



# The Stewardship Times

The Stewardship Newsletter of St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church, Studio City, CA

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## Planning to Give: Thoughts on Stewardship

By the Reverend Dan Justin

Every year members of the church are asked to prayerfully consider making a pledge (an estimate of giving for the coming year). As Christians we offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices. We offer our time, talent, and treasure in gratitude to God. It is a way of acknowledging that all we have is a gift from God. It is also a way to express our trust in God. Giving is an act of worship. There is also a practical side of stewardship. The parish operates based on donations of money. Your pledge supports all the ministries of the parish and helps make the daily operation of the parish possible.

How much should you give? This is an important question that only you can answer. Most importantly, your answer should not be motivated by feelings of guilt, nor a sense of duty. It should be based on good theology. Perhaps it would be helpful to explore a few potential answers to this question:



### How much should I give?

**T**ithing is the biblical standard for stewardship. This means giving 10% of your income to God. When Jacob encountered God and saw the vision of the ladder, received the promise that God would be with him, keep him, and bring him home, he made some promises back to God (Genesis 28). One of those promises was to give 10% of his income back to God in thanksgiving. The Old Testament is filled with examples of people committing to give 10%. It is also what God asks of people. The Episcopal Church hopes all its members will tithe. Many people in our parish tithe. Perhaps you would like to join us this year. By the way, there are many opinions on whether you tithe on your net or gross income. That can be up to you if you choose to tithe.

**The Modern Tithe** is a more recent idea that acknowledges the great joy of giving 10% while also recognizing that many people want to give to more than one place. Perhaps

you want to practice the tithe but have other favorite charities you want to support. The Modern Tithe still dedicates 10% of your income to be given back to God. 5% is given to the church, the other 5% is given to charities and/or organizations of your choice and which are important to you. You are still giving to God and practicing generosity, giving both to the church and to other places.

**First Fruits Giving** could be an option for those who are unsure what their annual income will be. Committing to First Fruits Giving simply means that when a paycheck or money is received, the very first thing you do is give a portion of it back to God. You can decide on what that portion will be based on your own budget and needs. Perhaps it is a dollar amount. Alternatively, you could select a percentage. But before any other bills are paid, you give to God. These are your first fruits. Selecting an amount to write on your pledge card could be based on the previous year's total income. Remember, pledge cards are estimates of giving.

**Proportional Giving** recognizes that not everyone can give the same amount. For some people giving a small amount is a huge sacrifice. Who can forget the story of the widow in the temple who gave two pennies? Jesus tells his disciples that she had given far more than anyone else that day. Those who were wealthy gave in ways that made no real impact on their lives. Proportional giving understands that it is about equal sacrifice, not equal gifts.

**Growing in Giving** should be a goal we all have. Jesus teaches us to be generous people who share what we have. Stewardship is the ideal spiritual discipline. Stewardship is the tool by which God teaches us to be like Jesus, who gave everything because of his love. When I began giving to church, I was only able to afford to give a small amount. I practiced proportional giving. What I gave seemed like a big sacrifice to me. Each year I tried to increase what I was giving. Today I am happy to say that I tithe to the church. I give 10% of my income back to St. Michael's as an act of worship and gratitude to God. Honestly, it took a long time to get to the

point where I was able to tithe. But each year I was committed to growing in giving. Make a plan and a commitment to grow in giving. I am certain you will be glad you did.

### How we give could be more important than how much we give!

**G**iving to the church is indeed an act of worship. Stewardship is synonymous with discipleship. Our attitude toward giving is important.

We should always give **gratefully**. First and foremost, giving is an opportunity to express our gratitude and worship to God. We recognize that all we have comes from God. Giving is a way of saying thank you.

We give **freely**. As I mentioned above, we should not give out of a sense of duty and we certainly should never give out of a sense of guilt. We should not give because we would be embarrassed if our name was not listed in the bulletin. We give freely because we love God and are offering thanks and praise to God. We give freely because we believe in the mission and ministry of the Church.

We give **cheerfully**. There is joy in giving and being generous. I can think of no one who came to the end of their life and regretted being generous. It is the other way around. People usually wish they had given more. Giving to God and helping others, supporting the life and ministry of the parish, is a great joy. We give to God cheerfully, not grumbling.

We give **obediently**. God commands us to give. We need to be givers more than God needs what we give. We learn to be followers of Jesus through giving. Jesus teaches that it is through giving we learn to seek first the kingdom of heaven. We learn that security does not come through material things but rather from God who provides for all our needs.

Finally, we give **intentionally**. Giving should never be an afterthought. That is why we ask people to prayerfully consider their annual

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pledge. Understand why you are giving what you plan to give. Be intentional. Perhaps you want to be intentional about growing in giving. Perhaps you want to be intentional about being more cheerful in giving. Think about these things; take time with your pledge card. Discuss it with your family and friends. Ask God to lead and guide you. This is what is meant by intentional giving.

## Giving makes you a member!

The Episcopal Church defines membership in three ways: regular attendance in worship on Sunday morning, receiving communion at least three times a year, and making a financial contribution (a pledge) to the support the ministries of the parish. These three things also make you a “qualified elector.” That is just a fancy way of saying that you can vote to elect members of the vestry at the annual meeting. The Diocese of Los Angeles requires that each parish publish a list of qualified electors prior to the annual meeting.

In conclusion, I hope these thoughts on giving assist you as you consider your 2020 pledge. Please remember, we complete new pledge cards each and every year. Also remember, these are nothing more than estimates of giving. The church is not going to send you a bill. If things change over the course of the year, you can easily notify the parish office of a change in your pledge amount.

The goal of the vestry and our stewardship committee is always 100% participation. It is our hope that each and every family or individual who attends St. Michael’s will complete a pledge. We could achieve so much if all participated.

If you have questions about stewardship, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Blessings,  
Dan+

## Who Wants to be Average?

St. Michael’s is an above average Episcopal parish, whose financial giving is below average. Who wants to be average? Consider the following statistics and see what you think:

### Did you know...

**74%** of all Episcopal parishes in the United States have an average Sunday attendance *below* 100. Median attendance is 53 people. St. Michael’s is above average! Our current average Sunday attendance is 106.

The national average pledge amount is **\$2,964** per year. The average pledge in the Diocese of Los Angeles is **\$2,858**. St. Michael’s is below average in this category. Only 24% of our members are pledging at or above the national/diocesan average. The median pledge in our congregation is **\$1,500**.

Across the Episcopal Church we are seeing a trend of decreasing attendance partnered with increased giving. That means **fewer people are giving more**. Our parish has begun to reflect this trend. This is not a sustainable trend. Therefore, our primary stewardship goal has always been 100% participation. If you have never completed a pledge card before, please consider doing so this year. It makes all the difference.

All parishes of the diocese are asked to contribute 15% (minimum of 12%) of our normal operating income to the Mission Share Fund, which supports the ministry of the larger diocese. St. Michael’s is below average in this category. While we did increase our giving to the Mission Share Fund last year, we are still only giving **5%** as opposed to the expected 12%. The vestry is committed to increasing our Mission Share Fund giving. It is, however, vital that we understand this to be an important growth area for our congregation.

## Highlighting Our Ministries

Where do your pledge dollars go? We have long said, “Pledging makes you an active participant in every ministry of the Church.” The Vestry approves a budget based on mission and ministry priorities. Pledge dollars are used to keep the campus open, in good repair, lit, heated, and cooled. Salaries for the clergy and staff are paid. Of course, these operational expenses are not the only thing your pledges make possible. Other large budget items include:

### Music

Our parish choir, music director, and organist gather almost every Thursday during the program year to rehearse and prepare for Sunday mornings, as well as special services. St. Michael’s parish choir is lucky to include three section leaders who are paid a modest amount to help lead us in worship. The organ requires regular maintenance and tuning, as well as occasional repairs. The Vestry sets money aside that allows the parish to bolster our Easter services with brass, as well as our Christmas eve services with additional voices. You may not be a singer yourself, but if you pledge you are very much a part of our music ministry.

## Mission Share Fund

St. Michael’s is not an island unto itself. We are part of a much larger whole called the Diocese of Los Angeles. Our bishop, the Rt. Rev. John Taylor, is our chief priest. He is the leader of St. Michael and All Angels. Our rector and assistant clergy all serve on his behalf. The Mission Share Fund is how each parish and mission support the larger ministry of the diocese. Parishes are asked to dedicate 15% of their income (a minimum of 12%) to the Mission Share Fund. These funds are then used by the diocese to make ministry possible from north of Santa Barbara all the way down to San Clemente; from Santa Monica all the way out to Needles. Because of the way the diocese spends its money, most of our Mission Share Fund money could be considered additional outreach funds.

## Hospitality

Studies have proven that parishes with robust coffee hours are more likely to be growing and vibrant. Your pledges help pay for all those cups, forks, plates, and coffee we use during coffee hour. Not only that, but your pledges help cover special events like the Annual Meeting, Shrove Tuesday, the Agape Supper, and our Christmas Eve and Christmas morning breakfasts. It should be noted that almost all the food served each Sunday and at special events is donated by our dedicated coffee hour hosts and other parishioners. Only the service items – cups, plates, utensils – and the coffee is paid for through the budget. This year, the Feast of St. Michael’s was made possible through special donations from a variety of volunteers.

## Outreach

The Vestry fully funds the outreach ministries of our parish through the budget. The Outreach Committee meets and allocates these funds to support the all the various outreach ministries we all love. These include SoldierCare, Holiday Cheer, Get on the Bus, CropWalk and Sack Lunch Sundays. We continue to support the North Hollywood Interfaith Food Pantry, Prism, and the NoHo Home Alliance. We continue to support organizations working towards peace and justice, such as the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace, and Progressive Christians Uniting. It is our commitment that every single dollar allocated to outreach will be spent on outreach.

On the next few pages you will find more detailed information, updates, and pictures of some of our outreach ministries...

# Holiday Cheer is Coming!

By Meredith Reese  
#HC2019 #feliznavidad

On Saturday, December 14, from 8am to 2pm, the members of St. Michael and All Angels and supporters of our Outreach Projects, will gather with over 150 needy kids and their families. For the 22nd year in a row, we will host charities who help children in the Los Angeles and San Fernando Valleys and treat them to a day of fun and food to fill everyone with the holiday spirit. We will also bring in volunteers who have been dedicated to the Holiday Cheer cause for decades, and welcome new Outreach partners. This is always our biggest, most ambitious Outreach event of the year, with an operating budget provided by pledges and donations.



## Our guests include families from:

### **MEND = Meet Each Need with Dignity**

Their mission is to meet the immediate needs of individuals and families and increase their access to opportunities that strengthen their capacity to thrive. The families from MEND are living in extreme poverty in the Pacoima area. For many this is their only holiday celebration. It is not unusual to see a family take their presents back to their shelter to open on Christmas, gifts are that precious.

**Immigrant Families Together LA** is the local chapter of a foundation dedicated to reuniting and supporting immigrant families separated at the US/Mexico border and supporting border partners with critical needs. We welcome to Holiday Cheer the individuals who have mentored these families through legal hearings and heartache. Last

year the need was great, and this year we want to invite the families still in need to attend the party and receive gifts. We also will take the party as an opportunity to honor everyone who supported the Immigrant Families Together cause and continue to foster fellowship with the families reunited in Los Angeles.

**Get on the Bus (GOTB)** is a non-profit program of the Center for Restorative Justice Works that unites children with their parents who are incarcerated. St. Mike's has been a regular sponsor of buses during the year and this is the first year we've invited GOTB children to attend Holiday Cheer. We are happy to partner with Southern California Regional Coordinator, Adriana Franco to host local families and spread joy this holiday season.

**H**oliday Cheer provides a safe place for families of all ages. Please join this joyous St. Mike's tradition. Make ornaments, decorate gingerbread houses, frost cookies, play sports, tell stories, serve a delicious buffet lunch, give each child a brand-new outfit, sing-along to holiday songs and then welcome Santa, who gives each and every child a gift especially selected for them from their wish-lists. If this is your first year, to say this day is magical is putting it mildly! And THANK YOU for all of the hard work from every St. Mike's member who makes this the most special Outreach event of the year!!

## How you can help:

**SPONSOR A CHILD** for a gift or a new outfit. You can sponsor as many children as you like!

**VOLUNTEER!** We need folks who craft, cook, entertain, wrap gifts, play sports -- Many of these young guys have no dad in their lives and thrill to kick around a soccer ball or toss a football with you! --- You can also teach knitting, lead songs, make goodie bags for the Moms, watch little ones on the playground or just hang out and make new friends with our lovely guests.

**BRING STUFF!** We need wrapping paper, ribbon, tape, frosting and candies for the gingerbread houses, crayons, markers, paper, crafting supplies for ornaments, glue sticks, pinecones, knitting needles and yarn, beverages, paper goods, utensils, individually wrapped chocolates and beauty products for the mom gift-bags.

**MAKE A MONETARY DONATION** Mail a check to the church, made out to St. Michael and All Angels with "Holiday Cheer 2019" in the memo. Or use your credit card by calling the church office weekdays between 9am and 3pm (PST) at 818-763-9193.

If you can't make it the 14th -- you can help wrap presents and set-up on Friday, Dec. 13th 5pm-9pm in the Ministry Center. It should be fun and great way to meet our Outreach group! Contact me anytime... Meredith Reese [stmikesoutreach@gmail.com](mailto:stmikesoutreach@gmail.com) Check us out on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/smcopholidaycheer/>

## Photo credit:

Santa & Myla Russo at HC2016. Photo by Amber Russo  
Santa w/ brother & sister at HC2016. Photo by Amber Russo  
Nancy Woods & Rose Leibowitz at HC2016. Photo by Amber Russo





## Soldier Care Update

By David Rosenberg

The SoldierCare Project has been part of St. Michael and All Angels Outreach Committee for over thirteen years now.

What started as an individual response to the first injured Marines and veterans from the Iraq War has grown into a one-of-a-kind humanitarian effort that is rare among groups working with wounded and PTSD servicemen and women.

Every year the Project hosts a weekend in LA – with attendees, many of whom have lost limbs or are severely burned – in order to connect in an intimate experience created just for them. There is no press, no fundraising, and most important no “take a picture with a hero” dog and pony show. They do the weekend the way they see fit, with no expectations or demands. Vets are treated to a first pitch honor with the Dodgers and a private suite game, meals with actors and celebs, studio tours and closing with a brunch cruise to wrap up the weekend. St. Michael and All Angels spearheads a gift card drive for the weekend. Most of the events are donated.

What seems on the surface as just a fun weekend reveals a deeper purpose. The Project creates relationships, and in doing so becomes part of the veteran’s family and circle of support for a lifetime.

One of the first Marines who attended was a young Marine who lost both legs and had a young child with his girlfriend who left him because she couldn’t deal with his injuries. He barely said a word the entire weekend, until the very last day, when he expressed that he acknowledged the trust built allowed him to reveal a shame – his baby was sleeping in a chest of drawers and he was too ashamed to let someone know. The very next day St. Michaels set him up with a crib.

The next event is a mini weekend in NYC, with guests being treated to a new production of CYRANO with Peter Dinklage from Game of Thrones, a visit to Good Morning America and filming for the NBC series NEW AMSTERDAM. The Project is always looking for volunteers and supporters to help with events and year-round connecting to the community as well as donations. You can email the director, David Rosenberg, at [soldiercareprojectdr@gmail.com](mailto:soldiercareprojectdr@gmail.com).

