

Our Thoughts

Hi, friends! This is a new thing. What is it? And why are we doing it? Partly because of inflation and greater financial anxiety, and partly because we sometimes forget that stewardship is an integral part of faithful discipleship, we are hoping for this to be the inaugural quarterly financial discipleship piece. It won't be fancy. We will try to share some helpful thoughts, stories, and anything else we think useful, along with an article from the *Faith and Money* newsletter put together by the United Methodist Foundation of New England. We hope you enjoy! Even more importantly, we hope it helps you grow closer to God and His holiness. Jesus did, after all, talk about money more than any other topic aside from the kingdom of God.

I can't help but address inflation. It's on all our minds. Often. Other than suggesting that you use a budgeting app or spreadsheet, I don't have enough space to cover all that anxiety. Yet we read in Paul's letters most especially that we are called to give to God's work as faithful stewards when we are wealthy and when we are not. When someone gives us a gift, the best way to show our gratitude is to use that gift well—not ignoring it, not wasting it, not using it to destruction in the first week or two. How pleased the gift-giver is when, a year later, they see we are still using that gift well. It's the same with God, when He gives us financial and spiritual gifts.



I don't know about you but I have found it hard to still tithe in this climate. How am I going to have enough? I feel like I often don't. I've discovered, though, that making my tithe the first check that I write in the month, rather than the last, or waiting until the end of a week, helps. Then I'm not struggling to find money for my tithe. Instead, our expenses are planned around our tithe. Online/automatic giving can be good in this way. If you're worried week after week or month

after month whether you can still give to God's work at the amount you want to, you can set up online giving so that the amount automatically withdraws. Once you know that, you *have* to plan around it. Doing so when you're going on vacation or going away for a few months can reduce stress of putting aside money to compensate when you return. It's coming out anyway, you're all set. Such a practice might also force you to reflect on whether the purchases you make are necessary. Either way, making your offering to God's work—using your gift well—the first thing you do can help you maintain your faithful giving and limit guilt.

On a more spiritual note, I've also discovered in my life that giving thanks to God, especially by saying, "Thank you, God, for..." significantly reduces anxiety, even in the midst of crisis. Finding blessing and hope in whatever is happening, no matter how good or bad it may be, can be a challenge but is almost always a grace-filled practice. I feel better, the people around me feel better because I have remained calm, and I have a lot more energy (it seems that way, anyway, maybe because I want to stay awake and enjoy life rather than rush to end my day). Giving thanks to God allows me to be gracious. Gracious and generous. I don't need to hoard as much happiness as possible for myself because God has given me so much.

Taking that spiritual note and turning it practical: could we become more generous stewards and givers of our money if, in doing so, we gave thanks to God? I think so! And that's really why we give. We give because God has done so much for us, is doing so much, and we want to participate in God's work moving forward. When we give thanks, we acknowledge we don't need quite so much ourselves, we're not as destitute as we think, and we can calmly be more generous. That generosity will often make us feel better, too, and then it's like a joyful cycle (rather than a vicious cycle).

So, how might you practice gratitude to God? How might you change your giving attitude from a sense of obligation into a joyful, thankful response? How might generosity improve your life, your spiritual

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closeness to God, and your health? How might generosity help you share the story of Christ's kingdom?

-Pastor John

From Faith and Money

By Gary Melville

For years I have used the phrase, "Investing in The Future" when describing a gift given through a will, or other planned gift arrangement. After all, the church will not receive the bequest until my will is probated - hopefully not for many years. In the past, I defined a planned gift as a gift grounded in hope and rooted in the expectation that my church will be there, still in ministry, many years from now.



That expectation is not valid for many churches today. It is common to see a church with an average attendance of 20 people and an average age of the those attending close to 70 years old. Yet my hope for ministry in the future remains strong. My faith is in Jesus - not a church building. Though I would be thrilled if my church experienced a revival and was thriving when my future gift was destined to be received (all things are possible in Christ), I cannot depend on that event. However, I can depend on the grace of God, the promises of Christ, and the movement of the Holy Spirit. This is where the investment in our faith needs to be focused.

Not leaving the church in my will because I cannot be certain it will survive, places my hopes and fears in a church building. My planned gift cannot be contingent on the church building staying open.

However, as a wise steward, I can make contingency plans. I can make a provision in my gift plan using other alternatives if it is possible my church could close in the future.

Using the Foundation's services, I can create a planned gift arrangement that will provide income for my church, and if my church closes, I can direct that income to support another ministry such as a Camp or UMCOR. I realize now that I'm not investing in the future of a church building, I am investing in the future of our faith.

If you would like to have a conversation about what involves investing in faith, send an email gmelville@umfne.org or call 800-595-4347 x103

More

Wondering how to start online giving to the church? There are a couple of ways. 1) Go to our website, <https://www.charltoncityumc.org/>, go to the "Serve" heading, "Giving" section. 2) If you use Amazon, sign up for Amazon Smile and designate our church as your nonprofit of choice. Then, make sure you use Amazon Smile for your purchases. Without adding any more cost to your purchase, Amazon will donate 1% of your purchase price to the church.

We know we're all struggling. For that reason, we remind you about our Thrift Store. Nothing to be ashamed of in being thrifty. In fact, it's a good way of caring for Christ and the environment. You can also tell your friends. That way, you're saving money and helping the church/God's work at the same time.

Have any other ideas? Questions? Let Pastor John, Martha Burbridge (treasurer), Renee Graveline (finance secretary), Kevin Hunt (lay leader), or Keith or Nanc Luscombe (council co-chairs) know. We can address or implement your ideas or questions in future "financial discipleship" offerings.