

## **Financial Stewardship in COVID-19**

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Dear Friends in Christ,

In the midst of uncertain days and the rapidly changing world that is being shaped daily, even hourly, by COVID-19, some things remain unchanged. Our Lord is still the provider of all we need to support this body and life. He is the One who has given us the gift of life eternal through His own life, death, and resurrection even as our Lord so wonderfully reminds us through the season of Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. He is also the One who resources us to respond to His mercy in our lives through our own gifts back to Him which He in turn uses for the furtherance of His kingdom's work.

We each now walk a balance between our own fears of what will happen to us and our families and our sanctified response to our Lord's grace as expressed in our support of the local church even at this time when we cannot gather together as the church. Church leaders also need to plan how best to appeal for faithful giving, how to maintain the welfare of church staffs, how to care for those in need, and how to manage well the resources the Lord does bring to them for the support of the local church.

What follows, I pray, is both an encouragement and some practical considerations on both personal and congregational financial stewardship amidst COVID-19.

### **Personal Financial Stewardship**

- **Continue to give your regular offering** to your local congregation. This may be more challenging as we are not able to meet together in the Lord's house at this time. If you have not considered giving online and becoming a regular online giver to your local church now is the time to do so. If you do not know how to give online, contact your pastor or lay leaders to see how that can be done. If you do not wish to give online, make a plan to regularly mail in your offerings.
- **Adopt a special aspect of your church's ministry as your passion project.** This may be taking on your congregation's light bill, or sponsoring your food pantry for a given week. See what you normally give, and find something that your church needs to expend resources for that you care about, and make that your "above my normal giving" gift.
- **Become an advocate with your friends for continued support.** While you may still joyfully support your church, your fellow church members

may be tempted at this time to pull back on their own stewardship. At this crucial time, your encouragement to fellow members may be a vital way our Lord can use you to build them up and keep them mindful of their own care for the Lord's work among you.

- **Reach out to do a “wellness check” on your staff.** Church and school staffs right now are, like so many, stretched, tired by their focus on the care for others, and likely just as concerned about their own welfare and that of their families. A call from you to check in, ask what prayer concerns there are, ask how you might support them at this time, is a powerful assurance and reminder that we are a family in Christ who is caring for them through you.
- **Look for ways to match your financial gifts.** Your place of business, your insurance group, social organizations to which you belong, all might seek special ways of helping make your giving a greater impact through their match. If they are not doing this, your suggestion to them might spur such giving opportunities.
- **Remember your church in your estate planning.** Many of us are home now and if you have some extra time on your hands, now may be a good time to draft or update your estate planning. As you do so, prayerfully consider your local congregation as a part of that plan.
- **Pray.** Our Lord directs us in His Word to “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,” [I Thess. 5:16-18] and “The prayers of a righteous person has great power as it is working” [James 5:16b]. Continue to faithfully intercede for your church in its financial need before our gracious and abundant Lord.

### **Congregational Financial Stewardship**

- **Communicate the need of the ministry to your members.** In times of crisis, people can respond to bad news. They cannot respond to no news. Plan to prepare bulletin statements, emails, video taped messages posted on YouTube or social media that calmly and accurately explains where the congregation is due to the COVID-19 crisis. This gives members the opportunity to ponder how they might be our Lord's answers to your ministry needs.

- **Host “tech support” for new online givers.** Some congregations and many members are new to online giving and may be cautious or even overwhelmed by the thought of giving a gift in this way. Ask volunteers who are familiar with how to establish online gifts for your congregation to be available for a few evenings to receive calls from fellow members so that they can walk them through their first online gift. These volunteers are likely members who have established a recurring online gift for your church and encourage them to share what a blessing that has been for them with those who call them during the “tech support” sessions.
- **Acknowledge first-time online givers.** When someone has responded to the Lord’s grace in their lives and given an online gift to your church for the first time, be sure to send them a thank you, whether through email or regular mail. A short, personally-written note is a “high-touch” way to communicate your appreciation of their response to God’s grace in their lives.
- **Develop Stories that share the fruit of faithful stewardship.** Each week seek to share one story of what happens at your church because of faithful support. These stories can be posted on your Facebook group, or personal page, sent out via email, or used as part of your church’s live stream or pre-recorded worship service.
- **Ask lay members to share their encouragement to give.** Ask those who do faithfully support your congregation to prepare one-minute videos that share why they give to your congregation, or how the Lord has blessed them through their own act of giving. Embed these videos to play during the offering portion of your online service.
- **Display ways to support your congregation’s ministry.** You may wish to prepare a PowerPoint slide or short video that you can display each week as part of your congregation’s online service that explains the ways online worshipers can support your ministry.
- **Ask people to consider a tithe or proportional giving of government relief.** As our government moves to provide relief in these economic challenging days, many members may receive financial support they had not factored into their own personal budget. Ask them to respond to this support with a one-time thank offering that donates part of that support to meet their congregation’s financial need.

- **Plan for ministry with reduced support.** For congregational leaders, these are stressful times. You may have already witnessed a decrease in weekly offerings or the full cessation of them from some members as you're no longer meeting together for worship. The decrease in giving may last throughout the time that we are dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. While difficult, it is part of good stewardship to have the difficult conversations as congregational leaders about how you will maintain ministry with a consistent reduction in giving. Set the priorities for what must be maintained, at what level ministry priorities must be supported. What are aspects of your ministry that could be temporarily shelved? What are aspects of your ministry that may need to be indefinitely cut? As you make these difficult plans, consider who will be affected by possible cuts (both staff and lay participants) and how best to address those affected in continuing care and love.

**Be at peace in our Lord's abiding grace.** No matter what our circumstances, what a comfort to know that our Lord promises in His Word, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" [Heb. 13:5b]. While the days ahead may seem uncertain to us, they will bring no surprises for our Lord, and He holds us in His almighty hands. When you are stressed or troubled in the days to come, may His Word of grace and promise surround you and be the source that you turn to for Christ's peace which passes understanding. Know at the district office we continually lift you up in prayer and are a call/text/email way to lift you up in care and encouragement. As President Buss has shared, "We are in this together. And our Lord is with us!"