

January 1, 2022. Local Church Budget.

First is Where He Belongs

Appeal: Genesis 1:1

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

We worship God because first is where He belongs. The opening words of the Holy Scripture, “In the beginning God,” positions God as “The First” without other details about His origin and prior existence. His position as “The First” is more than an honorific or a static title; it declares the Divine Being as the rightful Starter of everything. In Paul’s words, He is the Chief Cornerstone, and for John the Revelator, He is the Alpha. As the appeal “Put God First” resounds in our ears, it would be presumptuous to think that we can decide whether God is first. Putting God First is simply an acknowledgment of who God is: The First, The Starter. When we put God first, we are aligning our existence with the order of the universe.

The story is told of two brothers who were busy assembling the pieces of a puzzle game. After some time, the father could hear conflict between the brothers. As he stepped into the room, he could see both holding and pulling the same piece of the puzzle while screaming at each other. One wanted to place the piece at the bottom left and the other at the top right. ...He could not refrain from smiling and finally gave these words of advice: “Unless the piece is placed where it should be, you will never complete the puzzle.”

Unless “The First,” “The Starter,” is placed where He is supposed to be, our existence will never be complete. We are doomed to be non-starters. In managing our resources, small and great, who and what is competing for the first place? If you aspire to make this year a masterpiece of your life, choose to acknowledge God as the First in everything.

Prayer: Lord, we praise You for being the great Starter of the universe. We invite You to be First in our life and First in the management of our resources. In You, we want a great start and to finish strong.

January 8, 2022. Religious Liberty

Appeal: Matthew 5:9-13

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

The mission of the Adventist Church’s Religious Liberty Ministry is to preserve the ability of its members to practice and share their faith as their conscience dictates, and to administer the Church’s institutions in a manner consistent with our biblical beliefs.

The Public Affairs and Religious ministry protect and defends these sacred freedoms through the distribution of Liberty Magazine, legislative advocacy, public awareness initiatives, coalition building, education of our members and pastors, and the legal system.

The funds given today will go to sponsor Liberty Magazine subscriptions to individuals who make decisions that impact our ability to live out our religious convictions, to share God’s love with others, and to maintain churches and schools that reflect our Christian values and teachings.

It will also support the legal defense of members who experience religious discrimination in the workplace.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church additionally advocates on behalf of the religious freedoms of individuals who believe differently than we do. In doing so we honor God’s gracious gift of individual choice and the power of the Holy Spirit to motivate sincere change.

Please prayerfully consider giving generously to this offering. The amount of money contributed directly impacts the number of Liberty subscriptions that are distributed and the number of members the church is able to assist.

Join me in making the religious freedom of our church and its members a priority.

Prayer: Lord, indeed You are the Wisest Instructor. We invite You to lead us in our life decisions and the management of our resources.

**January 15, 2022. Church Budget. Supernatural Protection
Appeal: 2 Timothy 4:18**

“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever.
Amen.”

We worship God with our resources because of His multiple saving acts against supernatural powers. Apostle Paul speaks about his assurance concerning God’s protection and deliverance from every evil attack. God’s rescue from such supernatural powers was one motive leading Paul to constantly give Him glory.

As a young boy, Eric struggled with frequent nightmares, dreaming of attacks by strange animals that looked like some of the divinities worshipped in his culture. Frequently, he would wake up sweating and crying. As soon as he went back to sleep, the nightmares would return. To make things worse, Eric’s family would often hear strange noises on the steel roof of their house, like someone running or a stone rolling. The parents were convinced that their home was haunted and that the evil spirit wanted to kill their son. They tried every possible means to ensure protection from these supernatural attacks. Among many things, the parents would bring the boy to a Hindu priest for regular rituals, and once a year, they would do a pilgrimage to the grave of a priest. They vowed not to cut Eric’s hair until he turned 7. Apparently, these strategies did not bring the little boy peace. Finally, they resolved to seek help from the God of the Bible. At bedtime, the mother would read Psalm 91 while laying hands on the boy’s head. Gradually, Eric began making the connection between a night without nightmares and prayers before sleeping. He became convinced of the existence of a God who is more powerful than the evil forces which were harassing him. For complete security, he dedicated his life to the powerful God.

Evil attacks may be visible or invisible, known or unknown, but they are a reality that many experience. However, everyone and

everything dedicated to God can be securely preserved. This week, as we worship with our tithe and regular offerings let us express thankfulness for the divine protection.

Prayer: Almighty, powerful God, we are thankful for Your divine protection against the evil one who seeks to destroy and steal what You have provided. Today, we place ourselves and our resources under Your trust and care.

January 25, 2020

Religious Liberty

Thus saith the Lord! Recently, I read the following quote from a cherished book called *Christian Service* by Ellen G. White: “Men will exalt and rigidly enforce laws that are in direct opposition to the law of God. Though zealous in enforcing their own commandments, they will turn away from a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’” (*Testimonies* vol. 9, p. 229).

This beautiful quote reminded me that around the world there are people, systems, and powerful decision-making bodies that enforce a view of Christianity that is diametrically opposed to Scriptural truth.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America advocates for religious tolerance and mutual respect toward other religious traditions through its magazine, *Liberty*, and its efforts in the public sphere. *Liberty* is sent free of charge to many lawmakers and public figures. Our church likewise advocates and defends the religious rights in employment disputes for our Seventh-day Adventist Church members.

Our generous offering today will provide continued resources to expand this indispensable work in

defending religious liberty across the North American
Division.

February 1, 2020

Local Church Budget

Help, at the right time. A physician and his wife walked into a store and met a fellow church member. The member was frequently absent from church meetings. When asked why, the reply was: “we had some hard times, and needed to go to the local food bank open on Saturdays.” The physician and his wife felt impressed by the Holy Spirit to purchase a gift card from a local grocery store. They quoted a beautiful Bible verse on the card and set it in the church mailbox for this member.

Several weeks later, the member walked up to the couple and gave them a hug. She said: “I know this gift card was sitting for a while in my mailbox, but it came just at the right time. Thank you.” The physician and his wife were overwhelmed with gratitude. Tears welled up in their eyes. God had used them to help another person in need just at the right time.

Today’s offering is for our local church budget. We have worthy causes that minister to our local communities “just at the right time” for those who need it the most. Let us be generous with our contributions. Let us be part of God’s plan described in the book of Matthew: “for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in” (Matthew 25:35).

February 8, 2020

Adventist Television Ministries

“Who is that new person?” The pastor leaned over to the elder and asked: “Who is that new person sitting in the back pew?”

Elder: “He is a visitor who also came last week.”

Pastor: “How did he hear about us?”

Elder: “He was channel flipping and found Hope TV.”

Pastor: “That is excellent.”

Elder: “Yes. He said that the ‘preacher’ was talking about the Sabbath on TV and it was very interesting.”

Pastor: “Did you talk with him?”

Elder: “Yes, I did last week when you were at the other church.”

Pastor: “Did he enjoy his first visit last week?”

Elder: “It looks like it, since he came back this week again. I think he wants to meet you, pastor.”

This conversation takes place more and more often in churches around the world. Our Seventh-day Adventist television ministries here at home and across the world are making a huge impact in promoting the Gospel to millions of viewers. With your help, commitment, and sacrificial giving, we can continue to provide these modern-age services. Let’s commit a portion of our income to these ministries.

February 15, 2020

Local Church Budget

The angel recorded every offering made to God. In *Testimonies to the Church* (vol. 2, p. 518), Ellen White notes the following statement: “I was shown that the recording angel makes a faithful record of every offering dedicated to God and put into the treasury.” She continues on page 520 with the following words: “Duties in this direction are binding upon all who profess to be followers of Christ. God’s law specifies their duty to their fellow men: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’”

In February we celebrate love in secular society. But from a spiritual perspective, God also celebrates the importance of love toward our fellow human beings. Mrs. White is very explicit in stating that loving our neighbor is a “duty” for all of us who profess to be “followers of Christ.” Such an imperative is inescapable. God desires that we serve, in love, those closest to our spheres of influence. These could be our neighbors, coworkers, or anyone we come into contact with regularly.

This week our offering is dedicated to the local church budget. Our local churches have ministries that reach out corporately to our local communities and our “neighbors.” Let us be generous with our tithes and offerings so that our outreach may be a substantial blessing for those who receive it.

February 22, 2020

Minnesota Advance

Have I played my part well? This was the last question of Augustus Octavius, one of the most celebrated emperors of Rome. He was also a contemporary of Jesus Christ. Yet, the two could not have been more different. Augustus boasted that he found Rome in brick and left it in marble. Jesus left the center of the universe as God to save humanity by embracing human frailty. Augustus was a man of war commanding legions, while Jesus was a man of peace healing broken lives.

When death was near, Augustus asked those close to him if his life had any meaning. He famously asked: "Have I played my part well in this comedy called life? If so, please applaud as I exit." Augustus knew that there is more to life than conquest, riches, or glory. Jesus also knew that the greatest gift in life is one of service lived for the benefit of others. We see Jesus in the Bible healing, feeding, and reviving people.

Let us do as Jesus did and serve our communities with our time, talents, and financial contributions. Today, our offerings serve the various ministries of the Conference Advance. Let's give generously. Jesus reminds us to seek God's kingdom first and all other things will also be given to us (Matthew 6:33).

February 29, 2020

NAD Evangelism

A legacy to remember. Charles Marshall Kinny was the first African-American ordained minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Kinny organized the first African-American Adventist churches in the United States. He was born a slave in Virginia and after the Civil War ended Kinny accepted the Advent message and became a Seventh-day Adventist in 1878.

He worked as a pastor, evangelist, and lecturer in several states. His work was very fruitful and he is considered by many to be the “founder of Black Adventism.” The General Conference leadership turned to Kinny many times for advice on how to reach African-American brothers and sisters for Jesus Christ.

February is Black History month. We celebrate the achievements of our brothers and sisters in faith. This Sabbath our offerings go to support new church plants across the North American Division. Let us cherish the legacy of our spiritual forefathers, such as Charles Marshall Kinny, and give generously.

Charles Marshall Kinny information was retrieved from: <http://www.blackdahistory.org/charles-kinny.html>

March 7, 2020

Local Church Budget

Faithful in small things. The university student riding the subway had to make a choice: Would he spend his last 50 dollars on discretionary spending or give it to God as an offering? A verse came into his mind: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). As a new Adventist, he understood that miracles happen when the people of God stay faithful to the ideas and values that lift us closer to heaven. His offering, he argued, would help the local church reach others just like him.

The reason he became an Adventist Christian was due to a local Seventh-day Adventist church sponsoring a teacher who in turn gave Bible studies to students. He was one of those students who accepted Jesus Christ and chose to be baptized. The student decided to stay faithful to his pledged promise and give an offering to God in the local church.

The local church has an array of ministry opportunities that reach out to students, single parents, economically disadvantaged people, the sick, and the imprisoned. Our faithful and generous support of these ministries will have a tremendous dividend for eternity. Let us be liberal and magnanimous in supporting our local church budget. This support will serve people in need and introduce them to Jesus.

March 14, 2020

World Budget Emphasis:

Adventist World Radio/Hope Channel

Maria had hit rock bottom. After escaping an abusive marriage, she eventually found love again with a kind policeman. But then the unthinkable happened and she and her husband were ambushed during a drive-by shooting. Her husband shielded her with his body. She survived; he didn't. Her anguish became unbearable. She succumbed to depression and even turned to séances.

One day, her sister forwarded her an AWR360° cell phone sermon about the state of the dead. She became convicted about the Bible truth and prayed for forgiveness. That Sabbath, she walked into an Adventist church with her children, and has attended ever since.

But the Lord wasn't done with her. She wanted to reach others with the Three Angels' Messages. Incredibly, she forgave both her abusive first husband, and her second husband's killers, and started sending them cell phone sermons. They now listen every week.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Hundreds of thousands of people are regularly listening to AWR360° cell phone sermons, and that number continues to grow worldwide.

The offering today goes to support Adventist World Radio and Hope Channel Ministries. Both are transforming lives for eternity.

March 21, 2020

Local Church Budget

God opens doors we can't imagine. A small church and school decided to start a building project. They contracted a local architect to design the project. The architect priced the construction cost at \$75,000. The quoted price was within the local church's saved budget. The project commenced, but the excavation cost of the building site was higher than expected. The church realized that the project was significantly underestimated and that they lacked sufficient funds.

The contractor abandoned the project and the architect left the area. "What are we going to do now?" asked the church members. They decided to pray. There was no miraculous descent of dollar bills from the sky. Yet, something happened. A church member started a fundraiser for the needed funds. The church members saw that she needed help and offered to work with her. This brought the church together. Her project succeeded in providing more than \$36,000 a year and sparked a growth in unity, faith, and trust. Tithes and offerings increased. The church grew. Within a few years, the church completed a million-dollar project and saw what God can and will do when people unite, humble themselves, and pray.

Today's offering is for the local church budget. Let us unite, pray, and ask God to show us a miracle. Let us become accessories to this miracle by returning faithfully His tithes and offerings.

March 28, 2020

Local Conference Advance

A call to action. Revelation 22:12 states: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every one according to his work.” This statement calls us to action. It reminds us that our salvation has already been decided and will be granted when our Savior Jesus Christ returns the second time. Which brings us to a second Scripture passage. Matthew 28:18-20 calls us to be witnesses to the world by teaching, baptizing, and observing eternal truths spoken by Jesus Christ.

The question is, “How do we do this?” In part, we achieve this through our personal example, lifestyle, faith, and dedication in our service to our local communities. We fulfill the Great Commission through our local conference fields.

Our local conferences serve our local communities. They sponsor evangelistic series, manage camps for retreats, and organize need-based services.

When we give to Local Conference Advance, we fund ministries that directly and effectively serve the needs of our particular region.

Let’s continue to fulfill the Great Commission by actively funding Local Conference Advance ministries. By faithfully and generously giving, we serve and introduce people to Jesus for eternity.

April 4, 2020

Local Church Budget

When we serve, we create a better future. Shellie and her two children walked into a local library. She struck up a conversation with another mother who also had two children of similar age. A friendship ensued. A few months went by and Shellie learned that her friend struggled financially, living paycheck to paycheck.

The Lord impressed Shellie, a nurse, to help. She talked with her husband and they decided to purchase a few boxes of diapers and clothes, and send them to her friend anonymously. They learned that the struggling mother did not have any means to purchase the much-needed diapers. The gifts could not have come at a better time.

Despite desiring to remain anonymous, Shellie and husband were discovered and were thanked for their kindness. Such acts of kindness are examples of how we can serve and, in the process, create miracles in other people's lives.

Today, single-parent households are one of the fastest growing demographics. Single parents live in our local communities; working, shopping, and eating.

When we are faithful in our giving, we serve the needs of our local communities such as single-parent households. Let us give generously today to our local church budget.

April 11, 2020

**World Budget Emphasis:
Christian Record Offering**

How much is your sight worth? A few years ago, Claudia was talking with Roger, a recently baptized Adventist teenager, about disabilities. Roger was in awe of how Claudia was able to get around, read, and function with a severe disability that drastically reduced her sight. Claudia had lost her eyesight 10 ten years prior and was totally and legally blind. She was studying to become a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and was reading several publications that were provided by Christian Record Services.

After Roger left Claudia's home, he decided to put a bandana on his eyes and try to function without his eyesight for an entire day. He tried memorizing the placement of furniture, dishes, and other essentials in his room. He only lasted for one hour. Roger kept bumping into things in his house, could not find anything, and felt frustrated. He took off his bandana and understood how important it is to have eyesight and be able to function.

Christian Record Services is an organization that provides materials and services for the visually impaired. It also provides camps for children who are blind and cannot afford to attend them.

Our monetary gifts on behalf of Christian Record Services bring us closer to Jesus and also fulfill the commission described in Matthew 28:18-20.

April 18, 2020

Local Church Budget

Dream big. Susan Herbert Timmons managed 5,000 volunteers who served local communities in Virginia.

The women's ministries team sat at the table planning activities to reach women in the community. The discussion centered on how to reach out to young moms, busy working women, and the homebound. Down the hall, the deacons were discussing ways to spruce up the church grounds. The children's ministry team was designing the summer Vacation Bible School and ways to reach neighborhood children. The worship team was planning a special music program to inspire our local community as well as church members. The evangelistic team was scheduling a series of speakers to address end-time events. Each team member volunteered time and talent to spread God's love.

While each congregation has unique needs and a similarly unique community to serve, the willingness of volunteers is needed to provide the guidance, direction, and support to engage others in Christ's ministry and our calling to spread the gospel.

When you support your local church budget, you provide the resources to enable the work of these ministries in your community. At the same time, you honor and encourage the volunteers to dream big so that they may draw others closer to Christ.

April 25, 2020

Minnesota Advance

Timely and proper maintenance is important. A few years ago, a man met a milestone when his 1964 Porsche 356 C reached an astonishing one million miles driven. He became a local celebrity in his hometown. You have probably heard stories like this in the media: automobile owners of various brands being offered brand new vehicles for similar reasons.

When the owners of the various cars were asked what the secret was to such long driving histories, they were almost unanimous in their responses: “Timely and proper maintenance.”

Maintaining the ministries of our local conferences is similar. The “proper and timely maintenance” is predicated on a systematic and proactive giving on our part. In fact, we should teach such benevolent and premeditated approaches to tithing and offerings to our children. After all, they are the next generation of Seventh-day Adventist Christians to carry the “torch” of the Gospel forward.

It needs to be timely so as to avoid moments of crisis and total backdowns. We are all familiar with how small problems left unattended turn into major headaches later. Let us resolve that we will systematically, proactively, and benevolently support the mission, the vision, and the ministries of service in our local conference territories.

May 2, 2020

Local Church Budget

Do we know our neighbor? Ellen G. White once noted: “Wherever a church is established, all the members should engage actively in missionary work. They should visit every family in the neighborhood and know their spiritual condition” (*Testimonies*, vol. 6, 296).

To a postmodern, ultra-busy, perennially distracted Western mind (such as a North American Seventh-day Adventist Christian), such counsel seems surreal or out of this age. Did she really say that we should know our neighbor’s “spiritual condition”? Wouldn’t that be a bit nosy? Perhaps offensive to our neighbor? Did she mean we should do that personally? Or corporately as a church?

Her counsel seems to be clear: “wherever a church is established, all the members should engage actively” in ministry that will denote empathy, care, and genuine service. This was the model that Jesus Christ also followed. Our Savior cared for the people whom He served in the local communities.

We are called to serve our local communities personally and also corporately as a local church. Let us be faithful and support the ministry of our faith community and thus hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May 9, 2020

**World Budget Emphasis:
Disaster and Famine Relief**

Adventist Community Services. In a small town near Baltimore, Maryland, flooding destroyed homes and businesses within a two-hour time frame.

Adventist Community Services Disaster Response (ACS DR) volunteers organized a “Muck Out” for the affected homes in the community. Each home they visited was close to a waterway that had produced river-like water flow out in the streets. Many boxes and furniture had held water for more than two weeks. Additionally, some of the homes developed mold.

One family whose basement was flooded with more than 24 inches of water appreciated the help. Volunteers worked on their home removing furniture, carpet, drywall, and the remaining debris. The ACS DR teams were also able to provide other needs, such as food, water, and basic items.

ACS DR works throughout the North American Division serving communities in times of crisis. Today, your offering will be gratefully received to support the North American Division Adventist Community Services and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) internationally to assist before, during, and after disasters and traumatic events.

—Wynelle Steven is the Assistant Director at Adventist Community Services.

May 16, 2020

Local Church Budget

Yes, we can. Yes we should! A couple of years ago, *The Compass Magazine* had an interesting article about tithe and offerings. The article noted that in 2017, close to 1.02 billion dollars were given in tithe in the NAD. There was more interesting statistical data: one third of “active” Adventist members did not return a tithe. Young people and old alike “neglected” to be faithful in returning a tithe to the Lord. Why didn’t they give? The reason was not theological. It was not pastor-related (whether they liked or disliked the pastoral service). Believe it or not, it was simply a case of forgetfulness. People just plain forgot to pay their tithe.

Another subset of the same demographic noted that “they needed to tithe more regularly.” The Bible concurs. We can, and we should, remember to pay an honest tithe to our God. It is estimated that if most active Adventists would return an honest tithe, our annual income would easily double to \$2 billion.

Let us make a new covenant with our Lord to be faithful and return a faithful tithe to He. Yes, we can, and yes, we should!

Article sourced and retrieved from:

https://thecompassmagazine.com/blog/the-tithe-conundrum-what-percent-of-adventists-actually-tithe#_edn2

May 23, 2020

Minnesota Advance

Inflation by the numbers. Hungary has the distinction of having had the world's highest ever printed denomination banknotes at a staggering quintillion Pengo (the local currency between 1927 and 1946). That is a one followed by 18 zeros. Such hyperinflation hit the country between 1922 and 1924. In fact, Hungary managed to win another record by introducing a 100-quintillion note in 1946. After the second world war, inflation doubled every 15 hours. How much was 100 quintillion Pengo worth? A grand total of twenty cents.

Over the past several decades, average inflation in the United States has been around 3 percent. When inflation occurs, purchasing power erodes. Thus, every year, our dollar will buy three percent less.

As a non-profit organization, our church relies and depends on benevolent donations. If we always give the same amount without accounting for inflation, the ministries of the local fields will at some point run deficits. As we plan our systematic giving, let us increase our donations and account for the yearly purchasing power loss caused by inflation.

When we think strategically and account for inflation in our giving, we strengthen and secure the ministries of our local conferences.

May 30, 2020

Maplewood Operating Budget

Seek you first the kingdom of God. From cashless societies, to mega metropolises, to positronium fueled space exploration, humanity is rapidly accelerating its existence into an uncertain future.

Lifespans are prolonged. In the near future, medicine is personalized via nanotechnology to an unprecedented molecular level. Some argue that singularity (the science of merging humanity with algorithmic computer artificial intelligence) will redefine the very essence of what it means to be a human. The exponential growth in scientific advances and its related experiential continuum of our lives will most likely create insecurity and by extension will question identity.

The Bible promises us that certainty and a spectacular future (John 14:1-3) will be given to us by our Savior Jesus Christ. There is a caveat here: we are to seek the kingdom of God **first** (Matthew 6:33).

In this age, traditional orthodoxy is challenged, assumptions are discarded, and biblical counsel is dismissed as archaic and trivial. Yet, the God of the universe reassures us that if we seek Him first, we will spend eternity with Him (Revelation 21:4).

Let us seek Him, first. A glorious future awaits with Him.

June 6, 2020

Local Church Budget

Church money. Max was just a young boy living in rural Virginia with his parents and his sister. One summer evening, they went for a short drive to the river to eat their picnic supper.

Soon it was time for the family to pack up and go home. When they arrived home, they found the back door broken and wide open. Someone had broken into their home and stolen many of their belongings.

Later that night while Max was lying in his bed trying to go to sleep, he remembered something very important. He ran to his parents' room excitedly asking if the robber had found their "church money." His parents got up and they all went to the kitchen. Sure enough, the jar full of money was still there.

The family had been saving their extra coins and an occasional dollar to give as an offering on the coming Sabbath. They were so thankful that the gifts for the church were safe. With thankful hearts they carried the jar to church the following Sabbath and happily placed the money, jar and all, in the offering plate.

Let's be thankful today for the blessings we have and the monies we can generously share as we give to support the local budget needs for our church today.

—Carol Doudiken is a local elder in the Potomac Conference, and this story is about her uncle.

June 13, 2020

Local Church Budget

A chaplain hero serves, and lives are saved. Brad Brown lost his wife to cancer only five months before the devastating Camp Fire destroyed Paradise, California, in 2018. He worked as a chaplain at a nearby Adventist hospital when the fire enveloped the entire region. He called his two teenage children and told them that he loved them, after which he lost cell phone coverage.

More than 80 percent of Paradise was destroyed and close to 90 fatalities were reported. When the fire was the most intense, Brad decided to use his minivan to transport critical care and hospice patients from the burning hospital to safety. His actions and service saved lives. *TIME Magazine* named Brad Brown one of the heroes of 2018.

Nearly 1,300 Adventist church members were affected, with many losing everything except their lives. In crises such as these, it's inspiring to witness the outpouring of support from our faith community. Today, let's give to our local church budget to support those in need in times like this.

June 20, 2020

Local Church Budget

Appreciating our earthly and heavenly fathers.

Sonora Smart Dodd was 16 when she lost her mother in childbirth. Her father, a Civil War veteran, single-handedly raised six children, including a newborn. They lived in Washington State and life was not always easy. Years later, as Sonora sat in church listening to a Mother's Day sermon, she felt a deep desire to honor her father, William Jackson Smart. She started a petition in her town to designate June 5, her father's birthday, as a holiday. The town obliged, and a few weeks later the first Father's Day was celebrated on June 19, 1910.

In 1972, President Richard Nixon elevated the local statute to federal level and proclaimed Father's Day a national holiday. The affection of a grateful daughter led to fathers across the world being recognized and appreciated.

Every Sabbath, when we gather in churches across the country, we celebrate a close and intrinsic relationship with our heavenly Father. Let us cherish not only our natural earthly fathers, but also our Heavenly one.

As we collect our local offerings and tithe, let us be grateful to our Father for our lives, health, and families.

June 27, 2020

Minnesota Advance

We feel you are called to ministry. John Neuman was named businessman of the year in South Dakota. His construction company was respected and sought after in the city of Sioux Falls. “Business was good,” he recalls. The secret behind it all? John’s commitment to excellence in all that he offered to the local community.

John was happy in his work, but his heart yearned to do something for God as well. He went on mission trips and built churches in Panama and Arizona.

He felt the call to learn more about evangelism and outreach and thus enrolled in a short course that offered practical knowledge in this area. While taking this course, John and his wife Karris learned that several of the students were unable to pay their school tuition bills. After praying and talking it over, the Neumans decided to pay off all the tuition bills for six struggling students. Today, several of these students are full-time ministers in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For years, nobody knew about the couple’s generosity (except the students), as they kept it anonymous. They only wanted to serve.

Today’s offering goes to serve our local communities. The Local Conference Advance offering sponsors numerous programs and ministries that directly benefit our local communities. Let’s give generously.

July 4, 2020

Local Church Budget

Our citizenship is heaven. Ever since the fifth grade, Andrew desired to move to the United States and be one of its citizens. This incredible honor materialized when Andrew arrived in New York City in 1999. From the beginning, Andrew was spellbound. The skyscrapers, the hustle and bustle of the city, and the kindness and generosity of its people were electrifying.

Everywhere Andrew traveled, people from all backgrounds, colors, and cultures welcomed him as one of their own. Andrew could barely speak English, but that hardly mattered. America's people displayed a decency and desire to help even when communication was difficult.

Andrew fell in love with America: its zest for life, its optimism, and its belief in the collective potential for a better world. Andrew became a citizen and for the past 20 years has made the United States his temporary home. He has studied, married, and welcomed children in its land. He calls it a *temporary* home because as much as he loves his country, he looks forward to a permanent eternity with our God.

With an eye towards a country promised by our Savior, let us be faithful in returning our tithes and offerings to hasten its coming.

July 11, 2020

NAD Women's Ministries

We don't know all of their names. Women invested in Jesus's cause from the beginning. When Jesus traveled, the Twelve went with him, along with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, "and many others who provided for Him from their substance" (Luke 8:1-3). Lydia, a businesswoman, became the first follower of Jesus in Europe. Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, hosted Paul in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome.

Women's investment goes beyond financial. Jesus met a Samaritan woman who became the first evangelist in John's gospel. Mary Magdalene was the first witness of Jesus's resurrection. Tabitha, or Dorcas, shared the gospel through acts of service. Phoebe, a deacon, traveled hundreds of miles to deliver Paul's letter to Rome. Junia, an apostle, went to prison for Jesus's cause.

Our mothers, sisters, and daughters still face unique challenges as we serve Christ together. Women's Ministries provides opportunities and resources for women to experience spiritual growth, freedom from abuse, mentoring, networking, and greater service at home, church, and in the community.

You may not know all of their names, but your investment today will impact the lives of women and men across this division, for Jesus's cause.

—Raewyn Orlich is a pastor in Victorville, California.

July 18, 2020

Local Church Budget

God never takes a break. July is a summer month perfect for vacations. Some of us are getting ready to spend some leisure time at the lake, in the mountains, or even in a foreign country. We disconnect, leaving behind our work, hectic schedules, and the minutia of the daily grind. Hopefully, we return refreshed and ready for a new cycle of work, family, and routine.

Many know John 3:16 by heart. Its core message is that God loves humanity and came to save it. From the moment humanity chose sin in the Garden of Eden, God never had a day off from His “work.” Every day, the Creator of the universe “shows up for work” by healing, protecting, advising (via the Holy Spirit), admonishing, hoping (for wise choices), crying, and smiling.

Can you imagine the 9-to-5 grind in God’s schedule?” The sheer magnitude of God’s presence in our universe at all times and being of service to a fallen humanity is overwhelming—yet encouraging. He is there for us—we can count on Him. At all times.

Let us remember God in the midst of our vacation preparations. God never takes a day off, or a break. He is serving humanity 24 hours a day, every day, until His Son returns again.

July 25, 2020

Minnesota Advance

Time is short. “May the Lord give no rest, day nor night, to those who are now careless and indolent in the cause and work of God. The end is near. This is that which Jesus would have us keep ever before us—the shortness of time.” These solemn words were uttered by Ellen G. White in a letter written in 1886 (Letter 97, 1886). She definitely believed that urgency was needed when the people of God were asked to partake in the spreading of the Gospel.

Much like today, the people of her time were preoccupied with mundane tasks and with “making a living.” There is nothing wrong with making a living. Yet, the Scriptures warn us that priorities need to be kept in their proper perspective. The apostle Matthew is very frank when he draws a parallel between the time of Noah and the time of the end (Matthew 24:38). The Bible describes the last generation as succumbing to worldly cares and God becoming a lesser priority.

Is this really what we want? Would 80 years on this planet be it? Jesus promised an eternity with God. Why would we be careless and trade infinity for a temporary life?

Today’s offering is for our local conference. In remaining faithful and giving generously, we enable our local field to reach out to people who may not know Jesus yet. Time is short.

August 1, 2020

Local Church Budget

A lifesaving serum. In 1925, a major diphtheria epidemic was just about to sweep Nome, Alaska. The harsh and excessively cold Alaskan environment hindered the transportation of a lifesaving serum that would stop the spread of the epidemic. It was so cold that the engine of the sole aircraft that could have potentially delivered the medicine did not turn on.

Dogs were employed with sleds to transport the medication. It was an arduous journey with limited visibility, high winds, and temperatures of minus 31-degrees Celsius. Balto, a Siberian husky, relied solely on his senses to keep Gunnar Kaasen on the right track and lead him into Nome. Their delivery averted the epidemic.

God also staved off a major catastrophe by sending His only Son Jesus Christ to deliver a lifesaving sacrifice on the cross. Jesus endured ridicule, mockery, abuse, and violence for the salvation of humanity. Isaiah 53 tells us that Jesus was led as a lamb to a slaughterhouse and did not object. It was His choice to finish the journey and provide a lifesaving option.

The local church is a body of believers that reaches out on a regular basis to people who do not know Jesus Christ. Our tithe and offerings are an intricate part in this outreach. Let us be faithful in returning that which is God's.

August 8, 2020

**World Budget Emphasis:
Oakwood/Andrews/Loma Linda Universities**

Find your place – faith, friends, future. Serving more than 9,500 students combined, Andrews, Loma Linda, and Oakwood Universities are specially tasked with preparing future church leaders for the mission fields of healthcare and pastoral work.

You can tangibly help a student like Vanessa, who chose to attend Loma Linda University because of its holistic approach to health. To her, health went beyond physical healing. It included the social, emotional, intellectual, environmental, and spiritual health of her patients.

Or you can help a student like Christian, who was raised Roman Catholic in Ecuador and decided to leave a career in technology to become a pastor and attend the Seminary at Andrews University. His friends, family, sponsors, and mentors at Andrews helped him “rekindle the spark that ignites a commitment toward a true revolution of thought and action.” And he now wants to “wholeheartedly change this world with Christ and for Christ!”

Please give generously to help make a difference for students like Vanessa and Christian. Your help will be greatly multiplied by all those who are assisted by these future leaders of our churches and communities.

—Marc A. Grundy is Director of Marketing for the Association of Adventist Colleges and Universities

August 15, 2020

Local Church Budget

Is it really too much? After her baptism, Luzia made a plan to return her offering as a percentage of her income. She did not want to “forget” to be grateful to God. While living in Brazil, Luzia got a well-paid job, and writing checks for the tithes and offerings became painful. She always understood that tithes don’t belong to us and we return them to God. But she wasn’t so sure about offerings anymore.

Luzia prayed and finally understood that offerings are a way to show God our gratitude for the blessings received, and the only way to reduce the amount was if God reduced her blessings. Looking back, she can see that after returning tithe and giving offerings she always had enough to pay her bills, buy all she needed, and even make trips around the world.

She says the best thing happened when she and her husband moved to the United States. They sold their condo in Brazil and with that money bought a house for cash in the States. Daily she thanks God for this blessing and miracle, because, by her calculations, it should never have been possible.

God doesn’t need our money. He only wants us to learn to trust Him and His plans for our life. Luzia encourages you to try and see God’s generosity!

—Luzia Raleigh is a local elder in the Roanoke, Virginia Seventh-day Adventist Church

August 22, 2020

Minnesota Advance

“Begin by helping your neighbors.” “Every church member should feel it his special duty to labor for those living in his neighborhood. Study how you can best help those who take no interest in religious things. As you visit your friends and neighbors show an interest in their spiritual as well as in their temporal welfare. Present Christ as a sin-pardoning Savior. Invite your neighbors to your home, and read with them from the precious Bible and from books that explain its truths.”

This wonderful counsel can be found in the book *Welfare Ministry*, page 190, written by Ellen G. White. Two words stand out as very important. The first is “study” how you can best help. Such a word denotes premeditated interest for those in our immediate sphere of influence. The second word is “invite.” This word takes us out of our comfort zone. It reminds us that building relationships with people who may not know Christ requires time, patience, and, most of all, proximity.

When we invite a neighbor to our house, our most intimate space, we inspire trust and openness. Such behaviors often lower barriers and with time will offer opportunities for conversations about Christ.

When possible, let us seek such opportunities to introduce people to Christ.

August 29, 2020

Local Church Budget

Can we make a difference? With fewer than 40 people in attendance, the Roundup and Lewistown Seventh-day Adventist churches in rural Montana asked a very important question: “How can we impact our local communities with such small congregations?” Its “graying” constituency felt inadequate and had mobility, health, and age issues. Many argued that the modern technology was “way over our head.” We prayed, and then... God had a sense of humor.

In 2014, a man named Richard called asking: “Would you like a radio station? I will pay for most expenses and help set it up. Please tell me, Pastor, how many radio stations would you like to have?” Richard did not listen to the pastor’s arguments, and the rest is history!

In 2014, three FM radio stations were founded in the communities of Lewistown, Roundup, and Billings, Montana. In the first two churches, the members run these stations: Producing weekly content for their entire city, running computers, setting up microphones, broadcasting on social media.

Whether it’s running radio stations or supporting our local church budget, together we can make a difference!

September 5, 2020

Local Church Budget

Debt. In 2018, Americans collectively owed nearly four trillion dollars in consumer debt. A big chunk of this debt was credit card debt. The interest payment on such debt servicing alone stood at an astronomical \$104 billion.

One would ask, why are we borrowing so much? In 2014, a Gallup World Poll commissioned a study asking adults from more than 140 countries some basic questions related to “financial concepts, interest rates, compounding, inflation, and risk diversification.” Only one in three adults was able to give a correct answer. Collectively, we are becoming a financially illiterate society.

In contrast, the Bible gives us very strong counsel when it comes to debt: Don’t have it. “The borrower is servant to the lender,” the book of Proverbs (22:7) warns us. Borrowing robs us of the freedom to sponsor causes that are important to God.

Our offering today is for local church budget. Are we able to stay faithful in our giving or do we have to fret and worry that we are not able to meet all of our obligations due to excessive debt?

Information retrieved from:

<https://www.lexingtonlaw.com/blog/news/investment-literacy-survey.html>

September 12, 2020

Local Church Budget

Start where you are. Chris Gardner's fascinating story is portrayed in the movie, *The Pursuit of Happyness*. As a single parent with a young boy in tow, Gardner's character, played by Will Smith, had a hard time making it. He struggled to find adequate housing, as he had odd jobs and poor transportation. The story was emotional, raw, and uncomfortable at times. In the end, Gardner's exasperated pursuit of happiness was successful.

In real life, Chris Gardner becomes very prosperous. In his #1 New York Times best seller, *Start Where You Are*, he describes a roadmap that invites his success to be replicated. One of the most important points a reader takes away reading this book is that for anyone to succeed they need to start where they are.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Around the world a tired humanity is desperately searching for a substitute that will take away burdens and give peace. Yet, God reminds us that we can come to Him as we are.

Today, as we give to our local church budget, remember that our presence in this community allows us to reach people where they are.

September 19, 2020

Local Church Budget

Train up a child. Parents often feel guilty for not doing enough for their children. In fact, at times, some of us parents go overboard and indulge our children. Desires are satisfied, toys pile up in the guest bedroom, high-priced electronics are purchased. Soon after some of these articles are acquired, interest in them subsides and they are relegated to obscurity. Is this story familiar?

The Bible teaches us that we should “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). Teaching children about tithes and offerings is best in their earlier years. They can be taught to count out the tithe from monies they earned. They can also participate in donating to worthy causes.

The key in this training is the selection of proper timing, attitude, and benevolence. The child should not feel compelled. If properly explained, most children desire to participate in a project that helps other people.

Recently, a local pastor learned with delight that a young boy was returning his tithe faithfully because “that’s what God desired.”

Let us teach our children to be faithful in their earning and return to God what is rightfully His. This training will reap extraordinary dividends in the future.

September 26, 2020

Minnesota Advance

Living on \$2 a day. Kathryn J. Edin, a distinguished professor of sociology at Johns Hopkins University, and H. Luke Shaefer, an associate professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work, co-wrote the mesmerizing book *\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. The book chronicles the journey of nearly 1.5 million households in America in extreme poverty. Nearly 3 million children are part of this demographic.

Imagine extreme measures such as selling your plasma for \$30 to feed a family of four. These are unconscionable circumstances in which Christian empathy and help can mean hope and a better life.

In *Toxic Inequality*, Thomas M. Shapiro notes that more and more Americans, especially parents with young children, are left behind in the economic cycle. Such statistical realities can be opportunities for our Seventh-day Adventist Church to provide a lifesaving service to the most vulnerable people of our society.

Many local conferences do exactly that. They operate learning development centers and schools for the local communities. Others aid refugees coming to our country for a better life. Whatever the need, we are called to help. Thank you for being generous. Thank you for empathizing with those who struggle and for whom our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross.

October 3, 2020

Local Church Budget

Financial infidelity. This a term that describes a myriad of actions, activities and attitudes about money hidden from a particular partner. Dr. Bonnie Eaker Weil notes in her book *Financial Infidelity* that such phenomenon is the number one destroyer of relationships. Many couples feel betrayed by the offending partner's actions done in secret. The surprising revelation in reading the book is that many people do not see themselves financially unfaithful to their partners.

The same pervasive attitude is present in the Christian context. In a previous write up we noted that one third of active Seventh-day Adventist members do not return a faithful tithe. One of the main causes for such unfaithfulness was due to plain forgetfulness.

In the Bible the Lord tells us that not returning His tithe and offering is alike to robing God (Malachi 3:8). Such a strong statement may be unpalatable. Nevertheless, Scripture makes a very strong point that some of us are financially unfaithful to God.

Such financial infidelity may have deeper roots than a simple case of forgetfulness. Being faithful financially to our Lord is a predictor of our long-term relationship with Him. Let us remain faithful to Him.

October 10, 2020

NAD Voice of Prophecy / La Voz de la Esperanza

“Equipping the World for Christ to Come.” The Voice of Prophecy exists to proclaim the everlasting gospel of Christ—leading people to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.

A leader in religious broadcasting, the Voice of Prophecy focuses on God’s love and heralds the soon return of Christ—providing hope to broken people and guidance for daily living. Founded in 1929 by H.M.S. Richards, the ministry continues today under the leadership of Speaker/Director Shawn Boonstra and Associate Speaker Jean Boonstra. In 1942, La Voz de la Esperanza began broadcasting to bring the gospel to the Spanish-speaking world.

The Voice of Prophecy can be heard in nearly three dozen languages, and Bible lessons are available in more than 70 languages. Local *Discover Bible Schools* have been established in more than 2,000 churches across North America, with hundreds more around the world. La Voz de la Esperanza also has a Bible School with four collections of lessons.

As the Voice of Prophecy and La Voz de la Esperanza look to the future, they will continue to focus on sharing the love of Christ with a hurting world.

Let us support this Christ-centered ministry with our resources on this World Budget Sabbath.

October 17, 2020

Local Church Budget

The golden rule. Luke 6:31 introduces us to the gold standard of behavior toward others. It states that whatever you would like from people, you should do the same for them first. This is very sound advice. Yet, Matthew asks the very poignant question: “if you love those who love you, what reward have you?” (Matthew 5:46). In other words, if we only offer a transactional love and desire something in return, that love is meaningless.

In many instances in the Gospels, Jesus teaches His followers to love, give, and help unconditionally.

As a Seventh-day Adventist nonprofit institution, we are called to look for opportunities of service to our local communities. A parishioner once related a story to his pastor about a church. This Adventist church became so vital to the lifeblood of the local community that, if it were to be relocated without a warning, the local community would greatly suffer.

Have we become such indispensable extensions of our local communities? Are we serving them unconditionally, without any ulterior motives? The golden rule states that we are to love as we are loved. Jesus goes one step further when He asks us to love unconditionally.

October 24, 2020

Minnesota Advance

Investing in our future. Desmond Doss was an unassuming army medic often ridiculed for his stance on non-violent approaches to military service. His army colleagues often threw boots at him when he kneeled for prayer. He was called a coward and other names for his firm stance as a noncombatant conscientious objector. Yet, in 1945, at the Battle of Okinawa, Desmond Doss saved the lives of 75 men. He braved enemy fire, snipers, and an inhospitable terrain to save lives.

For such valor and courage, he received some of the highest military honors. President Harry S. Truman awarded Doss the Medal of Honor on October 12, 1945.

This service came at a price. Doss was wounded and evacuated from battle. Seventeen pieces of shrapnel were present after his gallant rescue missions. For the next five-and-a-half years, Doss underwent medical treatments that eventually culminated in him losing his hearing.

Such an amazing life story reminds us that service comes at a price. Jesus Christ Himself offered His life for the salvation of humanity. What a beautiful example to follow and legacy to remember.

By giving generously to the local Conference Advance, we are supporting programs and initiatives that are greatly appreciated in our local communities.

October 31, 2020

Maplewood Academy Operating Budget

Lunch money. In the communist regime of Romania, a teacher felt called by God to teach in a government-run school. The all-boys boarding academy was no picnic for her. She often tried talking to the students about Jesus, but was unsuccessful.

The teacher decided to pray for a venue in which God would use her to be a witness. She noticed that the students' state-provided school lunches were a bit on the light side. This observation impressed her to save a little money every month and put it in a special jar. When she would hear of a hungry student, the jar would be emptied, food would be purchased, and the student would be filled.

Soon, news got around in the student body about the teacher and her lunch provisions. The teacher rented a small house next to the school building. The students often walked to her house for food during recess. This idea of feeding hungry students became a ministry for her with great success.

Three of the students started listening to her stories about Jesus. They started reading the Bible and engaging in Bible studies. Two were baptized.

What ministry is God calling you to engage in and witness with? Do you have a talent and a desire to be used by God? God can use you and your talents to witness to others.

November 7, 2020

Local Church Budget

Is our faithfulness to God first? Ellen G. White noted the following: “We are not to consecrate to Him what remains of our income after all our real or imaginary wants are satisfied; but before any portion is consumed, we should set apart that which God has specified as His. Many persons will meet all inferior demands and dues, and leave to God only the last gleanings, if there be any. If not, His cause must wait till a more convenient season” (R&H., May 16, 1882).

When we are unfaithful with our tithes and offerings, we are sending a message. We send a message when we choose to put God and the spreading of the Gospel as a secondary or tertiary priority. We send a message that His cause must wait.

The plan of salvation was activated and Jesus volunteered to die for humanity on the cross. But what if He would have said: “I don’t really know about this.” Or, “Why don’t we wait a bit and see how this whole thing will play out?” Could you imagine if Jesus would have chosen to relegate humanity and its salvation as non-important?

God placed the salvation of humanity as a first priority in His life from the “foundation of the world” according to Ephesians 1:4. Let us remain faithful and place God first as well by returning His tithes and offerings.

November 14, 2020

**World Budget Emphasis:
Annual Sacrifice for Global Mission**

Let's sacrifice. Prem received medical training and then chose to live on a small stipend in a remote town in India as a Global Mission pioneer. Before Prem arrived, there were no Adventists in the region. The nearest hospital is several hours away, so pioneer Prem uses the talents God has given him to serve the town's sick. He transformed his living room into a clinic where he lovingly teaches the locals how to adopt a wholistic lifestyle and treats their illnesses. Then he prays for the Heavenly Physician to heal and bless them.

Through Prem's compassionate words and actions, many of his former patients now come each Sabbath to the local church building.

Global Mission pioneers sacrifice much to take Jesus to the unreached cities, towns, and villages around the world and to put His method of outreach into action. The question is, What are you willing to sacrifice to help support them?

The November 14 Annual Sacrifice Offering is a great time to make a special gift to support the work of Global Mission pioneers. If you want to help share Jesus with unreached people, write "Annual Sacrifice Offering" on your tithe envelope.

November 21, 2020

Local Church Budget

Let's give for the right reasons. In 1939, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt, at the behest of the retail lobby, decided to change the American* Thanksgiving Day from its traditional date to one week earlier. The retail community was worried that the short shopping season would have a negative effect on the still fragile economy, and the president was trying to help stimulate it. Several states celebrated the original Thanksgiving Day. About half of the states decided to keep the new, earlier version of the holiday. Disruption, confusion, and acrimony led Congress to pass a law that cemented Thanksgiving Day to its original fourth Thursday of November.

In the spirit of Thanksgiving Day, let us recount all of the blessings that we have received from God in this past year. And when we sit down and plan our systematic giving to our local church, let us remember to give for the right reasons. Let us give with a grateful heart. Scripture tells us that God “loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Today our offering goes to the local church budget. When we give for the right reasons, cheerfully, with a love-filled heart, God will bless us abundantly.

**Thanksgiving is celebrated in Canada on the second Monday in October.*

November 28, 2020

Minnesota Advance

When we stop and serve, others go to camp. Ed Horan of Lewistown, Montana, was hurrying to visit a sick person. When he was just about to enter the house, a young teen with a sad demeanor walked toward him on the sidewalk. Ed felt impressed to stop and ask the teen what was wrong. They chatted for a minute, and Ed realized that the teen was blind.

Anthony lost his eyesight in an unfortunate sledding accident and his life changed drastically. He was legally blind. Ed talked with the young man and informed him that there was a summer camp taking place for young people with disabilities. This camp was sponsored by private donations and the local conference. Within three days, Anthony was enjoying summer camp with other young people.

This miracle took place because one person listened to that ever-still voice of the Holy Spirit. He stopped, he cared, and he engaged in a conversation with a stranger.

Do we care? Do we stop? Do we ask other people about their days or weeks? It can be intimidating at times. Yet we must remember that all of us carry burdens. Most of us have issues. And all of us can become opportunities for service.

Let us ask God for such opportunities to serve. When we serve, we better other people's lives.

December 5, 2020

Local Church Budget

Consumerism or service? December is accompanied by holiday shopping anxiety for some of us. The holiday season implies spending and keeping up with “standards” that are self-imposed or copied from the proverbial Joneses. In November 2018, the American Research Group, Inc., noted that the average American would spend \$992 on holiday gifts. This number was up from the previous year (\$983 in 2017). Single-item purchases are becoming more expensive and larger.

But something is changing. Consumers are getting fatigued with the constant drumbeat of spend, spend, spend. Movements are springing up around the idea of consuming less and living more affordably. From tiny houses to skipping gifting entirely, our society is shifting priorities. More and more people are treasuring experiences, family, and opportunities to serve instead of purchasing objects with an arbitrarily inflated value.

The Bible reminds us that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). Before the holiday season begins, let us resolve to focus on people, needs, and opportunities to serve. Let us seek those in need in our local communities and cherish the opportunities God puts in our way. We have a choice: We can continue to be consumers, or we can be providers of vital services for those vulnerable and in need.

December 12, 2020

**World Budget Emphasis:
Adventist Community Services**

You meet the most wonderful people. Jason Morgan and his wife retired from the Air Force after 27 years of service. Jason served as bodyguard to Four-star Generals and was also involved in other sensitive military tasks all around the world. They recently moved into the same neighborhood as Patty Marsh, Upper Columbia Conference Director of ACS, Adventist Community Services.

Patty and her husband, Larry, met them while on their walk as the couple was moving in. Somewhere in the conversation Jason mentioned that he loved to knit winter caps. Patty came up with a wonderful idea of utilizing his creative skills to knit winter caps for the kids at STEAM Ahead and the Spokane Better Living Center Food Pantry in Washington.

Jason was so grateful for this opportunity and thanked Patty for providing places for him to share his handiwork. Patty stated, “You meet the most wonderful people as you give your best to bless others.”

By supporting ACS, you can make a lasting impact in your community, whether it’s by volunteering your time or donating goods and financial contributions.

—Wynelle Stevens is Assistant Director at Adventist Community Services.

December 19, 2020

Local Church Budget

Accessory to a miracle. On December 22, Lauren heard that her father needed emergency open-heart surgery. He lived in Europe, but Lauren was in the States. To fly to Europe on short notice was prohibitively expensive. An expired passport was also a concern. Her desire was to take her young daughter, Sabine, on this trip. The least expensive tickets were \$1,200. She needed two. Lauren prayed.

On Sabbath, Lauren and her family continued to pray. Church members formed a circle of prayer. And the miracles came.

First, the passport was renewed in just a few days. Second, a sister in the local church felt impressed to send a check for \$1,000 to Lauren. (It was mailed before the Sabbath on which the family prayed for a miracle.) Third, Lauren discovered that she had enough reward points to purchase a ticket. Fourth, Delta was informed of the story behind the short notice trip and discounted the second ticket to \$731.

Lauren broke down with tears in her eyes and related the story of these miracles to her father. He also was touched by God's kindness. The following Sabbath he made amends with God and took part in communion.

This miracle was possible because ordinary people decided to serve others. When we give to the local church budget, we too become accessories to miracles.

December 26, 2020

Local Conference Advance

Life is short—define your priorities. A pastor had a large, white rectangular board in his office. A timeline starting with his date of birth and presumed date of death (based on Social Security actuarial statistics) was drawn at the top of the board. The pastor was 42. He presumed based on his family health background that his imminent death would occur at around his 75th year of life. Statistically speaking, he only had 32 years of life left. He also assumed that the last 10 years of his life would be riddled with medical issues and, thus, the quality of his life would be lessened. In short, he only had 22 years of quality life left.

If other variables such as accidents, strokes, and heart attacks would not occur, this pastor could have 22 years of opportunities to make a meaningful life for himself, for his family, and for the local community in which he lives. (Of course, God ultimately determines when we die.)

We have to give it to him. He was very intentional about his remaining life. Can we say the same about ours? Have we thought about how we are to live out the remaining time of our lives? What are our priorities? Where do we spend most of our time, resources, and energies? Is God part of it at all? This year, 2020 is ending. Let us give liberally. Let us give as if God is the most important aspect of our lives.