



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

A LETTER FROM YOUR PRIEST

IN RECENT YEARS, the term “stewardship” has finally become a part of our Orthodox Christian terminology. The word “steward” is derived from the Greek word *oikonomos*, which simply means “manager.” Stewardship describes how we use our time, talents and possessions to further the cause of assisting the Church in her efforts to effectively spread the Gospel. Most of us would rather not speak of money and the Church in the same conversation. We are aware of the Old Testament directive to give a portion of our earnings back to God. Sadly, we find ourselves looking for loopholes in that command as we seek to justify our falling short of giving a percentage of what we possess, forgetting that *“every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above.”* (James 1:17)

God has given so much to us. Aside from our material possessions, He has blessed us with health, abilities and life itself. He has also offered intangible blessings to all of us — forgiveness, strength, courage and, ultimately, eternal life just to name a few. Therefore, it is certainly a *given* that we should give back to God in return.

In what spirit should our gifts be offered? First, we should give proportionately.

Perhaps the greatest example of stewardship can be found in the story of the poor widow, who came into the Temple one day and gave all that she had. It amounted to next to nothing, but as Christ was quick to point out, she did not give out of her abundance, but rather out of her poverty, making her sacrifice that much greater.

We must give gladly. In reality, a gift given grudgingly, or out of a sense of obligation to do so is not a gift at all. The Apostle Paul certainly says as much when he writes: *“He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 9:6–7).

Finally, we must give humbly. Our Lord Himself told us that *“when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”* (Matthew 6:3). We must not seek glory for our giving. God knows our good deeds and will reward us accordingly.

May we all be the faithful stewards that Christ expects us to be! —✠—

SCRIPTURE & STEWARDSHIP

I Chronicles And now we thank Thee, our God, and praise Thy glorious Name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. (29:13–14)

Deuteronomy Beware lest you say in your heart, “My power and the light of my hand have gotten me this wealth.” You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth; that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as at this day. (8:17–18)

I Peter As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. (4:10–11)

ON PROPORTIONAL GIVING

by His Eminence, Archbishop Michael

WHAT DOES A PROPORTIONAL GIFT of sacrificial love look like? Let's not use the standards of the world, but the example of the Scripture. Let's examine the very first gift of sacrificial love that God accepted in the Bible.

In Genesis 4, we read that God received the offering of Adam's younger son Abel — which was the first born of his flock of sheep. God rejected the offering of Cain — what was left over from the harvest of fruits from his farm.

Like Abel and so many others in the Scripture after him, we too need to give our first and our best as our offering to the Lord. Let me suggest that those of us who work offer the first hour worth of wage each week (something known only

between us and God) in thanksgiving to the Lord for all His blessings — cheerfully, lovingly, and regularly each week. The first of the harvest of our labors, every week — that is our pledge — whether we come to church that week or are on vacation — in gratitude to God Who blesses us every week, and for the benefit of His Church in our parish community. And if you are already doing this — then consider if you can do even more — if your blessing from Him has been greater.

(Excerpted from "Time, Talents, and Treasure" in the Lessons in our Faith video series on nynjoca.org)



STEWARDSHIP FACTS

In a typical congregation, **20 percent of the members give 80 percent of the money** (the 20/80 rule). "Recent large-scale studies have borne out this pattern. What they have also shown is that 20 percent of members give virtually nothing. The easy explanations all fail to account for these facts. The top 20 percent of givers are not necessarily the most wealthy. The bottom 20 percent are not predictably the least involved or the poorest." (James Hudnut-Beumler, *Generous Saints*)

In 1996, Americans spent **\$2.5 billion on chewing gum**. Americans also spent \$6 billion on pet food.

In a survey, 85 percent of the pastors interviewed said that they are **untrained in the theology of stewardship** and have no books on Christian stewardship, money, or giving.

Ninety percent of the parishes interviewed had no stewardship plan.

Seventeen of the thirty-eight parables told by Jesus are about money.

The Bible has **2,350 verses** on possessions and money.

Parishes with growing incomes and effective ministries and outreach do **talk about money and stewardship**.

(From the OCA Stewardship Resource Kit, found on goodnews.oca.org)

Two Mites

The relationship of a person and his money is fundamentally a spiritual matter: it reveals as much about his relationship with God as does his discipline of prayer or any other "religious" activity. Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, "*Where your treasure is there shall your heart be also.*" Somehow, in some way, what a person does with his money, how he thinks about it, where he spends it, what he will do to earn it, and the things to which he will give it, are some of the real clues to who he is inside, to what is essentially important to him, to what is really in his heart... The places where we make our most serious investments are the places where our real self, our inner self, is going to be most interested, most teachable, most responsive, and most open. To deal with a person in terms of what he does with his money is to deal with most people where they really live.

