

Dear Ones,

Last month I tried to make my case for not “going light” on stewardship this year. To back up my claim, I am going to continue for the next few months on that very topic. For years I have, as Rector, and now Bishop, been open and transparent about my giving with those who I serve. In my stewardship consultations over the years there is nothing that brings people more anxiety than telling others what they make and what they give, in specific terms, and also the topic of “should the priest know what people give?” (a topic I may speak to at a later time).

In this article I want to address the first issue, talking about our giving with specificity and why I think that is important. The first time I did this, being convinced and converted by my work among my mentors in the stewardship area, I was terrified. As in most churches, money was not high on the list of polite conversation, and getting real enough to start talking numbers, unheard of. I wrote the letter, much as you will see in this one, and sat back and waited. Very quickly, the first call came in. It was from a member of our parish who, when I answered the phone, said, “I got that letter!” I was not sure where we were headed, but to my amazement, the voice on the other end of the line said, “The Church has given so very much to me, to my family. I am not sure what I would do without it. I can take it so much for granted. When I read your letter I realized that I give more to my cleaning lady, than I give to the Church.” And she just kept repeating that line. She went on to talk about how that was going to change, that she was not tithing, but she was going to work toward it. The conversation transformed her, and it transformed me. I remember sitting there with tears running down my face, because, on the other end of the line, I heard a liberated voice; someone who had discovered anew the giftedness of life, and a reordering of priorities. Those are always amazing moments.

We give money amazing power. Proof comes in just how gently, and quite frankly secretly, we handle it. Money itself is neutral. On its own it has no value. The value it has, we put on it. The meaning, good and bad, is something we create. I am sure Jesus knew of this power, and knew of our need for liberation from it. He spoke of money and our possessions more than any other single topic. I am convinced that we can take this anxious power away not by shying away from it more, not by avoiding it more, but instead just the opposite, by talking about it openly. Some of the more practical reasons for my belief that this openness is important include that fact that I am not going to ask you to do what I am not willing to do myself.

This year, along with the changes in the budget at DHouse, my salary has gone down, actually back to what it was when I arrived two years ago as your bishop. No matter, I am very rich, and blessed. I know that. My wife has decided to go to work full time and that will make up the difference so our income will, for now, stay about at the level it was last year; something many will not know this year. Through all our work, my family stands to bring in about \$134,000 next year. Most of that is what you pay me, but some money comes from other areas as well. With other benefits I get by being your bishop one could say I make even more. Even though this is not cash, I benefit from it. We plan to give \$25,420 (15.5 percent) of our income away to various things in which we believe and want to be part. Of that, \$17,056 will go directly to the Diocese of Olympia through each church I visit and other ministries here (10.4 percent of our income). For the fourth year, we have also decided to follow the .7-percent plan to help the world reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations and commended by our Presiding Bishop and General Convention as something toward which we should all strive. My family and I have signed on and will give .7 percent or more of our income toward world poverty reduction. So, the additional \$8,374 goes to the MDGs and other charities we support. Our son, Austin, follows the same program. He learned when he was old enough to know what money was, to give 10 percent of it back, save 10 percent and live on the rest. Austin is earning \$25, and so he gives \$2.50 to his church each month, and saves \$2.50. (He

has saved a lot, I may need a loan from him soon!). He and I talk about this a lot, especially when he asks for a raise! Always part of our conversation is the fact that making \$25 month puts him in the top 10% of wage earners in the world.

All I can say is this, since I was converted to the tithe, knowing my income, conscious of my gifts, I have been deeply blessed, and more generous. There is a wholeness that I cannot exactly explain. As Christians, our life is not bound to this power and, being free from it, we are closer to The Power in whom we do find our hope and our salvation.

Faithfully,

Greg