1217-1274)*





## *You want to tithe, Marvin? You've got to be kidding!*

There are events and experiences in our lives that bring God into sharper focus and make us more aware of God's gifts and our responses.

The defining event for both Marvin and me was the sudden infant death of our daughter, MaryEllen, in 1960. I was made aware of how much of life I had taken for granted.

For Marvin the clearer focus came some time later when he attended a stewardship meeting in our parish. The speaker for the evening was a Lutheran layman who talked about tithing as an act of gratitude, as a response to God.

Marvin came from that meeting to tell me that MaryEllen's death had made him aware of God's many blessings and gifts to us, particularly the two bright, healthy children we had been given. Therefore, he would begin tithing.

Marvin's pronouncement launched a debate of monumental proportions. Actually, it was a battle royal that lasted for at least ten years. Every fall when the every-member canvass began, I battled with renewed energy.

"We cannot afford to tithe!" I said. "We are poor. Let the rich tithe!"

And I continued on and on: "That's easy for you to say. I'm the one who buys day-old bread in order to save. I'm the one who worries when the children need shoes and there's not enough money to pay for shoes or when the washer breaks down and we can't afford a new one."

Every year the battle raged. It usually ended when I threw



up my hands and said something I knew was not fair: “Oh well, it’s your money. I don’t go to work to earn any money, so you get to decide how it’s spent.”

This was unfair because I knew Marvin did not think this way at all, but wanted all our decisions to be made together.

The debate ended with our *not* tithing, but Marvin would add one more dollar to our weekly pledge. For years he would add one dollar a week to our pledge.

One day in the 1970s—I’m not sure about the exact time—in a moment I can only describe as God’s Grace, I sat down at the kitchen table and said, “Marvin, if you were going to tithe, how would you do it?” He almost fell off the chair!

That day we worked out a compromise. We would give six or seven percent to our church and the other three or four percent would go to the charities of my choosing.

From then on, every payday, the *first* thing we did with our money was to give it away.

No bills would be paid until we put the money in the church envelope and wrote checks to complete our tithe. Doing this *first* was important to both of us.

I learned slowly that it was not financial security I needed, but trust in God.

Our lives were changed. The really strange experience was that we always had enough money to pay our bills even had three children go to college without borrowing any money. We still have an abundance of money that amazes me, and we still give away our money *first*.

*The Rev. Canon Doris Bray  
Palmerton, Pennsylvania*

*This essay first appeared in the October 2000 edition of Diocesan Life, the newspaper of the Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem.*



## *A Post-Communion Prayer*

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so we and all your children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Source unknown*



## *I Can't Afford Not To*

A youngish psychiatrist in Salem, Oregon, was challenged by his medical partner who had just discovered that he tithed to his church: “But...but you can’t afford to do that on your income.” (Meaning “our,” perhaps. And perhaps also meaning that sophisticated medical people didn’t do that sort of thing.)

My friend replied, “I can’t afford not to.”

“I don’t understand,” said the colleague.

“What don’t you understand? Tithing?”

“No, no, I know about tithing, ten percent and all that, but I don’t understand why you have to do it.”

“Well,” he answered, “it probably doesn’t make a lot of sense economically. But it makes perfect sense to me spiritually. It is an important expression of who I am in relationship to God and world around me. There is a kind of balance about it. It gives me great pleasure. It feels right!”

It has taken a few years to plumb the depths of that confession. And I’m not so sure I will ever understand it fully. But it rings true to me. And it also lays to rest, or at least makes less important, the popular concept that we should give out of gratitude. Taking a teaching of Jesus and twisting it about slightly; he said it is easy to love those who love you. How about loving your enemy? So, now, about gratitude. It is easy to be grateful when you’ve received a gift or life is going well for you and your family and Boeing and Microsoft. But what makes it possible to be a serious and consistent giver, or impossible not to be as my friend would say, when life is “the pits” or uncertain at best and the gifts and blessings seem scarce? I like



the humor of the British sailors of old who, as their man o' war came round for a broadside, were heard to say: "For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful." So, if not gratitude, primarily, what is the driving motive?

In a few words: because we are created to give and because we live in a world in which there is always something to give.

In Genesis we read that God created us, male and female, in his own image. What in the world does that mean? Certainly not that we "look like" God. Certainly not that we are as powerful as God or as good. But we are a reflection of God. We reflect his creativity. We reflect his love. We reflect his authority and concern. And (here's the punch line) we reflect his generosity. It is in our DNA. So that, as we are created to be creative and loving and responsible and caring, we are also created to be generous. We can't avoid it. And as we live and give of ourselves we discover deep pleasure and fulfillment because it is truly being ourselves. The converted Scrooges of the world have not become new men. They have simply become themselves.

In the second chapter of Genesis we have a fairly full account of all that God gave to Adam and Eve. They blew it, of course, but even so found abundance in the world outside of Eden. This is the necessary correlative to natural generosity. God's creation is plenty. Therefore there is plenty to give and share.

It seems so simple. And yet we make it so difficult. Many believe that generosity must be taught rather than discovered. Many believe that the resources of our world are scarce and that we must grab and hold "my share." And here is the third vital truth about giving.

What we have is not our own but God's. God entrusts us with life and talents and resources. Therefore what we give to others is from the treasury we have been given on loan to manage. I am not so much of a curmudgeon that I don't feel grati-



tude for gifts and a great day and family and so forth. But I know that the most profound gratitude is owed to God for creating us to be generous, giving us the wherewithal to be generous and relieving us of the anxiety of letting go of our stuff by reminding us that our stuff is simply on loan. Putting it all together it spells “stewardship.”

*The Rev. Murray Trelease  
Grace Church  
Lopez Island, Washington*

*This essay was first printed in The Episcopal Voice, the newspaper of the Diocese of Olympia, in December 2001. It is reprinted with permission.*



## *Pray Yourself in Me*

Lord, grant me to greet the coming day in peace. Help me in all things to rely on your holy will. In every hour of the day reveal your will to me. Teach me to treat all that comes to me throughout the day with peace of soul, and with firm conviction that your will governs everything. In all my deeds and words guide my thoughts and feelings. In unforeseen events let me not forget that all are sent by you. Teach me to act firmly and wisely, without embittering and embarrassing others. Give me the strength to bear the fatigue of the coming day with all that it shall bring. Direct my will. Teach me to pray. Pray yourself in me.

*The Most Rev. Frank Griswold  
Presiding Bishop  
New York, New York*



## *When Stewardship Means Giving Yourself*

They say that stewardship has to do with giving to support God's work in the world.

It isn't always easy for me to tell the difference between stewardship and evangelism.

Sometimes people share out of deep faith and rejoicing.

Sometimes people share deep faith and rejoicing.

The summer after his junior year, we sent him to "doctor's camp." He reported that the primary community-building activity the first morning together was to watch an autopsy. An unusual bonding experience for a group of sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds. While I was spared most of the details during our phone conversation, it was clear that budding new friendships were being formed, in part, by turning green and holding each other up.

"How'd you do?" I asked.

"OK," he said, "especially for not knowing that was the first thing we were going to do."

There were other phone conversations. He was given the responsibility, with a supervisor, for monitoring one of the machines during a surgical procedure.

"And how about that?" I asked. "

"It was OK too. But you know, I've been thinking. I know I could do this, but I'm not passionate about it."





“Well,” I said, “it’s good that you’ve had this experience to help you figure that out.”

“Yeah,” he said, “but I’ll tell you what I really, really like. We also have time each day to talk about ethical issues. I love that, all the legal and moral and ethical concerns.”

And so it was.

I suppose his friends would say he changed his mind all the time about what he wanted to do with his life. But something seemed to gel as I watched him from that point. We’d have a periodic conversation about prolonging life, or creating life, or euthanasia. Passionate from the time he emerged from the womb, there was never any question about where he stood. Heart on his sleeve, deeply convicted, his passion was just plain too much sometimes for his friends.

Health care, politics, friendship, loyalty, sports...God.

Especially God. God had always been a part of his life. From the time he and his brother were old enough to hold still in church, they were acolytes. In a small congregation where the gifts of even little ones were blessed, they stood to assist from the time they were five or six. He’d done a comic strip for the church newsletter where a young man was always having ideas about how to serve God.

He was a runner. In a talk that he shared at “Happening,” he told the group, “Some of you may have heard of a film entitled ‘Chariots of Fire.’ In the movie, one of the characters’ names is Liddell. Liddell is training for two things. First, he is training to become a minister. Second, he is training to run in the Olympic games. In the movie Liddell’s sister becomes worried that his running is pulling him away from God. But Liddell explains to her that God works through him when he runs, just as when he preaches. He talks about how God made him fast, and how he can feel God’s pleasure when he runs. So Liddell runs in the name of God. He quotes the thirty-first



verse of the fortieth book of Isaiah that says, ‘They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.’ The phrase ‘wings of eagles’ has been very familiar to me in the past couple of years because, every time I run, my mom tells me to put on my eagles’ wings. I have decided that I, like Liddell, will run in the name of God. I can now feel God’s pleasure when I run, too.” He told them about the miracles God performs through people, and he told them about the miracle of Jesus’ death and resurrection. “Here’s the great part,” he told them, “Now that Jesus has risen from the dead, we have become sons and daughters of God, and from the moment Jesus reached God’s right hand, we have lived and will live with God forever.”

Passionate, opinionated, but growing up. And maybe it was that conversation about medical ethics that enabled me to see his maturing faith clearly manifesting itself in how he processed the decisions before him. Little things and big. That summer he also got his driver’s license. It didn’t occur to me until later that one of the first “adult” decisions he made was to indicate that he wished to be an organ donor.

The normal round of senior pictures, back-to-school preparations, discernment lessons from the summer, through a frightening bout with viral meningitis, a lost cross-country season, success in journalism, college applications, senioritis, new spiritual depth, eagerness to leave the nest, and finally the decision to attend a small Lutheran college, eager, eager, eager.

The day came that I drove him to school. More phone calls, a quick visit home with twelve friends! Stories about the group that was becoming community, stories about chapel, about BASIC (Brothers And Sisters In Christ), and a phone call asking for prayers because he’d fallen in love and wanted the courage to tell her. Still wearing his heart on his sleeve, and all this after only sixteen days into his freshman year!



Sometimes people share out of deep faith and rejoicing.

Sometimes people share deep faith and rejoicing.

Never far from me on the bookshelf is a picture of a 34-year-old woman. I am listening to her heart with a stethoscope.

Listening to her heart because one bright summer day, a young man who believed deeply in God, and cared deeply for the gifts he'd been given, pledged his organs in the case something happened.

It isn't always easy for me to tell the difference between stewardship and evangelism.

On Matthew's seventeenth day as a college freshman, he told a young woman he loved her. Rejoicing at her receptivity he climbed a limestone cliff with a friend as she and another young woman watched from below. The prayers he'd requested, the prayers I offered for God's reassurance in moments of vulnerability, did not protect him from the fall. Within less than twelve hours we would wrestle with the knowledge that he would not recover. Off and on throughout the night I'd rested with my head on his chest, lungs still filling with help from the breathing machine, heart still beating strong.

And as we looked helplessly at x-rays and listened to words we didn't want to believe, the nurse who sat with us said gently, "Some families like to consider organ donation in these circumstances." Indeed we chose not to have a surgery performed that would only have postponed the inevitable. And so, twenty-four hours after a young man in love climbed up a limestone cliff, all of his major organs were harvested for transplantation.

Anytime a young person dies, the outpouring of care and concern is predictable. But I suspect that all parents who have lost a child can understand that "consolation" is a word, a once-known concept, a wish by others that simply no longer



holds meaning. Each family member processes grief differently, survives with different techniques. It was the stories of God's people through the ages that kept me moving. Stories of women at the cross, women anointing the body of a young Jesus, taken before his time. And it was Matthew's faith.

Card after card arrived from young people, kids he'd known all through school, and young adults that he'd known for only seventeen days. Message after message had to do with the strength of his faith and how important that had been to them. My son as a witness to God's grace and God's glory. His sure and certain presence with the cloud of witnesses, the company of heaven. His request, on the night before he fell, for prayers in a time of new love and vulnerability.

And then other letters began to arrive. The ones that spoke of miracles. "Thank you for my second chance at life." Letters that told us, story by story, of what it meant to receive a long-awaited organ. Kidneys, pancreas, liver, lungs, heart, and assurances about the use of bone, tissue, corneas. Stories of new life, stories of gratitude that children would have a mother, a mother would have her son. Days and weeks and months blur in the grip of grief and of shock, but I do remember the day the call came from the organ procurement center. It was just before the first anniversary of Matthew's death.

"The recipient of Matthew's heart would very much like to meet you." And so I began to pray my way into meeting a 34-year-old woman carrying my son's heart. I wondered: is it Matthew's heart? Is it this young woman's heart? And I remembered the last night I listened to his heart beat, and I heard it over and over again. I wondered if it sounded the same. I wondered if it would be anything like having to let go of him again to be near his heart.

Finally the day came, the long drive and the anxiety, yet the knowledge that this was the right thing to do. And then the moment...and we were looking at each other. She was



anxious too, and there were tears in her eyes as she held out her arms. She wanted to hear about him. We wanted to hear about her, but I kept wondering about her heart. And then I put the picture on the table and said, “This is Matthew.”

As the tears streamed down her face and welled up from within my own heart, I knew the answer to my question. This was God’s heart, after all.

The testimonies to grace, along with the ever-present grief would provide grist for many stories and many chapters. New-found depths with God, through that grief, have brought new insights about the image of the Body of Christ. Matthew’s organs, far from the clinical, scientific, matter-of-fact “replacement parts,” have become part of the living bodies of others and of the larger Body of Christ. When I think about the man who received his lungs, I always think of the breath of the universe, “Spirit,” *Ruach*.

Sometimes people think it must bring comfort to have made Matthew’s organs available for others. No comfort. But there are lessons. And as we’ve been invited to share our thoughts about stewardship, giving, offering, returning part of the bounty and blessing God has given, I give thanks for the life and witness and the lesson offered by a young man with a fierce faith and a love for God’s people. While the decision was ours in the eyes of medical professionals, Matthew had made it for us the day he received his driver’s license.

And I can still see him in a roomful of kids telling them about the miracles God performs through people, telling them about the miracle of Jesus’ death and resurrection. And then, finally, saying, “Here’s the great part. Now that Jesus has risen from the dead, we have become sons and daughters of God, and from the moment Jesus reached God’s right hand, we have lived and will live with God forever.”

Sometimes it’s hard for me to tell the difference between stewardship and evangelism. And I suspect that, even with



Matthew's good care of his body, his pledging of it for others, his offering to God, that with each precious organ, a tiny proclamation of the Good News was transplanted to people who live on.

*The Rev. Susanne Watson Epting  
New York, New York*



## *A Stewardship Prayer*

Gracious God,  
abundant are the blessings  
you have freely and joyously  
given us.

Grateful for the opportunities you  
provide for living generous and  
compassionate lives of love,  
prayer, and service,

Help us now and always to offer  
freely and joyously to you,  
O God, our gifts of time, talent, and treasure.

This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

*The Rev. Bill Hibbert  
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
Rapid City, South Dakota*



## *Bring It Into the Light*

Usually I only scan *Networking* [the newsletter of The Episcopal Network for Stewardship] briefly, due to the overload of reading material we clergy face. This time, however, the Holy Spirit must have directed my eye to the piece on clergy tithing, so much so that I even took it home to read it a second time and show it to my wife. The piece ended up convincing me (and I in turn convinced her) that I needed to preach about tithing, and tell the congregation about our tithe to our own church. I did so yesterday (using the 1 Advent readings), with my introduction being: “There’s something I need to awaken to; something I need to bring into the light that has been in darkness.”

Previously only the vestry knew that my wife and I tithed. At the time I told them (a vestry retreat), I knew none of them tithed, nor had they ever been encouraged to. At that time I spoke softly about it, but was unable to engage them. There was little response. I let it go then, but brought it up again when I gave the vestry a ‘pep talk’ prior to their going door-to-door for the church’s first every-member canvass in many years. Again, little response.

In retrospect, I must have been too ‘soft’—or perhaps, too apologetic. In any event, yesterday I delivered a very unapologetic, undefensive, unqualified sermon about tithing. I used a wonderful thought that my wife (once I convinced her, she was way ahead of me) came up with: “I’m asking you for more money, asking you to tithe. What’s the difference? Tithing is about having faith, and about living faithfully.”

I told them my own story. First I told them the exact amount of our pledge, and then I told them of the long, fits-





and-starts journey my wife and I had taken towards tithing. I told them of somehow always having just enough no matter how much we increased our pledge by. I told them of the heroes of the story: 'ordinary' parishioners of modest means in ordinary parishes where my wife and I had been parishioners over the years, who did something extraordinary—they tithed, and they told us why. I told them why she and I tithed: "It's not because I'm a priest and want to set a good example. It's because of what God has done for us."

At the end of the sermon, I again cited the collect and epistle about putting off the darkness and putting on the light. And then walked down the aisle to the (dark) narthex where the pledge cards were sitting on a (dark) table, picked them up and walked them to the front of the church, the head of the aisle, and put them in the light, on a table at the bottom of the steps that led up to the altar rail.

The response was astounding. After the dismissal, there formed a long line of parishioners waiting at the front of the church by the table where I had placed the pledge cards. Person after person told me how moved they were, especially the members of the vestry. I can't believe it! My wife said she was nervous during the sermon, for fear that parishioners would be cool towards her because she was 'holier than thou' because she tithed. She was greeted even more warmly than usual. As I write this, there's a pile of filled-in pledge cards in envelopes on my parish administrator's desk. I don't know what the numbers will add up to, but the spirit in this place has just been incredible.

*The Rev. John Perry  
St. James' Episcopal Church  
Titusville, Florida*



## *Remind Us, Lord*

Dear God: we often think our deepest fear is that we are inadequate.

But our deepest fear may be that we are powerful beyond measure.

Remind us, Lord, that we were born to manifest the Glory of God within us.

Remind us, Lord, that it's not just in some of us: it's in everyone.

Remind us, Lord, that by liberating ourselves from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

*adapted from the 1994 Inaugural speech of Nelson Mandela,  
President, Republic of South Africa*



## *A Faith Nourished Through Tithing*

Several years ago I made the decision that I wanted to tithe but there was only one thing stopping me from doing so—*fear*. I have listened to our priest and others over the years speak about the experience of tithing. I truly believed what they had to say about their experience of tithing, but I just wasn't quite so sure things would be okay for me if I were to tithe.

I have always taken my yearly pledge very seriously. Even if I didn't pledge a large sum, I knew I needed to follow through by giving the amount I had pledged from each paycheck because I had made the commitment to do so. This is the part that scared me. You see, I'm single, and my income is my *only* source of income. I already feel like things are tight for me each month. I'm currently not making a car payment, traveling much, or making home improvements the way I would like to do if I had the money. So how would I ever be able to tithe?

Shortly before the time we were filling out our pledge cards last year, I had just gotten three estimates for the cost of a new roof. I knew I needed to put a new roof on my house within the next year or so—this was something that was truly becoming a necessity. In thinking about how I could make this possible, I knew I would need to get a second job to earn the money for a new roof. I love my day job and it pays well, but to pick up a second job, I figured it would be like the job I had taken on a couple years ago at Christmas time—working retail for minimum wage—and I knew that at this rate it would take a long time to save enough money for a roof.

This struggle went on within me. I was extremely anxious. I held onto my pledge card until the last minute before I abso-



lutely had reached the deadline of having to turn it in. Again, I just couldn't quite make the decision to tithe. Maybe next year. I did increase the amount of my pledge by a little. I felt like this was all I could "safely" do.

That was in November. When January came and it was time to pay my increased amount out of each check, I decided I would try to tithe for a paycheck or two and just see how I did. To make a long story short, I am still tithing every paycheck and I have more than enough cash sitting in the bank to put a new roof on my house!

This year has been an incredible faith experience for me! I didn't have a pile of money just appear but I had opportunities come before me that I never expected. I saw a Census Bureau ad when they were hiring last spring and I worked for them for about five weeks (for more than minimum wage!). It was tiring to work almost every evening and every Saturday and Sunday for five weeks, but it was short term. Every cent went directly into savings for my roof. Then about a month later, my boss had received two requests to do some consulting work for two hospitals in nearby Oregon towns. She couldn't take on both. She called me into her office one day and asked if I would provide consulting services for one hospital and she would provide services for the other. I had never done something like this before, but what an *opportunity*! In addition to the fact that I had more money going directly into my savings account for my roof, this was such an enjoyable experience for me and would certainly benefit my career!

I felt like I took a cowardly approach at tithing by not being able to write the amount of a ten-percent tithe on my pledge card, but again, this year turned out to be an incredible faith experience for me. I have everything I need. Oh, sure, there are many more home repairs that I both need and would like to make, but when I stop and really think about it, I know I have everything I *need*. I feel like God has provided for me in



incredible ways. I can't put into words the feelings inside me and how much my faith has increased. I knew intellectually last November that fear was the opposite of faith but I had to actually go through the actions of tithing, not knowing what a richness this would bring to my life. I envisioned that I would struggle from check to check but my finances were really no more of a struggle. Instead, I have been nourished in my faith. I'm sure that somewhere along the road I will encounter unexpected expenses that will seem overwhelming but I now have the faith and *know* that I will always be provided for.

*Jan French*



## *Prayer For the Moments*

Dear God: We spend so much time reliving yesterday and anticipating tomorrow, that we lose sight of the only time that is really ours: the present moment!

God, you give us today one moment at a time. That's all we have, all we ever will have.

God, give us the faith which knows that each moment contains exactly what is best for us.

God, give us the love which trusts you enough to forget past failings and future trials.

God, give us the hope which makes each moment an anticipation of eternity with you.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

*Adapted from a prayer heard at a  
"Ministry of Money" conference in Boston, Massachusetts*



## *Keeping a Stewardship Vigil*

I grew up in the church knowing that the standard of giving is the tithe. Knowing it and doing it are two different things, however. After getting out of seminary in 1978, my wife and I did not tithe. Somewhere, in the first year in the ministry, we both became persuaded that we were to start tithing. So, we asked the Lord to enable us to tithe. That month, we made the final payment on our car, which meant that we had to put up or shut up. Well, we put up. That was in 1979 and we have been givers as well as tithers ever since.

In September 1979, a person suggested that I get my congregation to have a 24-hour prayer vigil for the financial needs of the church. Well, we started it and now some twenty-three years later, that's all we do. For the past sixteen years, at The Church of the Holy Spirit, we have the prayer vigil the Friday and Saturday before Christmas. We begin at noon on Friday and end with the Holy Eucharist at noon on Saturday. The parishioners can sign up for blocks of one-half hour. Many sign up for more than the one block of time. I have material laid out for people to read if they want pertaining to the principle of giving and tithing being the place to start. I ask them to ask the Lord how much they are to give to the work through The Church of the Holy Spirit and to pray for the congregation's giving so that we might be able to accomplish the work the Lord has given us to do.

*The Rev. Joe Rhodes  
The Church of the Holy Spirit  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana*



## *Help Us Listen To Our Lives*

Lord, help us listen to our lives.

Help us see them for the fathomless mysteries that they are!

In the boredom and pain of them, no less than in the excitement and gladness, help us touch, taste, and smell our way to the holy and hidden hearts of our lives;

Because in the last analysis, all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.

*Adapted from a passage in  
Longing for Home by Fredrick Buechner*





## *A Journey From Ordinary to Extraordinary*

The youngest of five children, I was born at home in Ordinary, a small country town on the Virginia east coast. My family moved around a lot, but we always attended the local Methodist church and participated in the numerous church activities. My parents pledged to the church, although I don't believe they ever tithed. Regrettably, on April 23, 1998, one day after my parents celebrated their fifty-eighth wedding anniversary, my dad died after battling cancer for two years.

Gordon's parents did not attend church regularly, but they made certain he went, and made regular contributions. They were, however, the most generous and loving people I knew. On January 1, 2001, also after a wonderful fifty-eight years of marriage, Dad Ellis passed away with pneumonia. But fortunately for Gordon and me, both mothers are still living and they remain good friends, as well.

Gordon and I were married in Baton Rouge in 1966. After starting our family we began to look for a church where we would feel welcomed. Gordon was raised Catholic; I was raised Methodist. In the mid-1970s, friends asked us to attend St. James' Episcopal Church and immediately we discovered a church and church family that was right for us. But before that, we were blessed to have been involved in other churches, as well as the Billy Graham Crusade that came to Baton Rouge in the early 1970s. We took part in Bible studies and prayer groups that provided the yearlong foundation prior to the Crusade. At this time Gordon and I had one child, Daryl, born in



1970, and were expecting our daughter, Candace Elizabeth. She was born in 1972; last was our younger son, Ryan, born in 1976.

Candace was a beautiful baby with thick, long, dark hair and green eyes. Tragically, at four months of age, she became critically ill with spinal meningitis. She was in the hospital for two weeks without us knowing if she would live or die. Later, her doctor confided in us that in his forty years of practicing medicine he had never seen a child as sick as Candace who lived.

While Candace was in the hospital a dear friend brought us a framed passage to hang over her bed. It was a prayer written by St. Francis de Sales. It read:

#### Your Cross

The everlasting God has in His wisdom foreseen from eternity the cross he now presents to you as a gift from His inmost heart. This cross He now sends you He has considered with His all-knowing eyes, understood with His divine mind, tested with His wise justice, warmed with loving arms and weighed with His own hands to see that it be not one inch too large and not one ounce too heavy for you. He has blessed it with His holy name, anointed it with His grace, perfumed it with His consolation, taken one last glance at you and your courage, and then sent it to you from heaven, a special greeting from God to you, an alms of the *all merciful love of God*.

God's gift to us was in the form of a cross. Candace did live, but she was to be profoundly retarded. At that time I couldn't accept the reality of that truth. I knew for certain that with our prayers and the prayers of the many faithful Christians who were praying for her, one day soon our little girl would be restored to good health and live a normal life. Now, I must stop here and report the good news. On Halloween Day



Candace will be thirty years old. She lives in a school in Alexandria, Louisiana, a delightful, happy and loving young lady with a mind of a three- or four-year-old. She is a true ray of sunshine and she brightens not only my world, but also the world of many others whose lives she has touched.

While learning to live with this heartache and pain, I continued to study the Bible and mature in my faith and understanding of the Christian journey. It was several years later when I read a book by Morris West, the author of many fine novels, such as *The Shoes of The Fisherman*, *Lazarus*, and *The Devil's Advocate*. In his novel, *The Clowns of God*, West has Christ Jesus speaking to a small group of followers. For me, these words helped to make sense of my cross and the pain I was enduring.

I know what you are thinking. You need a sign. What better one could I give than to make this little one whole and new? I could do it; but I will not. I am the Lord and not a conjuror. I gave this mite a gift I denied to all of you—eternal innocence. To you she looks imperfect—to me she is flawless, like a bud that dies unopened or the fledgling that falls from the nest to be devoured by the ants. She will never offend me, as all of you have done. She will never pervert or destroy the work of my Father's hands. She is necessary to you. She will evoke the kindness that will keep you human. Her infirmity will prompt you to gratitude for your own good fortune. More! She will remind you every day that I am who I am, that my ways are not yours, and that the smallest dust mote whirled in darkest space does not fall out of my hand. I have chosen you. You have not chosen me. This little one is my sign to you. Treasure her.

Romans 12:2 reads, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." In time, by focusing on Christ and His Word, my mind



had been transformed. I was seeking to know God's good, perfect and acceptable will for our family, and through this transformation—going from “yes, but” to “but, yes”; and from “why me?” to “why not me!” Through God's grace I could begin to accept with joy and appreciation the cross He had given me many years before. I am always learning to put my trust in Him.

Both Gordon and I continued to grow in our spiritual journey. Five years ago during the St. James' Church Stewardship Campaign, I listened while two good friends shared their stewardship stories. Immediately, I realized that my sisters in Christ had a relationship with Jesus that Gordon and I were missing. In their separate talks to the congregation they spoke of faith and commitment, of decisions to give more of themselves to serving God with their time, talent and treasure. I knew that if we were to have that same depth of peace and strength that they demonstrated, that we, too, would have to make similar commitments. After discussing it we agreed to double our pledge for the next year. We again doubled it the following year, and have continued to increase it every year since. The tithe is our goal. Our goal is in sight!

And the Lord is faithful. He continues to bless our marriage, home, family and business. He shows us that our participation in His Way and Word is His good, perfect and acceptable will for us. To my amazement, this transformation has taken me from an old place called Ordinary to a new place that is Extraordinary. To my amusement Extraordinary has replaced Ordinary.

*Mary Lou Harrison Ellis*



## *It Is Enough*

As the rain hides the stars,  
As the Autumn mist hides the hills,  
As the clouds veil the blue of the sky,  
So the dark happenings of my lot  
Hide the shining of thy face from me.  
Yet, if I may hold thy hand in the darkness,  
It is enough.  
Since I know, that though I may stumble in my going  
Thou dost not fall.

*ancient Gaelic prayer found in an Escomb (England) church.*



## *God Has Opened the Windows of Heaven*

On a Thursday night, while attending a five-day interdenominational retreat, our speaker, the Rev. Al Durrance, gave a wonderful talk on the priorities in our lives. I awoke the following morning about 3 a.m., and, thinking about Al's message, decided to change my priorities. First in importance at that point in my life was taking care of the wants and needs of my family, followed by my job, which enabled me to take care of their wants and needs. Then there was my country—I'd spent three and a half years of my life defending her in WW II. I loved my country and still do. Finally on the list was God. I guess you could call me a "Good Christian," attending church and Sunday school with my family, teaching, serving on vestries, attending meetings—in effect, doing all those things which our church expected us to do.

God, from now on I'm going to put you first in my life. I don't know how I'm going to do this, but I know that you are constantly with me. I'm going to call on you frequently for help and know that you'll answer. Thank you Lord for hearing my prayer.

And suddenly I was filled with a feeling of peace and washed repeatedly from head to toe with a wonderful warmth. Sharing this experience with my wife the following morning, she asked me what I was going to do. I told her I was going to seriously read the Bible to find out what God expected of me. Starting that afternoon with Genesis, I began to read four chapters of scripture each day in order to complete the reading in one year.



Months later I turned to my wife one evening and said, "Sweetheart, let's tithe."

She replied, "What finally brought this on? You know I've been wanting to do this from the day we were married."

"Beth, God has just spoken to me through the prophet Malachi: 'Bring the full tithe into the stockhouse, and thus put me to the test says the Lord of hosts: See if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing'."

The next day my wife and I took my paycheck to the bank and opened up a savings account which we call God's Account. Ten percent of the gross amount of every paycheck or other income goes into this account.

We put God to the test and He has opened the windows of heaven and poured forth an overflowing blessing on us.

*Lathrop P. Smith  
Greensboro, North Carolina*



## *For Wise Use of Talents*

Almighty God, you have blessed each of us with unique gifts, and have called us into specific occupations, relationships, and activities using those gifts. Enable us to use our talents to witness to our faith in you and to communicate your love to the people we meet each day. Empower us to be ministers of reconciliation, love, hope, and justice. Keep us steadfast in our commitment to serve actively in your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Occasional Services,  
*Augsburg, 1982, p. 148*





## *Putting Decisions in God's Hands*

I was asked to write a testimony on what giving to the Open New Doors capital campaign means to my husband Daryl and me. I thought back to the process we went through in making the decision to contribute, and reflected on what it means to us to write our check every month.

When I went to the meetings which showed the models and slides of the new additions to the church and heard the architects talk, I got excited. I wanted to help make it happen. Then I thought about the time frame and realized we may no longer be living in Austin and going to St. David's by the time all this is completed. I thought about whether or not I wanted to invest in something I may never enjoy.

My husband Daryl and I stated tithing right before we got married last December. It was something we had both been trying to do for a while. We decided that we wanted to start out our marriage tithing to the church. The Open New Doors campaign came close on the heels of this decision. Thinking about giving ten percent of our income, and then some more, did not weigh easy on my mind.

The prayer, "Lord, what do you want to do through me to fulfill your will for St. David's Church"? was very comforting to me. I felt that putting the decision into God's hands was where it needed to be. I did not feel comfortable going into this on our own. Also, I was on the intercessory prayer team for the Open New Doors campaign. Knowing all the prayerful consideration that went into planning the different phases of building and then into the campaign itself gave me the peace of mind that this campaign is God's will for St. David's.



“Equal Sacrifice” was a phrase I like. It was easy as young people at St. David’s to look around at others who could give so much more than we could. It was tempting to feel that we couldn’t really make a difference, so why bother? The idea of equal sacrifice put giving in a better perspective for me: more of a spiritual matter than a financial one.

So Daryl and I decided to make a commitment to Open New Doors.

St. David’s means so much to us. It is a place we both feel so welcome and at home. Our spiritual journeys have been nurtured here. We met at the 20/30 Vision group and then we got married here. We thought about the people who were at St. David’s before we got here, all the way back to 1848, and what they have done to make St. David’s what it is today. We want to be a part of St. David’s history and do what God wants us to do to keep this great church going and growing.

It’s not always easy writing the checks each month to St. David’s, but it feels right. We feel part of the community. God has a way of making it work. Making a financial sacrifice to our church reminds us of God’s position in our lives, and the fact that we always end the month okay reminds us that God loves us and will take care of us if we put our trust in him.

*Terri R. Hay  
St. David’s Episcopal Church  
Austin, Texas*



## *Litany for Stewardship*

O God, grant us full knowledge of the goodness of your creation.

*We seek this gift for your love's sake.*

O God, grant us obedience to the good gift of your law.

*We seek this gift for your love's sake.*

O God, grant us ears to bear the prophetic call of your justice.

*We seek this gift for your love's sake.*

O God, grant us full knowledge of your love crucified.

*We seek this gift for your love's sake.*

O God, grant us complete hope in your love raised from the dead.

*We seek this gift for your love's sake.*

O God, grant us joy and power from your love filling us with your spirit.

*We seek this gift for your love's sake.*

O God, grant us full knowledge of your loving providence.

*We seek this gift for your love's sake.*

O God, help us to understand and care for your creation.

*We seek to give you this gift because we love you.*

O God, help us to obey the commandment to tithe out of all we have.

*We seek to give you this gift because we love you.*

O God, help us to be agents of your justice.

*We seek to give you this gift because we love you.*

O God, help us to die to sin as we stand at the foot of the cross.

*We seek to give you this gift because we love you.*



O God, help us to live in radical hope.

*We seek to give you this gift because we love you.*

O God, help us to be signs of your love, joy, peace, goodness, patience, gentleness, and self control.

*We seek to give you this gift because we love you.*

O God, help us to be generous with others as you are generous with us.

*We seek to give you this gift because we love you.*

O God, you have given us so much, grant us one more gift, the gift of grateful hearts.

*Amen.*

*The Rev. Hugh Magers  
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
Fort Worth, Texas*



## *If We Are Just Selfish Long Enough*

In the summer of 1954 my wife and I moved to Corpus Christi, Texas, to begin a new congregation. A group of businessmen in that community had purchased a small piece of property on which we placed a donated, two-room contractor's shack which measured about 12 feet by 24 feet. That represented the whole of the new mission's worldly goods.

I began ringing doorbells in the neighborhood. Several of the other Episcopal churches in the city gave me the names of lapsed members to call on. After a few weeks we began holding services in a nearby public school cafetorium. The bishop appointed our first Bishop's Committee (the vestry for a mission congregation).

At one of our early meetings we were faced with creating our first budget. I was anxious for us to have an outreach from the very beginning. I asked eight members to write down on an unsigned slip of paper the percentage of our income they thought we should give away. I gathered the slips and averaged the figures. The average was five percent.

We talked for quite a while about that figure. The conversation focused on all the things we needed and did not have. The warden defended the low outreach figure. When he called for the vote, it was seven in favor, one opposed.

Then the warden called on the woman who voted "no" on the five percent figure to say why she had been in opposition.

"Didn't you hear what we were saying?" she asked.

The warden's dignity was offended and he said, "Of course we all heard what we said."



Then the “nay” voter said, “What we are really saying is that if we are just selfish long enough, we will learn to be generous.”

There was a stunned silence as her words sank in. A reconsideration of our budget followed, and the figure designated for our struggling new congregation’s outreach was considerably increased.

*The Rt. Rev. Gerald N. McAllister  
Retired Bishop of Oklahoma  
San Antonio, Texas*



## *Help Us to Think*

O God, our Creator and our Father, it is you who gave us life.  
Now teach us how to use life.

When we are thinking and planning what to do with life, help  
us to have the right kind of ambition.

Help us to think

not of how much we can get out of life, but of how much  
we can put into life;  
not of how much we can get, but of how much we can give;  
not of the number of people we can use, but of the number  
of people to whom we can be of use.

Help us to think

of money, not as something to spend on ourselves, but as  
something to share with others;  
of leisure time, not as something always to be used on plea-  
sure, but as something which can be used to help the  
Church, this fellowship and the community in which we  
live;  
of work, not as a grim and stern necessity, but as that  
which makes life worthwhile, and help us to work, not for  
ourselves, and not for a master, but always for you and in  
the service of others.

Jesus was in the world as one who loved his fellow men and  
women and as one who served.

Help us always to be like him, that in his service we may find  
our perfect freedom and in doing his will our peace. This we  
ask for your love's sake. *Amen.*

*Source unknown*



## *It Can Take Decades to Realize Money Isn't Security*

Money. What does it mean to me? What does giving it to the church mean to me?

Money has always been a big deal to me, from my earliest memories. I remember the day that I saved my first dollar. As a five-year-old, I was given a quarter a week allowance, and I can remember saving up three quarters and the moment my mother handed me a fourth quarter that made a full dollar. I was so proud.

My father died when I was five. My mother then supported my brother and me on a public school teacher's salary. It was not easy.

I can remember also the exact moment that I determined I would have to have a job with a good salary so that I would not have the worries my mother had in supporting our family. I have supported myself since my freshman year in college, through both undergraduate school and law school.

After graduation, I was hired by a major Austin law firm. I then knew that if I worked hard, I would achieve my goal, and money would never be a worry.

Twenty years later there was money in the bank but no real sense of the security that I hoped for. The security I thought money would bring eluded me.

So what does this have to do with giving to the church? I think it has to do with two things.





First, since I have a relationship with God, I now know that the security I long for will come only in the kingdom of God—not through my savings account balance.

Second, and more importantly perhaps, as I give control of my life back to God, I can also give him control of my bank balance. I give Him control through prayer, by seeking specific guidance as to the amount of my pledge.

The first time I did this, the direction I received surprised me. I followed through, however, and trusted God “this once.” I have continued to do so.

What has happened in return? A number of wonderful things. I no longer have any feelings of guilt about whether my pledge amount is enough. I’ve been told what to pledge. I am also able to trust that God will guide the human hands that receive the money I pledge to use it wisely for God’s chosen purposes. Lastly, and most importantly, it has given me a new attitude in my work. I’m now working part for God! That’s a lot more energizing than working out of fear that I may not have enough money.

For one gift on my part, I’ve received three back: happiness for following God’s direction, the removal of guilt, and a renewed joy in my work. I think that’s God’s way. He doesn’t ask for too much—and He gives back much, much more than He gets. I wish for each of you this same joy.

*Brook Brown  
St. David's Episcopal Church  
Austin, Texas*



## *A Prayer for Stewardship*

Lord, I put my all before you  
All you've given me.  
I want to learn to let go  
And trust what I can't see.

Remembering that all I have  
Is all you've given me.  
What else can I learn to do  
To use these gifts for you?

My home, a haven  
Of warmth and peace  
A model for the nations  
We long to reach.

My heart for love  
To trust and teach,  
Learning to share  
And not just preach.

My health for the missions  
You're calling me to,  
Opening doors  
With faith brand new.

My wealth for your church  
And the work we're called to do  
(It's all yours already  
but it'll teach me to be true!)

Lord, this is a challenge  
That I'm called to.  
But you cause the harvest—



It's great but the workers too few.  
Humble me please, Lord  
And bring me to you.

*Suni Montgomery  
Youth Group Representative  
to the Stewardship Committee for  
St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church  
Palmer, Alaska*



## *Blessed By Faithfulness*

I began tithing at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Hampton, when I was challenged by the rector to do so as a leader of the parish on the vestry.

It was difficult at the time with young children but my wife completely understood and we were set free by this act of worship of our Lord. We were set free to know that our lives were blessed due to our faithfulness. We were set free to act confidently in our leadership in the parish and we were witnesses to that fact by testimonies before the congregation. It became one of the sources of rededication over the years until I was embraced by the Spirit to be called to ordained ministry at age forty. We continued to tithe even at seminary and felt good about the faithfulness we were demonstrating to the Lord, and yet, realized His faithfulness to us in carrying us through that time of scarcity with blessing.

Today, we continue to tithe and set the example of that in witnessing to the congregation as rector and family that our stewardship is vital in our relationship with the Lord. We believe the church needs this covenantal reality and want others to catch the Spirit in their offerings. Tithing continues to be a means for us to know our Lord God in an intimate way; we know that He is in charge of our budget, He has the pre-eminence of priority in our lives, and He is the giver of all that we have. It's so satisfying to give to Him His gift.

*The Rev. Joe Rees  
All Saints' Episcopal Church  
Vista, California*



## *The Overflowing Basket*

This is the day that the Lord has made.  
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.  
We will not offer to God  
Offerings that cost us nothing.

Spirit of God,  
Brooding over the waters  
Of our chaos,  
Inspire us to generous living.

Wind of God,  
Dancing over the desert  
Of our reluctance,  
Lead us to the oasis  
Of celebration.

Breath of God,  
Inspiring communication  
Among strangers,  
Make us channels  
Of your peace.

That we may give  
In deep thankfulness,  
Placing the overflowing basket  
Of our gifts  
On the table  
Of rejoicing.



## *What We Believe Is What We Do*

A major turning point in our journey in stewardship happened on a June Sunday in the early 1980s, right here at St. Matthias.

Father McMichael preached a sermon on Christian stewardship. Yes, you heard right: June, not the usual time of the year. But it sure caused us to re-examine our giving.

Three things he said are still etched in my mind.

1. “The decision to tithe is a spiritual decision, not a financial decision.”
2. “If you and your spouse have not argued over your pledge, you probably haven’t thoroughly discussed it.”
3. “What we believe is not what we say, it’s what we do.”

Simple, but true. These statements made sense then and they still do.

He didn’t stop there, though. He said, “Now that I’ve told you what I believe, let me tell you what we do.” He then stated the amount of money he and his spouse earned and the amount they gave to St. Matthias. The percentage was greater than the tithe.

Father McMichael had not only explained Christian stewardship. He showed that he not only knew what to say—he knew what to do and was doing it.

*Norman T. Parker  
St. Matthias’ Episcopal Church  
Shreveport, Louisiana*



## *Collect for Stewardship of Creation*

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer*  
*page 259*

