



Herb Miller reminds us that: “Each of us makes one of two choices in life. We either become emotionally attached to our money or we become emotionally attached to the God who gives us our money. Although we often hope to do both, in our heart we know that cannot happen.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the specific requests at the six-month review of our time together was for us to be very intentional about our stewardship, to practice stewardship all year long and not just during “pledge season.” Also, the request asked for me to preach on the Episcopal Church’s position on money, pledging and tithing. This is that time.

We are in the midst of our annual campaign. We ask for your pledges so that the Finance Team and the Vestry can make reasonably informed decisions about funding ministry for 2014. The brochure that was mailed to you focuses on ministries, programs and projects that are supported by St. John’s and how the money you give makes it possible for us to live out our mission to witness to God and to love one another. Our budget reflects, we pray, our core values of community, inclusion and worship. Our budget reflects those projects and programs to which we have given our hearts.

The Bible is full of verses and stories about money and our relationship with money. Perhaps you recall the verse just a couple of weeks ago: from 1 Timothy 6:10: “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.”

Or perhaps you remember the story Jesus told: from Matthew, chapter 6: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

And then there’s the verse we say when the offering is received each Sunday from 1 Chronicles, chapter 29:14: “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.”

I could go on and on, Bible verse after Bible verse to your yawns and “so whats”. It’s good to know that the Bible urges us to give of our money- but what good is that giving if it is from duty rather than from joy or when the giving is grudging. After all, 2 Corinthians 9:7 tells us: “Each of

<sup>1</sup> *Church Effectiveness Nuggets*, vol. 5. Copyright 2009, Herb Miller. [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com)

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7; Psalm 66: 1-11; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Giving draws us closer to God. It enriches our lives spiritually as we see our pledges used in ways that support projects and programs that work towards ensuring the dignity and well-being of all. This might be participating in the REINDeer project. It might mean making sandwiches for Summer Lunches or those building a Habitat House.

Giving draws us closer to God when we offer a place for community groups to meet. A place that is desirable to many groups because we don't have any steps from the parking lot into the building through the patio and into Whitlock Hall or the church. St. John's has created an environment that is welcoming to all.

People like coming here for meetings and part of what your pledges do is enable us to have a well-maintained building that has “curb appeal” while not being ostentatious.

Giving deepens our own relationship with God when we have a place of worship that fits our needs on Sundays, Wednesdays and for funerals and weddings or other worship-related services. When we have glorious music –thanks be to God! – and voices that lift our prayers to God.

Giving reflects our relationship to God when our giving is from a spirit of gratitude and generosity and not grudgingly or only from duty. “People do not drift into good giving habits; they decide into them.” One reason for a pledge campaign is to give each of us a time of reflection and discernment and prayer around our relationship to God and to money.

Philip Gulley, in his book The Evolution of Faith, says “The happiest people I know had one trait in common. They were all profoundly and extravagantly grateful. Even when they weren't sure who to thank, they knew it was important to have a spirit of appreciation.”<sup>2</sup> Pledging reflects your spirit of appreciation.

Tithing, or the giving of 10% of your income, is biblically-based. The concept of tithing relates to giving God the first fruits of your labor. From the Old Testament in Leviticus (27:30) to many places in the New Testament, it is clear that the standard measure of giving is the tithe.

In the Episcopal Church, clergy are expected to tithe and all others are encouraged to tithe. In fact, if a clergyperson is not tithing, it is the reason for a discussion with the Bishop. As clergy, we are called to be leaders, including giving to God at least 10% of our salary. We are called to lead by example. By tithing, we can speak with integrity and authenticity about returning to God a portion of what God has given us. Giving not from duty or obligation but rather from gratitude and with generosity to help support the many ministries, programs and

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Gulley. The Evolution of Faith (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 163.

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7; Psalm 66: 1-11; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

projects of St. John's. I do tithes. I do so as a response to all that God has blessed me with, including this time with you as priest-in-charge.

As you discern what you will return to God, with a joyful and grateful heart, during 2014, consider what percentage of your income God is calling you to give. What percentage of your income will help ensure that St. John's continues to be a place and a community where the love of God and of neighbor is evident? What ministries, projects and programs are important to you in your walk with the Lord? What percentage of your income, given to St. John's, reflects where your heart is?

Perhaps you resonate with Adult Forum, Bible Study or EfM - your pledge helps ensure that we have a place to meet and resources to answer your questions.

Perhaps your greatest joy is our fellowship gatherings- be it the Annual Meeting or Easter brunch, the White Elephant or the Porch Party, or outings like the Indians game. Your pledges help ensure that our office functions and communications get to you so you can participate.

Money is a proxy for our relationships in general and our relationship with God specifically. Everything we do and say is a reflection of our heart. Our pledges reflect our response to God. Have you grown in your relationship with God this last year? Then perhaps an increase in your pledge is one way to respond to that deepening relationship with God.

Did you wish for some ministry that didn't happen this year? Did it not happen because of lack of funds? Perhaps your pledge might reflect your hopes and dreams for 2014. Our pledges reflect our dreams and our vision.

Think about some of the responses to human need that St. John's met or contributed to this year. We had a full complement of volunteers who went downtown Indianapolis to work at the Cathedral Strawberry Festival – and the money we received was matched by our Outreach funds and given to the Mary Ludwig Free Clinic. A concrete human need in Crawfordsville that we can proudly say: we helped. We helped because we believed. We helped because people were willing to give of their time to make a larger gift possible. We helped because our hearts want to help those in need.

Or think about our participation with Food Finders Mobile Food Trucks. How many people stepped up to the "5 for 50" campaign so that we could provide additional funds for additional food for those who came when the truck arrived. And one of the extra and perhaps unexpected joys of the two times we participated was increasing our relationship with Wabash Avenue Presbyterian and First Christian. We created a model that will go forward into 2014.

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7; Psalm 66: 1-11; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

People of St. John's had a vision for what is possible. People of St. John's saw a need that we can meet. When there is a vision, the people may flourish – and flourish in faith. Where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18)

The insert this morning asks whether expressing gratitude is a measure of health and whether praising God is good for our health. I hope by now you know the answer is a resounding “yes.”

As you continue to discern and pray over your pledge, I encourage you to consider what percentage of your income God is calling you to offer back to God for the work that we do as St. John's, locally, state-wide, nationally and internationally. Where is your heart among the ministries of St. John's?

I encourage you to tithe- or to work towards tithing. From personal experience I can tell you that being able to tithe changed my attitude towards God and my financial resources. Once I began to tithe many years ago, I found more time for people. More time for projects and programs that I cared about. Less concern with whether everyday bills were going to be paid. More gratitude and grace in my life.

And all because I began to tithe.

But whatever you decide, however much you decide to pledge, do so from a heart filled with gratitude for all that God has given to you. Give full measure and God will give to you. Give knowing that you are promoting and supporting the values of St. John's as they express the love and grace of God. Give knowing that your heart and your faith are calling you to respond with gratitude to all that God has given to you. **Amen.**