

Frequently Asked Stewardship Questions

Article 4: Miscellaneous Topics on Stewardship

This is installment four of the parish's "Stewardship FAQ Document". This installment deals with a few more questions associated with stewardship.

- I give in other ways; do I need to give money too?
- Can I give my money for special causes?
- Does that mean all charitable giving must go to the church – I give to other causes?
- How much should I give? What is proper?

Previous articles have covered Parish Finances, Diocesan Support and an Introduction to Stewardship.

Q1: "I give in other ways; do I need to give money too?"

Yes.

Many people give endless amounts of time to their church. This is a worthy gift. In some cases they give their time *instead* of dollars. We are asked, directed really, by God to return a meaningful portion of all of our resources back to His church. That means not just money or not just time – but a portion of all of it.

Q2: I would prefer to donate in support of specific parish purposes or activities – not the entire budget. Can I do that?

Once again, like it or not, you're part of a team. Your first priority should be to support the general work of the parish.

A budget is adopted at an annual meeting early each calendar year. It hopefully accurately expresses the priorities of the parish as a whole. Once the budget is adopted it is the responsibility of everyone that is a part of the parish to support it to the best of their ability with a generous meaningful pledge. You have an opportunity to express yourself about parish priorities at any time -- to any member of Parish Council or to Fr. Steven.

It's of course completely fine to donate EXTRA¹ toward advancing particular projects or for a particular liturgical article or furnishing or a specific ministry need -- but that should be after and in addition to (not instead of) a generous, proportional, "non –earmarked" donation to the general budget of the parish.

Some would argue that a parish should *never accept* an earmarked offering from a member who does not also support the general work of the parish. They reason that accepting special donations for particular "causes" may short change the general work of the parish and *may* lead to unevenly distributing influence to those with personal agendas and fat checkbooks.

¹ See section on "tithes and offerings" in subsequent question.

Q3: “I give to other non-parish charitable causes. Are we being told that all charitable donations should be given to the church?”

No responsible parish stewardship effort would suggest that you must donate only to your parish.

We are called to be disciples of Him and it is through the Church that we carry out the work of Christ in the world today. The Church is the body which most clearly expresses the meaning and values that we (should) find at the center of our lives. Additionally many persons find simply that giving to their church provides much greater leverage and control for the contribution.

We’ll simply suggest that in a Christian’s “portfolio” of donations it would seem reasonable that his or her church/parish should be number one on the list – by a considerable distance.

Q4: “How much should I give to the church?”

In his book “Good and Faithful Servant”, Orthodox priest Fr. Anthony Scott summarizes a variety of prevalent attitudes and approaches for discerning what to give the church. These are reproduced briefly in the box at right. Which is proper? If you answered, “Number seven!” *go to the head of the class!*

What Proportion?

First portion giving of a tenth of one’s income (a tithe) is taught by all Christians-- including Orthodox -- as being a scriptural standard, established in the Old Testament and carried forward to the New Testament. In fact many sources speak of tithes and offerings--“tithes” being a baseline and “offerings” being what is *given over and above* a tithe.

Often Orthodox people have been never been taught about tithing. A common reaction is that tithing is a “Baptist” or “Protestant” idea. Let us repeat. *Tithing is Orthodox*. Many, many Orthodox Christians tithe. Many give more than a tithe. Many in our parish tithe.

The actual proportion you choose should be your own prayerful decision. If there is one word to describe “how much”, we like the advice to make it “*meaningful*”. This will vary considerably with an individual’s financial situation.

In considering the definition of meaningful, consider the lesson of the widow’s mite. She gave a tiny amount but this was given in love, NOT from her abundance but from her necessities.

An Approach

So for those looking for an approach to determining their donation we offer this:

1. Determine your household income. (For example \$60,000/yr.) This will vary widely among our parishioners.
2. Determine what you currently give to the church (Example: \$2,000/yr.)
3. Determine the current percentage/proportion you give back. (Current donation ÷ Household income = \$2,000/\$60,000= 3.33%)

Evaluating Our Personal Stewardship Mindset – How Much to Give?

Seven Common Mindsets

1. **Disposable Giving** -- The church is last in line.
2. **Legal/minimal Giving** - Dues mentality
3. **Averaged Budget Giving** – (Necessary \$) ÷ (# families)
4. **Project Giving** - Not giving really –but buying; it’s transactional
5. **Comparative Giving** -- Smug superiority vs. others
6. **Herd Giving** --Downward adjustments when moving to a different parish.
7. **First Portion/Sacrificial Giving** –Joyful, meaningful proportional gift given without strings that expresses an investment in our parish purpose.



Two mites – Roman Coins

4. Determine a target percentage. Decide what *meaningful* percentage of the resources God has given to you that you will give back to God through the church. (Example 10%)
5. Develop an annual plan for moving to that target. Some will try to get to the target in one year. Others may try to narrow the gap (the difference between 10% and 3.3%) over, say, three or four years moving from 5% to 7% to 9% to 10%.

“We’re not rich people here!”

At this point we’re talking “real money” as the saying goes. And some readers are no doubt quietly thinking, “Hey we’re not rich ya know!”

Throughout these articles we have consistently stressed the concept of responsibility. Perhaps we have under emphasized the concept of *gratitude*. It has been said that “Our grounds for gratitude are far greater than our capacity for being grateful,” so reminders are probably helpful.

Gratitude

A retiring bishop of the Church once noted. “After 35 years of ministry I believe I have found the center and it is gratitude. I wish I had learned to preach and teach stewardship much earlier.”

While few of us consider ourselves “rich” it is known that church going Christians are statistically likely to be more prosperous and better off than the average American. And, we would venture that Orthodox Christians are above average for all Christians. American Orthodox are now, on the whole, *more affluent and better educated than at any time in history*. Ask yourself the question, “Are you better off than your parents and grandparents?” Many will quickly answer yes.

“Everyone to whom much has been given much will be required.”

LK 12:48

If prior generations of Orthodox Christians, most newly arrived in this country, were able to scrape together enough money to build churches and establish seminaries in the not so distant past surely we are prepared to take on the Church’s next set of priorities with similar zeal.

Speaking of gratitude, we thank those (perhaps few!) of you who read along with this series.

In Christ,

Your Parish Stewardship Committee.