

The Theology of Accumulated Financial Resources in the Ministry of Planned Giving

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by Rev. Douglas Conlan, Gift Planner for the PCC and UCC (adapted)

The primary goal of the Stewardship of Accumulated Resources is to help individuals and congregations grow spiritually through their giving and to participate in the present and future ministry of the church. The asking, giving and receiving of gifts for ministry become the occasion for celebration and growth in faith. People give, not primarily because of tax benefits - although these provide wonderful opportunities for wise and efficient giving -- but because they love God and they love the church.

Two important presuppositions are acknowledged: (1) giving is joyful and fulfilling, promising rich spiritual rewards; (2) the church has an obligation to provide meaningful opportunities for people to give as they are called by God to support the church's work.

There is much hesitation and discomfort around money issues in the church - it is the one topic we do not want to talk about. And yet Jesus had much to say about our relationship to money and possessions. When we are helped to make links between faith and money, we have the opportunity to grow in our faith.

The following theological principles provide a biblical understanding about the link between faith and money:

God is a God of abundance and grace.

This assumption lies at the heart of the ministry of planned giving. The task is to lead people to the recognition that God is infinitely gracious and generous. God cares for our needs. We do not foster a survival mentality. We are people of abundance. We are richly blessed.

We give thee but Thine own,
Whate're the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.
May we Thy bounties thus
As stewards true receive
And gladly, as Thou blessest us,
To Thee our first fruits give.

William How

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We are stewards of material resources that ultimately belong to God.

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1). Everything we have and are - including the resources and assets we accumulate over the course of our lifetime - ultimately belong to God. We are simply stewards, or trustees, of what God has entrusted to us during our brief time on earth.

Learning to give is essential to spiritual growth.

Martin Luther spoke of three conversions in the Christian life: “The conversion of the heart, the mind and the purse.” The tendency in the pervading secular context of our Christian experience is to diminish the third. Yet Jesus’ teachings suggest that the conversions of the heart and purse are inextricably combined. In fact, the conversion of the purse is often the precursor to the other two conversions. Remember Jesus’ words: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21).

Through giving we participate in God's work in the world.

By being stewards of the material resources that we have accumulated, we have a wonderful opportunity to provide financial resources for the church for today and for the future.

One fact is perfectly clear. We came into this world with nothing, and we will leave this world with nothing. As Paul reminded Timothy, “We brought nothing into this world, so that we can take nothing out of it” (1st Timothy 6:7). None of us leave this life without having given everything away - to someone, somewhere. The only question for us is: to whom do we want to bequeath the wealth God has entrusted to us? The good news of Planned Giving is that there are ways that we can share our wealth with the church to enhance its life and mission far into the future. We can go on giving long after we have died and thereby continue to participate in Christ’s ongoing mission to the world for generations to come.

About the author:

Rev. Douglas Conlan was an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada and a professional gift planner. He worked as a regional gift planner in the UCC as well as for The Presbyterian Church in Canada, helping congregations develop and promote the ministry of Planned Giving. Douglas died of cancer in the summer of 2004 and was actively promoting planned giving until shortly before he died.