

**GRR Proposed Resolution 2018 - 1
(GA-1717)
(Operational, Policy and Organizational)**

**RESOLUTION TO CELEBRATE AND REAFFIRM OUR COMMITMENT TO
THE VISION OF PLANTING 1,000 NEW CONGREGATIONS BY 2020**

WHEREAS, throughout our history, the Stone-Campbell movement has been marked by courageous leaders called to create communities rooted in God's mission for wholeness; and

WHEREAS, God has called Disciples to start 1,000 Disciples congregations in 1,000 different ways by the year 2020; and

WHEREAS, since 2001, bold Disciples leaders have answered this call by establishing more than 975 new churches, including plants and affiliates, in United States and Canada, and celebrate that over 60-percent are still bearing Christ's witness to the world five years past their inception; and

WHEREAS, the New Church Movement, in response to the 2020 Vision, is a major contributor to the racial/ethnic diversity of our congregations, as exemplified by at least 28 languages in which we now worship Church-wide; and

WHEREAS, Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation partners with Disciples Regions and Areas, National Convocation, Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries and North American Pacific/Asian Disciples to train, equip, assist and multiply new church leaders as they guide new congregations into God's mission; and

WHEREAS, it is through this partnership and the mighty courage and commitment of new church planters and their families that the New Church Movement serves as an area for growth in the denomination;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting July 8-12, 2017, in Indianapolis, Indiana, celebrates the meaningful New Church work already accomplished and encourages the whole Church, Regions, Areas, and congregations to recommit to the critical mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to start new churches through 2020 and beyond. By collective spiritual support and prayer, ongoing Pentecost Offering giving, financial stewardship, and the faithful call and formation of new leaders, Disciples will champion the proclamation: "Churches Change the World... Start More!"

Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation

2017 – 20

1. Urban Missions – Pomona, CA
2. Potluck Church – Madisonville, KY
3. Vision of Jesus Christian Church – All these churches are PSWR region and are under care by the region
4. Joyful Church
5. Loving Jesus Church
6. Nanum Christian Church
7. Silver Lakes Christian Church
8. Casa de Oración Fullerton
9. Casa de Refugio
10. Centro de Alabanza Emanuel
11. Centro Familiar Cristiano Restauración
12. Iglesia Cristiana de Ventura
13. Iglesia Cristiana Emanuel
14. Iglesia Cristiana Encuentro con Dios
15. Iglesia Cristiana Seguidores de Cristo
16. Iglesia Discípulos de Cristo
17. Fe, Esperanza y Amor Christian Church
18. Iglesia Unida en Cristo
19. Iglesia Cristiana - Árbol de Vida, Pensacola, FL - In Formation
20. Primera Iglesia Cristiana, Birmingham, AL - In Formation

2016 -14

1. Community Christian Church – Brooklyn, NY
2. The Church at Lake Cherokee – Henderson, TX
3. New Life in Christ Christian Church – Louisville, KY
4. First Tongan Christian Church – Salt Lake City, UT
5. Centro la Familia Cristiano Church – Rowlett, TX
6. Bethel Ethiopian Christian Church – Dallas, TX
7. New Life Christian Church – Sacramento, CA
8. First Samoan Congregational Christian Church – Oakland, CA
9. Disciples in the Wilderness – Conroe, TX
10. Life Recovery Fellowship Church – Hastings, NE
11. New Hope Community Christian – MO
12. Chuukese Fellowship Church of Christ – Salem, OH - Affiliation Process
13. Iglesia Cristiana Príncipe de Paz – Portland, OR – Affiliation Process
14. Iglesia Nueva Vida – Portland, OR – Affiliation Process

2015 - 20

1. Congregational Christian Church – Stockton, CA
2. La Viña – Troutdale, OR
3. Christ Church – Portland, OR
4. Saint John’s Community Church – Portland, OR
5. Pacific Islands Family Church – Portland, OR
6. Iglesia Cristiana Bíblica Eben-Ezer – Dallas, TX
7. At the Cross Christian Church – Dallas, TX
8. Open Table Christian Church – Murfreesboro, TN
9. Church of Another Chance – Nashville, TN
10. Co-Heirs with Christ Missions INC – Lexington, KY
11. Discípulos de Cristo – Springfield, VA
12. Visión Mundial para la Familia – Arlington, TX
13. Pacific Islanders Fellowship- Lakewood, CO
14. Centro Cristiano Discípulos de Cristo en Houston – Houston
15. Saint Paul’s Church – Dearborn Heights, MI
16. Casa de Refugio Christian Church – Covina, CA
17. Zeteo – Houston, TX
18. Sacred Hoop Native American – Tulsa, OK
19. New Century Fellowship Christian Church – Louisville, KY
20. Downtown Disciples – Des Moines, IA

**The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
ADOPT GA-1717. (Discussion Time: 12 minutes)**

GRR Proposed Resolution 2018-2
GA-1721
(Sense-of-the-Assembly)

A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION MINISTRY

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has committed to be a pro-reconciling/anti-racist church through the adoption of General Assembly resolutionsⁱ, the 2020 Vision and its Mission Priorities; and

WHEREAS, this conversation, which started in the early 1960s as an open dialogue and church-wide prophetic commitment to the eradication of racism in all its forms; has become at times, a marginalized topic despite our continued efforts to include this as an imperative goal for the body of Christ; and

WHEREAS, in Resolution 6919 we affirmed the “oneness of all [hu]mankind demonstrated by Jesus Christ in his respect and self-giving for every person, regardless of the distinctions imposed by the social system” and acknowledged that “that despite our resolutions and pronouncements, our churches, have, with rare exception, failed to demonstrate a race-less Christianity, a community of once alienated persons reconciled and made one in Christ. We repent of our racism. We pledge ourselves by God’s grace to bring forth the fruits;” and

WHEREAS, Disciples have prophetically affirmed that we are one body of people (Romans 12:5), gathered at the Welcome Table who are commanded to love one another (Matthew 22:37-40), be reconciled to God and to each other (II Corinthians 5:16-21), and be a witness of God’s power to break down walls which separate us (Ephesians 2:14b); and

WHEREAS, we must reaffirm that the struggle against racism is not an optional endeavor but an intrinsic mandate we all must share; and

WHEREAS, we have seen the progress that the establishment of the Reconciliation Ministry office has made in advancing the church towards better providing minority groups with a clear focal point for community with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); and

WHEREAS, one office and a single funding source cannot expect to meet the challenge of dismantling racism alone, but rather all three expressions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) must join together as one to eradicate that which destroys the image of God reflected in all humanity;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, meeting in Indianapolis, IN, July 8-12, 2017, urges all expressions of the church to re-commit to “dismantle the pervasive evil of racism that keeps the community broken and fragmented [and] reconstitute the

table into a place where healing, remembering, and reconciliation take place”ⁱⁱⁱ; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly urges congregations, regions, and General expressions of the church to renew their support of the Reconciliation Ministry Offering and to explore the implementation of the recommendations of General Assembly resolution 0731 (attached) so that the funds allocated to Reconciliation Ministry will continue to sustain this ministry by providing sufficient support for a full-time staff person with administrative support and contracted professionals to provide on the ground training and education during pertinent moments of racial upheaval and reconciliation opportunities, as well as funds to support the pro-reconciling/anti-racist priority of the church; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Reconciliation Ministry, in consultation with the Office of General Minister and President, establish metrics that can narratively and numerically demonstrate progress toward becoming a pro-reconciling/anti-racist church and report back to the next General Assembly; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly acknowledges that race is still an issue within our ministry context, affirms the removal of the marginalization of this work, fully expresses support for the office of Reconciliation Ministry and the mandate of its work and calls upon Disciples to provide the necessary pastoral and financial resources to move the church to become a Pro-Reconciling/Anti-Racist church where institutional and interpersonal sins of racism will be fully eradicated; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that until then, Reconciliation Ministry will be absolutely necessary.

Centennial Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) St. Louis, MO
Webster Groves Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), St. Louis, MO
Memorial Blvd Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), St. Louis, MO
New Vision Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Kansas City, MO
Woodland Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Columbus, OH East
Sixth Street Christian Church, Oklahoma City, OK

**The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
ADOPT GA-1721. (Discussion time: 12 minutes)**

ⁱ Resolutions about pro-reconciliation and anti-racism that were adopted by the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) include, but are not limited to: No. 6919, No. 6920, 6922, No. 8122, No. 9144, No. 9720, No. 0121. Reports have also been received by the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that include background information and strong abhorrence to racism include, but are not limited to: No. 7148, No. 0113, and No. 0116.

ⁱⁱ No. 0113 Report from the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Received by the General Assembly (Year Book Pages 247-250).

NO. 0731
(OPERATIONAL BUSINESS ITEM)
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING RECONCILIATION MISSION¹

A Brief Background to the Formation of the Reconciliation Evaluation Committee

By early 2003, its existing funds expended, the upcoming Reconciliation 2005 Offering became the only source of funding for Reconciliation Mission.² Hurricanes Katrina and Rita aggravated the financial stress, for as a result of the ensuing devastation, our congregations understandably gave money to assist our sisters and brothers in the Gulf Coast region, thereby limiting their resources for other offerings. In the aftermath of these disasters, the Reconciliation offering dropped by twenty-five percent.

The continued insufficiency of funding resulted in staff reductions and severe curtailment in trainings. In light of this circumstance, Reconciliation Mission Commission formed an evaluation committee to assess its mission and make recommendations regarding its future. The Committee thus formed consisted of thirteen persons, plus General Minister and President as ex officio. The Committee included five women and eight men: five African Americans, two Asian Americans, one Hispanic American, and five European Americans.

To carry out its task, the Reconciliation Evaluation Committee devised two surveys on reconciliation ministries of the church. Each survey consisted of ten questions, one geared toward regional and general leaders, the other toward congregational leaders of the church. Each Committee member then used one or both of these surveys to interview up to four active leaders of the church. Consequently, a total of fifty-one survey results were collected. In addition to these surveys, the Committee consulted the Shank Study, commissioned by Reconciliation Task Force in 2004. This was an online quantitative and qualitative study based on 668 responses, the majority of which came from lay members throughout our Church. Recommendations in this report reflect opinions expressed in these data gathering efforts, with particular emphasis on the fifty-one in-depth surveys. The Evaluation Committee has met several times by telephone conference and once in person. Subcommittees met to help design the survey and draft the recommendations.

¹ This version of the document represents the edits and adaptations of the Reconciliation Mission Commission, which reviewed and adapted the Evaluation Committee's recommendations on March 30, 2007.

² For a more extensive background, see "Report of the General Board Task Force Administrative Committee January 2005 (abbreviated)," and "Reconciliation Mission Seeks New Approaches For Its Work," *Disciples News Service* (April 28, 2006).

WHEREAS, in the year 2001, the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, approved the 20/20 vision for our Church, which included the mandate for the Disciples to become an anti-racist/pro-reconciling Church. This mandate was in accord with the original mission of Reconciliation, whose antecedent was established in the wake of significant urban unrest following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and affirmed our commitment to live up to a core Disciples value—unity—which cannot be achieved unless we value and practice diversity, which in turn necessitates that we value and embrace persons of all races—and keep ourselves and our institutions free of racism; and

WHEREAS, after focused and prayerful deliberation, informed by the above resources, we, the Reconciliation Evaluation Committee, believe that racism—especially institutional racism—remains a formidable force in our church, and that the resources the church has thus far provided to combat it have not been equal to the task. God calls us in Jesus Christ to “break down the dividing walls that is the hostility between us.” (Ephesians 2:14b) Yet, the walls of racism have locked us into a hostile system that blocks us from achieving the unity we fervently desire; and

WHEREAS, in the light of this reality, we, the Reconciliation Evaluation Committee, conclude that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) continues to need a ministry whose sole purpose is to guide the whole Church in eradicating the sin of systemic racism. We heard again and again that this is a priority of the church. We therefore recommend that the Reconciliation Mission Commission restructure and augment Reconciliation Mission, so that it may more effectively combat racism in our midst. In such restructuring, the Commission should keep in mind that the relationships between the congregational, regional, and general expressions of our Church are covenantal, and that this justice ministry deserves the support of the whole Church working in covenant, holding each other accountable. While 2007 is a very different time than 1968, we are aware that Reconciliation’s original purpose remains to be fulfilled, that purpose being the end of systemic racism and therefore we continue to work on that mandate;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Reconciliation Mission now be called Reconciliation Ministry and that the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative housed in Reconciliation Ministry be known as the Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism Initiative. Reconciliation Ministry should carry out its work under the direction of the Reconciliation Ministry Commission, which in turn should be supervised by the Administrative Committee of the General Board; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Reconciliation Ministry focuses much of its work on networking in collaboration with regions. To this end, we recommend the following steps be taken:

- a. Regions of the Church collaborate with each other to carry out the work of racial reconciliation, possibly focusing on the existing five clusters or with other regional configurations.
- b. The clusters should consider sharing staff for the work of racial reconciliation.

- c. The regions should assume primary leadership in enabling congregational involvement in the work of racial reconciliation.
- d. Regional boards and clusters should be held accountable for the work of racial reconciliation, accountability determined with measurable benchmarks such as the number of congregations with active teams involved in the work of racial reconciliation.
- e. Reconciliation Ministry maintain an office in the Office of the General Minister and President so that it may equip general ministries and educational institutions for the work of racial reconciliation and liaise between these ministries and institutions and regional clusters.
- f. Reconciliation Ministry, housed in the Office of General Minister and President, develop resources and supervise core organizers and trainers and be available to regional clusters and other entities of the church.
- g. Reconciliation Ministry, housed in the Office of General Minister and President, collaborate with regions to promote the annual offering; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Reconciliation Ministry better communicate the significance of its works among the congregations. Towards that end we have formed an interpretation task force whose purpose is to translate Reconciliation Ministry to people who have not experienced the anti-racism training and to aid the incoming Minister of Reconciliation in developing a strategy for ongoing communication regarding Reconciliation Ministry with the wider church; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Reconciliation Ministry obtain/develop varied resources for its work. To this, end we recommend the following measures be taken:

- a. Reconciliation Ministry identify multiple models for addressing systemic racism, recognizing that no one model will meet all needs.
- b. Reconciliation Ministry develop and resource the development of preparatory materials for racial reconciliation training; such materials should include models congregations can use to engage in the work of racial reconciliation.
- c. Reconciliation Ministry develop materials and opportunities that support and encourage congregational, regional, and general ministries, particularly clergy, to engage in the work of racial reconciliation.
- d. Reconciliation Ministry develop resources that can be used to educate Disciples about the nature of systemic racism, white privilege and power, and internalized superiority and inferiority.
- e. Reconciliation Ministry strengthen ecumenical partnerships for the elimination of systemic racism; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we recommend that funding for Reconciliation Ministry be revamped and augmented. To this end, we recommend the following steps be taken:

- a. that general Reconciliation Ministry be supported by the Disciples Mission Fund. The Mission Funding Task Force will need to develop a timeline and mechanism for phasing in this budgeted item which will initially be funded by the Reconciliation Offering with the burden shifting over time to Disciples Mission

Fund. The Mission Funding Task Force will report back to the General Board in 2008.

b. that funds allocated to Reconciliation Ministry be sufficient to provide for a full-time staff person with administrative support, and to develop educational, promotional, and training resources.

c. that the Annual Reconciliation Offering, implemented in partnership with regions, be continued and that promotional costs should be shared.

d. that the Annual Reconciliation Offering that is collected be allocated among regions and Reconciliation Ministry and that the regions and Reconciliation Ministry negotiate an arrangement that will enable the regions to receive 50 percent or more of the offerings, to be negotiated with the awareness that some clusters may even choose to invest in cluster Reconciliation staff.

e. that the Annual Reconciliation Offering be used primarily to make grants to congregations, regions, general and institutional ministries for projects that focus on racial reconciliation. Congregational and regional grants will be allocated by regions. General and institutional grants will be allocated by the Reconciliation Ministry Commission as soon as the burden of funding the office of Minister of Reconciliation begins to shift to Disciples Mission Fund, and reported to General Board for approval.

f. that the Annual Reconciliation Offering be used for anti-poverty works only if such works contribute directly to the work of racial justice and reconciliation. We understand that poverty and racial inequity often correlate, and that as racial equity is achieved, poverty will decrease. We likewise recognize the biblical mandate to address poverty as a justice issue. We therefore encourage the church to find means to address poverty issues that are not directly related to race through additional venues (local, regional, general, and ecumenical); and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Fort Worth, Texas, July 21-25, 2007, join in prayer that may God bless this ministry as we serve together for all of God's people. "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Current Glossary

Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative: An initiative announced in the 1999 General Assembly to combat racial injustice; it has included training Transformation (anti-racism) Teams to work within various expressions of the church.

Anti-Racism Commission: This oversight body was formed in 2001 to give direction to the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative.

Reconciliation: The ministry that began in 1968 when the General Assembly adopted the urban Emergency program. Its mission was to work to dismantle racism in our church and society. In 1972, Reconciliation was reaffirmed as a permanent ministry of the church. “Reconciliation” has sometimes been used in a general sense to refer to the church’s work to combat racism and promote reconciliation.

Reconciliation Committee: For many years this Committee oversaw Reconciliation Fund and made grant decisions for Reconciliation at the level of the general church as well as working with the Director of Reconciliation to develop policies. In 2001, it and the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative came together under the Reconciliation Mission. In 2005, it dissolved.

Reconciliation Mission Commission: Established in 2005 by merging the work of the Reconciliation Committee and the Anti-Racism Commission, the Commission is responsible for oversight of Reconciliation Mission and thus the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative. The Commission is constituted by and accountable to the Administrative Committee and the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Reconciliation Evaluation Committee (also known as the Evaluation and Assessment Working Group): A committee created in 2006 by Reconciliation Mission Commission to evaluate the church’s work to dismantle racism and promote reconciliation. (Both this committee and Reconciliation Communication Committee were created in response to the termination of Reconciliation Mission staff in 2006 in order to discern and promote new ways of doing this ministry.)

Reconciliation Communication Committee: A committee (not mentioned in this recommendation) created in 2006 by the Reconciliation Mission Commission to develop ways to interpret more effectively and fully the work of Reconciliation Mission to the church.

(Both this committee and the Reconciliation Evaluation Committee were created in response to the termination of Reconciliation Mission staff in 2006 in order to discern and promote new ways of doing this ministry.)

Reconciliation Mission: A ministry created in 2001 to encompass both the Reconciliation Committee (the long-standing group overseeing the Reconciliation Fund and grant allocation at the general level of the church) and Anti-Racism Commission (charged with intentional organizing, educating and advocacy). In 2005, Reconciliation Mission was restructured, no longer awarding grants at the general-church level (therefore dissolving the Reconciliation Committee) and maintaining and focusing on the Anti-racism/Pro-reconciliation initiative (the former task of Anti-Racism Commission). This ministry is under the supervision of the Administrative Committee through the Reconciliation Mission Commission. In 2006, due to declining funds, its staff was let go.

Reconciliation Evaluation Committee:

Eric Brown, Ken Hall, Bob Hill, Chris Hobgood, Timothy James, Sandhya Jha, Jane Lawrence, Marcus Leathers, Tim Lee (Moderator), Janet Long, Noemi Mena, Regina Morton, Ron Parker/Sharon Watkins (ex-officio), Chandra Haskett (administrative assistant)

The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
ADOPT Business Item No. 0737. (Debate time 24 minutes).

GRR Proposed Resolution 2018-3

GA-1723

(SENSE OF THE ASSEMBLY)

ON BECOMING IMMIGRANT WELCOMING CONGREGATIONS

WHEREAS, the Bible instructs, “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:33-34 NRSV); and

WHEREAS, Jesus commands us to welcome the stranger, for “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40 NRSV); and

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) recognizes that it was founded partly by immigrant ministers, such as Thomas and Alexander Campbell; and

WHEREAS, immigrants are pastors, congregation members, and leaders in our church and denomination; and

WHEREAS, in these uncertain times of unprecedented negative rhetoric against immigrant groups and with changes in immigration policies, our congregations and pastors have heard the cries of affected communities many of whom are fearful of detention, deportation, and the ultimate separation of families and who are concerned about their families and family members who are already residing in detention centers; and

WHEREAS, the United States immigrant population stood at more than 42.4 million, or 13.3 percent of the total U.S. population, in 2014¹ and immigrants in the United States and their U.S.-born children now number approximately 81 million people, or 26 percent of the overall population of the United States²; and

WHEREAS, according to the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Immigration, an estimated 11.4 million undocumented immigrants resided in the United States as of January 2012. Between 2009 and 2013, it is estimated that 4 million unauthorized immigrants (39 percent of the overall unauthorized population aged 15 and older) resided with children under the age of 18. Of this group, about 3.3 million (84 percent) resided with at least one U.S. citizen child under the age of 18, and 16 percent resided with non-U.S.-citizen children³; and

¹ In 2014, around 47 percent of immigrants (20 million) were naturalized U.S. citizens. The remaining 53 percent (22.4 million) included lawful permanent residents, undocumented immigrants, and legal residents on temporary visas (such as students and temporary workers)

² <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>

³ Id.

WHEREAS, it is estimated that in the 2009-13 period, 5.1 million children under the age of 18 lived with an undocumented immigrant parent, representing 7 percent of the U.S. child population. About 79 percent (4.1 million) of these children were U.S. citizens, and another 19 percent (959,000) were permanent residents and those with temporary visas⁴; and⁵

WHEREAS, there were between 35,000 and 120,000 undocumented immigrants in Canada as of May 2013⁶; and

WHEREAS, it was estimated that somewhere between 100,000 and 250,000 undocumented migrants resided in Greater Toronto area alone, and that the number was expected to surge in 2015 when four-year work permits for thousands of temporary foreign workers who had moved to Canada began to expire under a 2011 law, potentially moving thousands more “underground”⁷; and

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada has historically fought for social justice and has advocated in favor of the poor, dispossessed, and marginalized; and

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is committed to serving all of God’s people; and recognizes all persons are created by and valuable in the eyes of God;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that in this prophetic and historic moment, the 2017 General Assembly, meeting July 8-12, 2017, in Indianapolis, Indiana, encourages the church to deepen its commitment to building unity and integration among all our Disciples congregations by issuing a call to congregations to become “immigrant welcoming congregations;” and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada and their respective Disciples ministries consider:

- (1) engaging in congregational prayer, listening conferences, and action around immigration policies;
- (2) offering mental health training and resources to immigrants and immigrant families, and to those from communities providing support and solidarity to these immigrants and immigrant families, such as clergy and other leaders;

4 Id.

5 The U.S. Supreme Court’s 4-4 split decision on June 23, 2016, effectively blocked President Obama’s executive actions on immigration that sought to expand Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and created Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA), thereby resulting in adverse effect upon thousands of families residing in the United States. *United States v. Texas*, No. 15-674.

6 As reported by the Toronto Sun, <https://www.reference.com/government-politics/happens-illegal-immigrants-canada-107f166da99ce7e4>

7 As reported by the Toronto Star newspaper reported August 20, 2013, <https://www.thestar.com/news/immigration/2013/08/20/undocumented-immigrants-toronto-may-be-a-sanctuary-city-but-agencies-still-ask-about-status.html>

- (3) supporting immigrant families when facing and experiencing separation; and
- (4) promoting ministries of healing for trauma resulting from immigration travel and trafficking⁸; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada and their respective Disciples ministries consider:

- (1) establishing preventive measures that help immigrant families and individuals avoid fraud and obtain credible legal resources and guidance;
- (2) offering planning and resource materials for individuals and families in the face of detention and deportation risks; and
- (3) offering support for those immigrants and families living in border communities and beyond; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that churches of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada seek to:

- (1) build solidarity between immigrant and non-immigrant congregations;
- (2) consider becoming or assisting congregations offering sanctuary protections to immigrants;
- (3) develop community protection and response models for families facing separation due to detention or deportation;
- (4) educate themselves and others about those immigration policies that support the rights of immigrant families;
- (5) offer support for current Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, border communities, and victims of hate crimes, fraudulent activity, and sex trafficking; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that congregations, ministries, organizations, and institutions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will continue to strive to respect and affirm the dignity of every child of God and to advocate for the fair and just treatment of immigrants and immigrant families in the United States and Canada.

Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries (Obra Hispana)
Refugee and Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Disciples Immigration Legal Counsel
Iglesia Alas de Salvación, Chandler, AZ
Iglesia Cristiana Emmanuel, San Benito, TX
The National Benevolent Association (NBA)
National Convocation
North American Pacific/Asian Disciples (NAPAD)
Disciples Women

⁸ According to the Pew Research Center, “The Obama administration deported 414,481 unauthorized immigrants in fiscal year 2014...” <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/31/u-s-immigrant-deportations-declined-in-2014-but-remain-near-record-high/>

Background Information

References / resource links for drafting assistance:

Previous Disciples statements/resolutions:

<https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/missions-advocacy/refugee-immigration-ministries/about/disciples-statements/>

UCC Immigrant Welcoming Congregations Initiative:

<http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/Becoming%20an%20immigrant%20welcoming%20congregation%20updated%20Nov%201%202012.pdf>

UCC's historical resolutions related to immigrants, including their most recent resolution passed in 2013: http://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration_resolutions

**The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
APPROVE GA-1723. (Discussion time: 24 minutes)**

**GRR Proposed Resolution 2018-4
GA-1732
(Study Document)**

**STEWARDSHIP AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE AND ITS
APPLICATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

This study document was prepared in response to GA-1536 which authorized the Center for Faith and Giving to prepare a Study Document on Understanding Stewardship as a Spiritual Discipline.

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A Point of Origin and Direction

This document is presented as a response to the charge of the General Assembly (**GA 1536**), meeting in 2015 at Columbus, Ohio, to offer for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) a study and reflection document on stewardship – specifically *understanding stewardship as a spiritual discipline and its practical applications for the 21st Century*.

The Center for Faith and Giving, tasked with undertaking this responsibility, presents to the General Assembly, meeting July 8-12, 2017, at Indianapolis, IN, a biblical reflection, a series of theological assertions, and some recommendations for the church to consider, along with the commitment to establish and curate resources in the long-term for the continued in-depth study of stewardship.

This document serves as a broad examination of the biblical materials that relate to the topic of stewardship, with an intent that the church become conversant with these fundamental understandings. It further provides a theological perspective which is

44 intended to encourage dialogue and conversation within the church about what
45 stewardship is, and what it means to be a steward as an individual, a community of
46 faith, and a part of God’s wondrous creation.

47
48 Assumptions are proposed regarding practical applications if the perspective of the
49 document is followed to some of its potential conclusions. Suggestions as to how these
50 assumption/conclusions might interface with the context of the early 21st century are
51 offered at the end of these pages. We recognize that not everyone will share the same
52 conclusions/assumptions of the document. That is acceptable since unity of opinion on
53 how to be a steward *in a singular way* is not the primary goal. Our objective is to better
54 define what a steward *is* and thus to open a conversation. We trust that the church in
55 its wisdom will discover what a steward *does* in the unique contexts in which individuals
56 and communities of faith are located.

57
58 The curation of resources is one important outcome of this assigned task and it is a
59 logical culmination of our ongoing work given the following circumstances: 1) The sheer
60 volume of the materials required for in-depth study cannot be contained in this type of
61 document; 2) the changing nature of our context, requiring a more nimble ability to
62 adjust to the contemporary social and political climate, which would appropriately dictate
63 the tone and focus of such statements; and 3) the fact that in this age of easy access
64 via electronic means, a more comprehensive and divergent mosaic of materials can be
65 made available to a wider audience at little or no cost with unlimited access to those
66 seeking the information.¹

67 By the church receiving this document, it is commissioning the development of
68 additional resources from a “Disciples” perspective on all aspects of stewardship for
69 study and reflection into the next decade.

70

71 **The Biblical Witness and Theological Assertions about Stewardship**

72

73 *Biblical stewardship, broadly defined, is the intentional management of resources (all*
74 *living things in and of the earth and their produce) on behalf of the rightful owner, who is*
75 *God.*

76

77 ***Abundance and Care for the Earth:*** The biblical and theological grounding for
78 stewardship is found first in the creation stories. The poem of Genesis 1 affirms God’s
79 delight in all that springs from the Divine imagination. Each day the conclusion is the

¹ The Center for Faith and Giving envisions an access port via our website to videos, articles, essays, curriculum, an extensive bibliography, and a conduit to other collections of stewardship-related materials. In many respects, the Center for Faith and Giving website currently operates in this regard. However, this portal can serve as a central location where connections to stewardship-related ministries within the whole church can be identified and accessed. For example, pointed connections on the Center for Faith and Giving website to the Green Chalice ministry within Disciples Home Missions can list assets and materials for those who visit the CFG site seeking earth-stewardship-related resources. A mirror index on the CFG website of these materials within Green Chalice would allow for easier access and quicker discovery. By its very presence on the CFG site, it affirms holistic and a less fragmented view of stewardship.

80 same, “God saw that it was good.”² In fact, on the sixth day, it is not simply good, but it
81 is “very good.”³ This embrace of the material world by the God who is wholly “Other”
82 sets the relational tone for all that follows. God and “the world” are inextricably linked.
83 Going forward, the choices of one will in some way impact the other. This
84 interrelatedness is a Divine prerogative – and choice will become a marker of the
85 human creature created in God’s image, as well. This includes the choice to love God
86 and practice obedience to God’s desires.

87
88 As the creation narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that there is an abundance within
89 the Divine design. The text implies a wild array of living creatures (winged things that
90 wing, creeping things that creep, swimming things that swim)⁴, and ample sustenance
91 for all of these beings as God has “given every green plant for food.”⁵

92
93 Further evidence that this abundance is present and intended to be a permanent
94 condition is contained within the first portion of the Divine command/promise to “be
95 fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...”⁶ The abundance of the earth is self-generating
96 and perpetual. Plants have seeds and trees have seed within the fruit for a never-
97 ending cycle of plants weighed heavy with grain and tree branches laden with produce.
98 There is enough. The *needs* of creation are attended to by Divine providence.

99
100 Concepts of abundance and the well-being of “enough,” however, do not mean that the
101 earth can be subject to mindless exploitation. There is no sense or endorsement within
102 the text that every *want* can be sustained or must be satisfied. A choice is to be made
103 for the management of resources. The second portion of the Divine command/promise
104 is to “...subdue it [the earth]; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the
105 birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”⁷ Made in the
106 image of God, the human beings are to rule in the earth in the same manner that God
107 rules in the cosmos. God governs for the good and well-being of creation. Humans
108 must exercise their designated power in the same manner. This is the goal of
109 stewardship.

110
111 Stewardship, while not specifically stated in the Genesis poem, is strongly inferred. “And
112 God said ‘Let there be...’”⁸ as well as later biblical affirmations that “The earth is the
113 Lord’s and all that is in it...”⁹ remind us that we are the creation, not the Creator. The
114 world, its produce and its inhabitants belong to God. Human beings, in exercising
115 dominion, do so on behalf of God. Therefore, doing as God would do matters and is a
116 form of obedience. We are stewards, not owners. Our own mortality affirms we are at
117 best temporary tenants and shareholders of what we claim to possess. We are

² Gen 1:4; Gen 1:10; Gen 1:12; Gen 1:18; Gen 1:21; Gen 1:25

³ Gen 1:31

⁴ Gen 1:20, 1:24

⁵ Gen 1:29-30

⁶ Gen 1:28a

⁷ Gen 1:28b

⁸ Gen 1:3

⁹ Ps 24:1

118 accountable for the way we express and exercise our dominion. There are
119 consequences for both good and poor stewardship.

120
121 In the second creation story (Genesis 2:4b-25), the concept of the human being
122 functioning as caretaker is again expressly stated. Genesis 2:15 states that “God took
123 the human creature and put him in the garden of Eden to protect and serve it.”¹⁰ The
124 human has a vocation, and in fulfilling that labor of “tending,” the garden flourishes. Not
125 only is this a stewardship function but it is also in the best interest of the garden’s
126 inhabitants, including the human! There is a direct relationship between the health of
127 the planet and the health of all living things which inhabit the earth. It was indeed
128 paradise, but what made it so was the presence of God,¹¹ not the absence of work. To
129 act as a steward is to fulfill a part of the human calling.

130
131 **Sabbath:** The dual themes of abundance and relationship continue with the dawn of the
132 seventh day: Sabbath. The very proclamation/observance of Sabbath is a way of
133 stating that God has provided *enough*. Labor is only required for six days, yet there is
134 provision for seven. This is abundance! The fear of scarcity and the anxiety of want
135 can be laid to rest and need not drive or define our psyche.

136
137 Sabbath also expresses the nature of the Divine/human relationship. It reminds us that
138 we are the created, not the Creator. The world does not exist solely because of our
139 frenetic activity. It exists because of the providential nature of God. God has
140 commanded rest and built it into the fabric of creation. To do violence to this command
141 is to deny God’s generosity and to risk a form of existential amnesia. We forget who we
142 are (the creation) and Whose we are (the Creator).

143
144 Several texts that pertain to Sabbath reinforce these themes. Exodus 16 is the story of
145 the manna in the wilderness that further affirms abundance and provision. Not only is
146 this the bread that God gives,¹² but each household has exactly what they need.¹³ To
147 hoard the manna (to keep it over for the next day, out of fear it would not appear or out
148 of greed or sloth) would lead to its becoming wormy and vile¹⁴ – except for the day
149 before the Sabbath, when a double portion could be collected and would not spoil. The
150 context of the story is set over against the wider wilderness-wandering theme of trust.
151 Will Israel believe in the God of deliverance? As the Christian Church, we of course
152 hear, echoes of Jesus’ prayer “give us this day our daily bread”¹⁵ as we read about the
153 manna. Do we believe God will provide?

154
155 The record of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 affirms that Sabbath is kept
156 because God rested and commanded creation to do the same.¹⁶ It is worth noting that

¹⁰ Translation provided by Rev. Dr. Carol Johnston, Christian Theological Seminary.

¹¹ Gen 3:8

¹² Exod 16:15

¹³ Exod 16:18

¹⁴ Exod 16:20

¹⁵ Matt 6:11;

¹⁶ Exod 20:8-11

157 all the community is to rest – including servants, sojourners [the alien], and beasts of
158 burden. This agency is extended even to the land in Leviticus 25, though the cycle of
159 rest for the land is in years as opposed to days.¹⁷ Everything needs rest. Provision will
160 be made and rest can be taken. One part of creation is not to abrogate the rights of
161 another on this issue.

162

163 An account of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5 moves us to another
164 consideration regarding the meaning of Divine and human relationship. Here, the
165 reason for Sabbath keeping is the deliverance from Pharaoh’s bondage and God
166 breaking the yoke of slavery. We mention it here because it has at some level an
167 *economic* significance, and stewardship is in part about money and economic systems.
168 Some scholars believe that the Decalogue is, in point and fact, more about social-
169 economic relationships than a moral code.¹⁸ As to Deuteronomy 5:12-15, a few salient
170 points follow.

171

172 First, the weekly observance of the Sabbath is a regular reminder of God’s powerful act
173 of deliverance (not simply a reminder of the Divine rest on the seventh day of creation).
174 Slaves do not get a day off and the freedom they enjoy comes not from their own
175 strength, but from God’s “mighty outstretched hand.”¹⁹ Second, the reason the slaves
176 labored under Pharaoh was to create bricks for supply cities – Pharaoh’s hedge against
177 the unreliable gods of Egypt who produce with inconsistent abundance. Third, the
178 relationship between Israel and Egypt is *economic* (cheap labor enforced by the
179 hegemony of Egypt’s military). Pharaoh is anxious about brick tallies, and Israel’s
180 relationship to the ruler of the Nile is based solely on their ability to produce building
181 materials.

182

183 God’s deliverance of Israel however, is not related to what Israel can produce. It is a
184 choice by God, having heard the cries of their oppression, to deliver them, not for what
185 economic value Israel may possess, but rather for their intrinsic worth to God as a part
186 of the creation. God does not deliver the people of Israel to create a new labor force.

187

188 This distinction is significant. God’s covenant will be based on relationship, not an
189 economic contract, which will thus impact the relationships among the people
190 themselves. Take, for example, the command to honor mother and father.²⁰ In a social
191 system that values life for its quality and quantity of *production*, honoring aging parents
192 who cannot contribute to the production schedule becomes problematic. In fact, the
193 entire second tablet of the law is about what makes human community possible and the
194 character of those relationships. Living peacefully with neighbor will include the
195 command to not covet the neighbor’s belongings. As it relates to stewardship, this will
196 come to light when we consider financial and material goods below.

¹⁷ Lev 25:1-7

¹⁸ For more see Walter Brueggemann: *Money and Possessions*, Interpretation; John Knox Press 2016. pp15-33.

¹⁹ Exod 5:15

²⁰ For additional consideration of this idea, see *Sabbath As Resistance*, Walter Brueggemann, John Knox Press, 2014.

197
198 **Stewardship as Loving Attention to Body and Mind:** Jewish thought understands not
199 that we *have* a body, but that in fact we *are* a body. The bifurcation and separation of
200 body from spirit comes late into the church's self-understanding and comprises only a
201 narrow percentage of Second Testament thought. To love God with body, mind, and
202 soul in harmony would have been familiar to Jesus as well as Paul. It is true that
203 gnostic and ascetic movements grew alongside of and within the early church. We
204 don't deny that there are believed benefits from suppressing the urges of the body
205 [flesh] in favor of strengthening the spirit. At the same time, we affirm that God
206 proclaimed on the sixth day that the material creation (including embodied human
207 creatures) was "very good."

208
209 This colors our perspective on the value not only of our own bodies, but on the entire
210 created order itself. We might further appeal to the apocalyptic biblical literature that
211 suggests that even the "new heaven and new earth"²¹ will still in fact be material in
212 nature, however perfect (not susceptible to corruption) it might be imagined. That
213 "God's place is among mortals"²² and that God will still "give water to the thirsty"²³
214 further suggests a realm that is not simply spiritual and disembodied, but still somehow
215 physical in nature. That this form would continue in an eternal state validates and
216 affirms material being.

217
218 When Paul suggests in Romans "...to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and
219 acceptable to God..."²⁴ we know that he has moral purity in mind (this ties to his
220 understanding that the body and spirit are intimately related so that what we do with our
221 body impacts our spirit). But, we can also infer that to offer the body as a sacrifice
222 entails giving God the best of what we have to offer. A body broken down by abuse and
223 poor health habits is far from the best "living sacrifice" we might produce! Such a body
224 cannot manifest the full capacity of its offerings and deployment of its assets. Thus,
225 failure to care for ourselves functions as a poor steward of a magnificent gift.

226
227 The body should be honored. It contains the indwelling treasure of the gospel²⁵ and is a
228 temple for the Holy Spirit.²⁶ Care for self, including rest (tied to Sabbath), renewal, and
229 providing for the body's good health are tethered to stewardship. When issues of
230 quality healthcare being available to all people arise, we can understand this as being
231 related to stewardship. Bodily health concerns, as addressed by prophets, Jesus, and
232 the apostles view healing as God's preference. Poor health separates one from the
233 community, and the failure to treat curable disease denies a person desired wholeness.
234 It follows that moving available resources in the direction of human wellness and
235 wholeness is an aspect of faithful stewardship within the context of forming and
236 sustaining community.

²¹Rev 21:1

²²Rev 21:3

²³Rev 21:6

²⁴Rom 12:1

²⁵2 Cor 4:7

²⁶1 Cor 6:19

237
238 **Stewardship and the Gospel:** “You are stewards of the many-colored graces of
239 God.”²⁷ When the author of 1 Peter makes this statement it resonates with the words of
240 Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:1 that we [the church] are “the stewards of God’s mysteries.”
241 Here the Greek leaves no doubt. It is not an inference but it is direct: *oikonomos* is
242 translated “steward.”

243
244 We are stewards of the gospel. Those who follow Jesus, who have made a confession
245 of faith, received the waters of baptism, and been given the gift of the Holy Spirit are
246 stewards – caretakers of the Good News of God’s unending love for creation, a love
247 that death itself cannot conquer.²⁸ That love is present at creation and is displayed
248 most fully in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This is the church’s ultimate
249 story, our most treasured of entrusted gifts, and it is ours to tell as faithful stewards.

250
251 Stewardship and evangelism are related to each other. We have a light to shine and we
252 must not put it under a bushel.²⁹ The simplicity of the task and the gravity of its
253 importance appear mismatched. We must tell our story because it has the power to
254 transform lives. Transformed lives have the power to change the world. Failure to be a
255 steward of the gospel not only risks others not coming to know its power, but for the
256 story (in the particular way that we, as the Disciples of Christ, know it) to not reach
257 beyond this generation. It is not about our own survival, yet we acknowledge that
258 something in the wider stream of Christian thought and witness will be lost without our
259 tributary adding to its ever-flowing river.

260
261 The Disciples of Christ tradition has long lifted the ministry of Andrew as “one who
262 brings others to Christ”.^{30,31} In story after story we learn that, despite Jesus’ urging to
263 do otherwise, those who witness his power and are moved by his teachings are
264 compelled to share the story of Jesus with others.³² To encounter Christ is to encounter
265 an experience worth sharing.

266
267 Per the synoptic gospels, upon his ascension into heaven, Jesus gives the great
268 commission to the disciples [the church] “to go into all the world and proclaim the good
269 news”³³ – leaving it for us to do in his physical absence, as a steward would manage
270 the household in the absence of the master. Prior to this, Jesus had also sent the
271 disciples on a mission to proclaim the Realm of God.³⁴ In the record of the four
272 evangelists, when Jesus is talking to the disciples, he is talking to us [the church].
273 Sharing the gospel is not optional; it is our vocation as followers of Jesus.

²⁷ 1 Pet 4:10, translation: Rev. Dr. Ronald J. Allen, Christian Theological Seminary

²⁸ Rom 8:38-39

²⁹ Matt 5:15

³⁰ John 1:41

³¹ The cross of St. Andrew is emblazoned upon our chalice as a reminder of our Scottish Presbyterian roots; Andrew is the Patron Saint of Scotland.

³² Mark 1:28; 1:45; 2:7; 5:20; 6:56; and 7:36-37 as examples.

³³ Matt 28:20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47

³⁴ Matt 10:7; Mk 6:12; Lk 9:2

274
275 **Stewardship and Resources, Money, and Possessions:** We begin by noting that this
276 relationship between ourselves and our possessions is often characterized in the bible
277 as one of *choice*. “No one can serve two masters; for a slave, will either hate the one
278 and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve
279 both God and mammon [wealth].”³⁵ It is a clear-cut choice. Money makes a powerful
280 servant but a lousy master. We get to pick, but we must also understand the
281 consequences of our choice. If we choose the possession of money as our source of
282 security and place of our ultimate loyalty, it will be like trying to collect water with a
283 sieve. There will never be enough to protect the well-being of our soul and there will
284 always be a desire for “just a little more,” and then “just this much more,” and so on, in a
285 never-ending cycle. That which is less than the ultimate cannot ultimately satisfy.

286
287 When you can give money away, you demonstrate your power over it. When you
288 cannot, it displays its power over you. The three synoptic gospels each tell of a man
289 (the composite picture of whom is a “rich, young ruler”) who presents himself before
290 Jesus with a question – a query about that which most of us would wish to have a clear
291 answer: “What must I do to inherit the Realm of God?”³⁶ Jesus begins by quoting the
292 second tablet of the Law, the things that make human community possible. Jesus then,
293 upon hearing the man’s reply that he “has done all these things,” presses him still
294 further. “Go, sell all that you have and give it to the poor so you will have treasure in
295 heaven, then come and follow me.”³⁷

296
297 Jesus sets before the man a choice: Divest your money and place it toward the values
298 of the Realm (taking care of the poor) and follow me, or stay with your stuff and miss
299 what ultimately matters. This or that. The man goes away sad, for he had many
300 possessions, or perhaps more accurately stated, his many possessions had him. He
301 chose poorly, selecting his lifeless wealth over the Living God. The strength of the pull
302 of our possessions should not be underestimated.

303
304 The nature and clarity of the decision are reminiscent of the first two of the great
305 commandments: You shall have no other gods before God; and, you shall not create an
306 image or worship anything that is “in the heaven above, on the earth beneath, or that is
307 in the water under the earth.”³⁸ The First Testament reminds us in an oft-repeated
308 mantra that our things cannot save us. When Joshua prepares the people of Israel to
309 cross over the Jordan and enter the land of promise, he reminds the people of the
310 power of God that has been displayed on their behalf, and demands that they make a
311 choice: Will they serve God or will they wander after foreign gods?³⁹

312

³⁵ Matt 6:24

³⁶ Matt 19:16-30; Mk 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30

³⁷ Mark 10:21

³⁸ Exod 20:4

³⁹ Josh 24

313 When in need, Israel has (a least part of the time!) chosen to trust God; and God has
314 (all the time) been the trustworthy provider in the desert wilderness. Now, when they
315 are to enter a land flowing with milk and honey, will they remember the source of their
316 abundance? Prosperity is as great a threat to the faithful handling of our possessions
317 as is being in want. When times are good, are we as generous as we might be? Are
318 we still aware of the ultimate source of our abundance? Or, do we think it is because of
319 our own hard work or other good fortune? Do we become more judgmental about those
320 who do not share in prosperity, perhaps believing them to be lazy? The warnings
321 (particularly in Deuteronomy 8) pertaining to the risk of unfaithfulness in the midst of
322 plenty are aimed at precisely this fact. Don't forget the true source of your provision.
323

324 Those things that would lure us away from true discipleship are rarely easily identified
325 as such. Temptation is often subtler in its appearance. Consider the choice placed
326 before our primordial ancestors and the nature of its presentation! "The serpent was
327 more crafty [subtle] than any other creatures..."⁴⁰ Even the choice in the garden itself is
328 a quest *for more than* what was deemed to be enough – to be *more than* human (eat
329 the fruit and become like God). A choice was made to live in the world on our own
330 terms instead of on God's terms, the consequences of which were/are harsh and
331 damaging to all the *relationships* in the creation. Stewardship is about rightful ownership
332 (it is all God's) and thus "rightful place" (we are entrusted with its care as *managers*) in
333 the created order. It is also about contentment with "enough" in contrast to the
334 insatiable desire for more.
335

336 This acquisitiveness is a human condition which can undermine our trust in God, our
337 relationships with one another, and the faithful stewardship of our resources. It's
338 connections to the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th commandments are obvious (the prohibitions
339 against adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting). To take or desire that which does not
340 belong to us, as opposed to being content with what we have, makes living in human
341 community impossible. To take more than we need at the expense of another or to
342 abuse the truth for our personal gain does violence to the neighbor and denies God's
343 provision and abundance, which is for the whole of creation. To be in fear that what we
344 have will be lost due to the actions of another creates defensive postures, relationships
345 shadowed by mistrust, and self-justification for hoarding.
346

347 Jesus says, "Do not store up treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and
348 where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,
349 where neither moth or rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For
350 where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."⁴¹ Despite wanting to believe that
351 our money will naturally flow toward the ventures of the heart and the spirit, Jesus says
352 something quite different. It is more than a mere suggestion that the condition of our
353 heart can be seen in the ledger of our debit card statement. Find your money and you
354 will find your heart. Your checkbook (and the church budget, for that matter) is a
355 theological document.

⁴⁰ Gen 3:1

⁴¹ Matt 6:19-21

356
357 Are we investing in the values of the Realm of God (storing treasures in heaven), or are
358 we engaged in something else? Have we been generous toward those things that lead
359 to justice, wholeness, and hope, or have we been seeking more “stuff” because our
360 current possessions have failed to truly satisfy us?

361
362 This question of acquisitiveness is not solely for the individual. It can apply to our
363 institutions, as well. To steward well the resources entrusted to us as communities of
364 faith should include an examination of our property, our “reserve” funds, and all our
365 assets (physical, human, and spiritual) that we hold in common trust. Are they all
366 employed well in service to the mission to which God has called us? Are we clear on
367 what that mission is? The human existential questions of “Who am I?” and “What am I
368 to do?” are meaningful for organizations as well as individuals. They are the perpetual
369 questions of a church that understands itself to be reformed and ever-reforming, thus
370 seeking to know God afresh in this time and place.

371
372 We noted that the relationship with our material goods, especially our money, is
373 presented as a choice. Wealth and resources are themselves treated as value-neutral in
374 most biblical passages that pertain to them. The real issue of concern is, what is our
375 relationship with these things? In what ways do we define them or allow them to define
376 us? The author of 1 Timothy reminds us that “the *love* of money is the root of all kinds
377 of evil.”⁴² When our desire is for money and material things in and of themselves, we
378 risk potential damage to ourselves and others. Most of us need little imagination to
379 connect this truth to the devastation left in the wake of those (both individuals and
380 corporations) whose only pursuit in life has been the acquisition of more. Such desire
381 can fragment relationships and exploit resources, both human and natural.

382
383 Luke’s gospel reminds us of a farmer whose land produced in immense abundance, so
384 much so that his current barns could not hold all that the fields had produced. In a
385 conversation he has only with himself (absent of others or accountability to God), he
386 plans to raze his old barns, build new ones adequate for the task, and “eat, drink, and
387 be merry for the rest of his days.”⁴³ As Jesus tells the story, it concludes with “But God
388 said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And all those
389 things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up
390 treasures for themselves, but whose lives are not rich toward God.”

391
392 We would note here that conversations about legacy are important for individuals and
393 congregations. Have we made provisions for that moment when our own lives (or the
394 sustainable life of our institutions) will “be required of us?” Understanding our
395 stewardship is “whole life” in nature would suggest that conversations about everything
396 from organ donation and the way we approach a funeral (especially cost), to being
397 intentional about leaving planned gifts for organizations that have changed our lives or
398 the lives of others, should be important. Other non-profits have not been afraid to ask

⁴² 1 Tim 6:10

⁴³ Luke 12:13-21

399 their donors and supporters to consider making a gift (perhaps the most generous gift a
400 person will ever make) at the end of life; shouldn't the church be willing to ask for the
401 same consideration?

402
403 Instead of flowing freely into a community for the benefit of all, wealth can become
404 concentrated among a few, and thus its blessings of assuring enough for others can be
405 withheld at the expense of those others. Money was not originally intended to be a
406 commodity, but rather a temporary medium of exchange.⁴⁴ Eric Law reminds us that
407 "when we lost sight of the original purpose of money and decided to accumulate it as a
408 commodity, rather than keeping it moving as medium of exchange, we created
409 economic problems."⁴⁵

410
411 We see at the beginning of this century how this becomes a concern for the practice of
412 stewardship and its impact at global level. It was reported in January 2017 that eight
413 individuals had amassed a combined wealth greater than the total resources of 50% of
414 the planet's population!⁴⁶ This staggering figure suggests a problem both in the
415 management of resources for the greater good and for the flow of money in the wake of
416 global poverty. It is true that several individuals of this "gang of eight" are generous with
417 their wealth and have invested in programs that are designed to help those in desperate
418 need. However, it is not unfair to ask, when so many go without basic essentials for life,
419 "How many billions of dollars do you need after the first billion?" The concentration of
420 wealth among such a few, while permitted in supply-side and free-market economic
421 systems, appears contrary to all acceptable biblical models. How much is enough?

422
423 At issue is not solely that some are wealthy and some are not. The concern is the
424 sanctioned systemic process whereby money is transferred to a concentrated few at the
425 expense of others through suppressed wages, which harm the very people who
426 produce the goods and services. It is further exacerbated when, due to insufficient
427 earnings, people are forced into indebtedness to purchase necessary goods for
428 survival. When lenders are unscrupulous, the rates of interest too high, or the terms of
429 loans unreasonable, the cycle is virtually unbreakable, and even more money flows
430 from the many to the few. Welcome the new Pharaoh! The practice of the empire in
431 the ancient world achieved this through taxes, indentured servitude, and outright
432 government-sanctioned theft. The prophets railed against the nation of Israel when it
433 imitated this behavior, seeing it as a violation of the laws God had set in place, and the
434 prophets believed that such actions contributed to the downfall and subsequent exile of
435 Israel.⁴⁷

436

⁴⁴ Dr. Eric Law, *Holy Currencies*; Chalice Press, St. Louis, MO. 2013 p. 133ff

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ Reported by Oxfam and CBS Evening News on January 17, 2017. Bill Gates, \$75 billion; Amancio Ortega, \$67 billion; Warren Buffett, \$60.8 billion; Carlos Slim Helu, \$50 billion; Jeff Bezos, \$45.2 billion; Mark Zuckerberg, \$44.6 billion; Larry Ellison, \$43.6 billion; Michael Bloomberg, \$40 billion. This is said to equal the economic power of 3.6 billion *people*, or roughly *one half* of the world's population.

⁴⁷ Amos 2:6-7; 5:10-12; 6:3-7, 12; 8:4-6; IS 2:1-11; Micah 2:1-5; 6:9-15

437 That said, the church also has an obligation to be in ministry with the wealthy and to
438 tend to their spiritual needs, rather than to dismiss them as evil or worthy only of
439 condemnation. While scholars within the church have clearly pointed to God's
440 preferential option for the poor,⁴⁸ that is not meant to counter the well-being of the rich.
441 Jesus says that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for the
442 rich to enter the Realm of God."⁴⁹ Therefore, it is incumbent on the church to educate
443 the wealthy on their responsibilities toward those in need and their opportunities to lift-
444 up the human dignity of each child of God. Naming the dangers of wealth and its: 1)
445 ability to insulate one from the suffering of another, and 2) the reliance on money
446 instead of God, is part of our vocation in proclaiming the whole gospel.

447
448 To suggest that God loves the poor more than the rich would be to deny both God's
449 love and God's grace to each individual person. Rich and poor alike and together have
450 both spiritual and physical needs to which the church has equal responsibilities. At the
451 same time, we acknowledge that to the one to whom much has been given, much is
452 expected.⁵⁰ Those who have wealth are often concerned about how it should be used.
453 They are also aware of how it can label or identify them in confining ways uniquely
454 similar to how the lack of money defines and limits the identity of those who are poor.

455
456 **Stewardship and Generosity:** The model upheld for the people of God is one of
457 sharing resources. Both Testaments leave little doubt that economic protections for the
458 poor and the vulnerable are not to be ignored. These prescriptions include laws that
459 pertain to gleaning,⁵¹ to what may be held as collateral,⁵² the charging of interest,⁵³ the
460 fair payment of wages,⁵⁴ the canceling of debts,⁵⁵ and generosity toward the poor
461 (which include the widow, the orphan, *and* the alien/sojourner).⁵⁶
462

⁴⁸ Catholic Encyclicals dating back to 1891 *Rerum Novarum* take up the cause of the poor. Most recently Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* links the suffering of the poor to the environment devastation we have unleashed upon the earth and its impact on the impoverished who suffer from its effects on their land (climate change) and within their bodies (pollution). All of this is within a sound condemnation for unbridled consumerism and its effect on both spiritual and physical wellbeing. Disciples should note in our own history in this area of concern that includes **GA 8735** "Economic Systems – Their Impact on the Third World – A Beginning Study" which contains a section on Christian Affirmations: *The Judeo-Christian tradition emphasizes special concern for the poor* and further states *A Christian will require any economic system to give and account of how it will improve the lot of the poor.* (Paragraph 39)

⁴⁹ Matt 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25

⁵⁰ Luke 12:48

⁵¹ Deut 24:19-22; Lev 19:9-10

⁵² Deut 24:6, 10-13

⁵³ Deut 15:1-3; Deut 23:19-20. Also, see Lev 25:35-37 and Exod 22:25.

⁵⁴ Deut 24:17-18; James 5:4

⁵⁵ Deut 15:1-11; see also Lev 25:10

⁵⁶ Deut 14:28-29; Deut 26:12. In addition, the following texts (among others) emphasize the importance of giving to the poor: Prov 19:17; Prov 22:9; 14:21; Prov 21:13; Is 58:7-8; Heb 12:16; Matt 5:42; 1 Tim 5:8; Luke 3:11; Jas 1:27

463 Concern for the poor is stated most emphatically in Deuteronomy and the appeal to
464 "...not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather
465 open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. ... Give
466 liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will
467 bless you, your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be
468 some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and
469 needy neighbor in your land.'"⁵⁷

470

471 The faithful keeping of these laws will have its own economic impact on the people, for
472 God promises that if the commandments are kept, there will be life and prosperity. For
473 Israel, and the land it is about to occupy, failure to do so will result in the blessing of
474 God being removed, which will end in death and alienation.⁵⁸ The ideal behavior for the
475 church to aspire is one where all things are held in common, so that there is no need
476 within the community.⁵⁹ This is not to be understood as an imposed economic system
477 (such as socialism), but rather a way of living that is truly egalitarian in nature, brought
478 about through the reconciliation of all things in Jesus Christ. Further, within the church,
479 there is to be no partiality shown between the rich and the poor, for to do so is to
480 commit a sin.⁶⁰ In fact, to fail to address the needs of the neighbor is to be in
481 possession of a faith that is dead.⁶¹

482

483 Such a way of being in the world is an outgrowth of discipleship flowing from the people
484 outward, rather than imposed by authority or compulsion. The Jerusalem offering and
485 Paul's appeal for its collection is one model of this behavior within the Second
486 Testament. There is a need among the "saints" in Jerusalem, and Paul has agreed to
487 seek financial assistance from the gentile churches in Asia Minor and Greece.⁶² We first
488 learn of this offering at the end of the First Epistle to the Corinthians,⁶³ as Paul instructs
489 the church gathered there to prepare for his coming. He encourages the Corinthians to
490 approach this offering with intentionality and discipline. Each week they are to set aside
491 something, so that when he arrives they will have the gift ready. That this gift is being
492 received over time suggests it is indeed a generous offering to meet a substantial need.
493 The idea that an offering is given with thought and preparation is worth noting as we
494 consider our own approach to such an act in our own congregations. Indeed, taking
495 time to be prepared both to make and to receive the offering is worthy of our best
496 efforts.

⁵⁷ Deut 15:7-8, 10-11; This text is also restated by Jesus in Matt 5:42.

⁵⁸ Deut 30:15-20

⁵⁹ Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37

⁶⁰ James 2:1-10

⁶¹ James 2:14-16

⁶² It is not completely clear if this offering is specifically for the poor in Jerusalem proper, or if this offering is to be received by the Jerusalem church which will serve as a clearing house for the distribution of this money. If it is the latter, one could argue the idea of a common mission fund, such as Disciples Mission Fund, has its origin in scripture. Either way, the idea of a disciplined and intentional offering for those beyond the immediate context of the local community yet done in partnership with other communities of faith is compelling for the Christian Church which understands its mission to be "From our doorsteps to the end of the earth".

⁶³ 1 Cor 16:1-2

497
498 In Second Corinthians (chapters 8 & 9) we learn the details of Paul's case for support of
499 the Jerusalem saints. It is important to note that Paul does not use guilt, though he
500 certainly appeals to the Corinthians' sense of pride by encouraging them "not to be
501 outdone" by the churches of Macedonia!⁶⁴ While remarking that the Corinthians have
502 excelled in many things, he now wants them to excel in generosity. He does not want
503 them to give beyond their means, but he does expect them to give liberally. There is a
504 call to a careful examination of conscience and an honest appraisal of individual
505 capacity. Paul suggests a balance between the Corinthian's abundance and the need
506 in Jerusalem, with the possibility of a reciprocity in the future. Paul refers to the story
507 we explored above in Exodus 16 regarding the manna in the wilderness. "The one who
508 had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little."⁶⁵
509 Abundance has not come at the expense of another. In this case, the one who has
510 given to the one who has not, so that *all* have "enough" and *no one* goes without.

511
512 That this gift should be generous is made clear in Paul's reference to Jesus Christ, "who
513 though he was rich became poor for our sake."⁶⁶ This further affirms the idea that the
514 gift itself is meaningful and offered with thought. Generosity looks like Jesus. It is not
515 without cost or sacrifice. As disciples, we, too, are called to give with liberality. To sow
516 sparingly is to reap sparingly, cautions Paul, so we are to sow bountifully with an
517 expectation to reap bountifully. And here, Paul sets the giving as an act of the will – a
518 choice. We are to give without reluctance or compulsion for God loves a cheerful
519 giver!⁶⁷ Your discovery that you have something to give should bring thanksgiving –
520 you have enough *and then some!* That what you give will make a difference in the
521 world on behalf of the Realm of God – what could be more satisfying? Knowing that
522 someone will eat a meal, have warm safe place to stay, be comforted or be made well –
523 it does stir deep joy from within us!

524
525 There is confidence in giving because God provides, says Paul. You can give believing
526 that, if sometime you have a need, God will provide for you in the same way that you
527 are providing for others. This giving is based on God's trustworthiness, and when the
528 gift is given there is a sense of doxology. "You will be enriched in every way for your
529 great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us."⁶⁸ In the
530 thanksgiving of those who receive the gift, God is praised. In an age of full basements
531 and storage units that we never visit but that we cling to because we might need that
532 stuff someday, we are assured that we can let it go and we will be okay. God does
533 provide, whether it is a ram in the thicket or the unexpected kindness of a good
534 Samaritan. We can trust the future when we live on God's terms of a community that
535 shares and practices generosity.

536

⁶⁴ He will later stake his own reputation on their ability to practice generosity along with their pride. 2 Cor 9:3-5

⁶⁵ Exod 16:18

⁶⁶ 2 Cor 8:9

⁶⁷ 2 Cor 9:7

⁶⁸ 2 Cor 9:11

537 Paul sees the work of generosity as an extension of the gospel proclamation and a
538 manifestation of God's grace. The economic partnership (*koinonia*) being forged on
539 behalf of the Jerusalem saints by disparate people and cultures affirms a unity in Christ
540 transcendent of those differences (what could be more different than Corinth and
541 Jerusalem in the first century CE!).

542
543 For Paul, the manifestation of generosity is a fruit of the spirit.⁶⁹ It is part of the
544 evidence that an individual is alive in the faith. Extravagant generosity is a Spiritual gift
545 which contributes to the benefit of the whole body of Christ.⁷⁰ Contributing to the needs
546 of the saints is among one of many virtues Paul encourages as a mark of the faithful
547 disciple.⁷¹ This is true for the church in every age.

548
549 Generosity is celebrated in a host of ways in the biblical witness. Joseph of Cyprus, who
550 was also known as Barnabas, is reported to have sold a piece of property and given the
551 entire proceeds to the early church. He is named as one among many who, under the
552 influence of the Holy Spirit, sold land and houses and laid the gifts at the feet of the
553 apostles, the result of which was "that there was not a needy person among them."⁷²
554 The generosity of the community sustained the community and it propelled the witness
555 of the gospel.

556
557 The Book of Acts also tells the resurrection story of the disciple Tabitha.⁷³ That she
558 was "dedicated to good works and acts of charity" should not escape our notice. When
559 Tabitha dies, it creates a crisis in the church at Joppa and the apostle Peter is
560 summoned with urgency. Peter arrives to find the grieving widows, whom Tabitha had
561 helped in her lifetime, gathered around her lifeless body, now prepared for burial. They
562 display the garments she had woven for them, as she was a lifeline in a culture that had
563 no direct support for the vulnerable, save their own families or the generosity of others.
564 The story reaches its climax as Peter, after having everyone leave the room, prays and
565 then looks at the body of Tabitha and says, "Tabitha get up" – and she does!

566
567 As careful readers of scripture, we know that Luke (the author of Acts) wants to make it
568 clear that while Jesus has physically left the building (ascended into heaven), his life-
569 giving power remains present via the Holy Spirit. But beyond that, we also see an
570 intentional affirmation of the vocation of charitable work. It could have been anyone
571 who died and whose being raised to life proclaimed the power of Jesus at work in the
572 apostles – but it was not just anyone. It was Tabitha, one whose life was dedicated to
573 helping others, reminding the church that we cannot be the church without this same
574 work. Generosity is life-giving.

575

⁶⁹ Gal 5:22

⁷⁰ Rom 12:8

⁷¹ Rom 12:12

⁷² Acts 4:34-37

⁷³ Acts 9:36-43

576 Recent studies have shown that generosity increases happiness, health, and a sense of
577 purpose in those who practice it. There is a correlation between generous behavior and
578 a personal sense of well-being, according research conducted by Christian Smith and
579 Hilary Davidson.⁷⁴ They point out the truth found in the proverb, “One man gives freely,
580 yet gains even more; another withholds unduly but ends up impoverished.”⁷⁵ Generosity
581 is good for you.

582
583 To look at Jesus is to see generosity incarnate. From the soaring prose of John 1 to the
584 magnificent hymn of Philipians 2, the Second Testament affirms that to see Jesus is to
585 in some way catch a glimpse of God. The nature of God is abundance and generosity,
586 and that is on display in the ministry of Jesus. In the presence of Jesus, there is always
587 enough. The gospels present a ministry of Jesus that has enough power to overcome
588 illness, enough grace to overcome alienation, enough compassion to provide comfort,
589 and enough love to overcome death itself. If we believe this to be true and we believe
590 that Jesus is still present in the church, this should lower our anxiety about having
591 enough resources to do the mission we have been called by God to do.

592
593 In the Gospel of John, there is a familiar story of Jesus at a wedding in Cana of Galilee.
594 We recognize that all stories in this gospel have layers of meaning and that, primarily,
595 the changing of water into wine is a miracle meant to reveal the Divine character of
596 Jesus and to point toward his glorification in death and resurrection. However, one
597 cannot dismiss the volume of the wine produced! It is more than enough for the
598 situation at hand – it is an abundance beyond what is necessary.

599
600 All four evangelists record the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Here, in the
601 face of need, Jesus provides more than what is required so that there are baskets full of
602 left-overs. What is important here for the church to recognize, beyond the provision
603 itself, is that Jesus, when confronted about the need for food, looks at the disciples⁷⁶
604 and says “You give them something to eat.”⁷⁷ While there are many aspects of this
605 story that can be lifted up, we choose two: 1) Jesus expects the disciples [and thus, the
606 church] to accomplish fulfilling the need at hand; 2) when the disciples place into the
607 hands of Jesus what resources they have (however insufficient they may appear), it
608 becomes more than enough. Generosity and abundance. A Divine human partnership
609 that changes the world.

610
611 There is also generosity that is offered in response to generosity received. While
612 elements of the story are somewhat unclear relative to who she is or what her
613 motivation might have been, all four gospels tell the story of a woman who anoints
614 Jesus with a fragrant ointment. Details are lacking about number of things, but all four
615 writers are certain that the value of the perfume is great – worth an entire year’s salary.

⁷⁴ *The Paradox of Generosity: Giving We Receive, Grasping We Lose*, Christian Smith & Hilary Davidson, Oxford Press, 2014.

⁷⁵ Prov 11:24-25

⁷⁶ When Jesus addresses the disciples in the gospels, it is understood that he is likewise addressing the church.

⁷⁷ Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6: 5-15

616 The act appears to be out of gratitude. The gesture expresses *extravagant* generosity.
617 It prompts a question to the reader – to what would you give a year’s salary and what
618 could possibly motivate you do so? A serious reflection about the depth of our own
619 gratitude for Jesus calls us to consider the nature of our own generosity. Grateful
620 people are generous people. God’s people have a reason to be thankful!

621
622 Gratitude is a part of our stewardship response, centered in the belief that all we have
623 come to possess is, at its core, a gift. When Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to
624 participate in the offering for the Jerusalem saints, he makes it clear that the gift they
625 are giving is not one of obligation. At the same time, he underscores the reality that
626 knowing all they have received from God in Jesus Christ, how could they be anything
627 but generous? Throughout scripture, there is an urging to rejoice and give thanks to
628 God. Whether it is the humble return of a cleansed leper,⁷⁸ the fresh obedience of a
629 penitent sinner, or the saying of grace at the evening supper table, gratitude is the
630 seedbed for generosity.

631
632 A favorite story for many a stewardship sermon is that of the widow’s mite.⁷⁹ At face
633 value, it is a tremendous story of generosity and faith, her giving two copper coins – all
634 that she possessed – to the temple offering. Told in both the gospels of Mark and Luke,
635 this story tells us that Jesus, who has been observing the gifts that people have been
636 making to the temple treasury, sees her gift and calls attention to its true value. Her
637 contribution was not out of what she could spare, but was all she had to secure her
638 sustenance. Stated as such, it is indeed an extravagant offering which displays great
639 trust in God to provide. The gifts of the wealthy, though considerably larger in amount,
640 pale in comparison. Would, that however impractical it seems to us, we could give so
641 freely!

642
643 However, there is a caveat in reading that text with regard to its placement within each
644 gospel. The passage which immediately precedes the story in both Mark and Luke
645 warns about the religious class – those who love the trappings of piety and privilege.
646 “They devour widow’s houses” Jesus says. “They will receive the greater
647 condemnation.”⁸⁰ The church cannot prey upon the generous, nor can it ignore the
648 needs of those in its midst by catering to the desires of the wealthy. While needing to
649 encourage generosity among its members, it must also practice it on their behalf and in
650 their best interest.

651
652 ***Stewardship and Judgment:*** Stewardship-related themes are also to be found in
653 stories about judgment, as our choices to act or not to act faithfully have consequences.
654 In a story given to us only by Luke, we see the harsh punishment that awaits a rich man
655 who has ignored the beggar at his gate.⁸¹ It is a narrative of stark contrasts, as the
656 wealthy one is dressed in purple (a sign of significant wealth) and who dines

⁷⁸ Luke 17:15

⁷⁹ Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ Luke 16:19-31

657 sumptuously every day. The poor man (named Lazarus – which means “God helps”)
658 sits at the gate begging for scraps off the table and is covered in sores which the dogs
659 come and lick. It is unlikely that the rich man was unaware of Lazarus in his daily denial
660 of the poor man’s plight.

661
662 The nature of their situation is highlighted further when you consider that in the ancient
663 world, the poor had bread, the middle class had bread and sauces/vegetables, the rich
664 had bread and sauces and meats, and that the very wealthy had such an excess of
665 bread they could use it like a napkin to cleans their hands. Lazarus desires what is
666 essentially just the napkin of rich man to stave off his hunger!

667
668 As Jesus tells the story, both men die, and in the afterlife, Lazarus is in the bosom of
669 Abraham while the rich man is in Hades suffering torment. The great reversal, so
670 prevalent in Luke, governs their fate in the afterlife. The rich man now seeks comfort
671 from Lazarus, who is unable to provide it. In great concern for his five brothers left
672 behind, the rich man appeals to Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them of the fate they,
673 too, will suffer if they do not change and consider the poor. Abraham responds that
674 they have Moses and the prophets, and if they have not listened to them, why would
675 they be convinced if someone returned from the dead?

676
677 To reflect on this story is to wonder what their fate would have been (specifically the rich
678 man) in the afterlife had there not been such an unmitigated disparity of their
679 circumstances while in this life? If the rich man had extended generosity toward
680 Lazarus, would his punishment have been so extreme? There is a change coming. For
681 people who have *both* the “law and the prophets” and “one who has returned from the
682 dead,” it would be hard to deny we have not be warned.

683
684 In a word about the final judgment in Matthew’s gospel, we hear a story with a similar
685 refrain. Known to many as the parable of the sheep and goats (or the Judgement of the
686 Nations), the scene is set as the final reckoning and adjudication between those who
687 will see the Realm of God and those who will not. The distinction between the fates is
688 clear, once again affirming the power of choice related to our employment of resources,
689 our compassion, and our sense of justice. “Come, you that are blessed by my Father,
690 inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry
691 and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a
692 stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and
693 you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”⁸²

694
695 Here, in what is the essentially the longest discourse in the Second Testament about
696 the criteria that qualifies one for entrance into heaven, what matters most is seemingly
697 not doctrine or right belief, but it is having assured the basic human needs for others.⁸³

⁸² Matt 25:34-37

⁸³ While there is some indication in the Greek that would suggest that this applies specifically to the community of the church, there is no stated restriction that would keep such a practice from being extended to the entire community. The tradition in Deuteronomy, as an example, includes all in who are in the land related to issues of justice, care for the poor, and Sabbath observance.

698 The failure to do so warrants eternal separation from God. “You that are accursed,
699 depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was
700 hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was
701 a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick
702 and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they will answer, ‘Lord when was it that we
703 saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take
704 care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one
705 of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’”

706
707 The text needs little commentary. Part of our stewardship is the care for one another. In
708 seeing to the needs of the least of these, we bear evidence of and participate in the
709 coming Realm that is both present and yet to be fulfilled.

710
711 When it comes to judgment, we must also address the honesty and integrity of our
712 approach to giving and being in community. Immediately following the magnanimous
713 gift of Barnabas in Acts 4 comes the story in Chapter 5 of Ananias and Sapphira. They
714 also make a gift from the sale of land; however, they conspire together to withhold a
715 portion of the proceeds for themselves. When this is revealed by Peter, he tells
716 Ananias that he [Ananias] was not compelled to sell the land or to give the entire
717 proceeds from the sale to the community. Instead he [Ananias] has lied, claiming the gift
718 to be more generous than it was, and by so doing has not lied only to the church but to
719 God. Upon hearing this truth - Ananias falls down and dies! Further, when Sapphira
720 shows up hours later and she is questioned, she too lies (not yet having learned of her
721 husband’s fate) and she also falls down and dies!

722
723 Hard as it might be to accept that God would strike down these two for lying about their
724 gift, there is a deeper message here for the church to consider. The fact that they lied
725 about the proceeds reveals that their entire heart was not dedicated to God. While
726 saying otherwise, their actions demonstrate that they were not fully invested in the work
727 of the Holy Spirit within the community. They simply were not “all in.” Faithful
728 stewardship is about being “all in” on what God is doing in the world and being an agent
729 of the Realm so that the world as we know it is transformed into the world as God
730 desires it to be.

731
732 Stewardship may be considered a life-and-death issue when we examine what is at
733 stake regarding the impact of our whole-life discipline of practicing it, and the difference
734 such a commitment makes to the world in which we live. When teaching discipleship –
735 what it means to follow Jesus - we must be honest about what such a decision
736 demands. “No one who has put their hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the
737 Kingdom of God.”⁸⁴ In the Book of Revelation there is a similar warning issued to the
738 church at Laodicea: “I know your works; you are neither cold or hot. So because you
739 are lukewarm I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”⁸⁵ To be a true disciple is to be
740 truly committed.

⁸⁴ Luke 9:62

⁸⁵ Revelation 3:15-16 Here “cold or hot” is not so much a matter of enthusiasm as it is a level of commitment.

741

742 **Stewardship and the Tithe:** It may surprise the average person to know that the tithe
743 (when compared to money in general) is seldom addressed in the Bible, aside from the
744 instructions for its collection by the priests in Numbers and Leviticus. The first mention
745 of the tithe is in Genesis 14 when, following a successful battle, Abram is blessed by
746 King Melchizedek and Abram offers him 1/10 of everything.⁸⁶

747

748 The most detailed discussions of the tithe are found in Deuteronomy, and it may not
749 sound like what you thought you remembered! “Set apart a tithe of all the yield of your
750 seed that is brought in yearly from the field. In the presence of the Lord your God, in the
751 place that he will choose as the dwelling for his name, you shall eat the tithe of your
752 grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the firstlings of your herd and flock, so that you
753 may learn to fear the Lord your God always.”⁸⁷ This is a potluck supper celebration!
754 The tithe is brought in and the people rejoice that earth has produced once again for
755 their benefit.

756

757 Whether you have a little or a lot, you bring in 10% of what you do have and the entire
758 community benefits. This serves as a reminder as to the source of the blessing. “So
759 that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always” takes us back to the assertion in
760 Genesis 1 that we are the created, not the Creator. This offering proclaims that God is
761 the source of the abundance that sustains us. It has not come simply from our own
762 endeavors, however good our farming and animal husbandry skills might be – it begins
763 with God. We can plant the seed, but only God can make it grow!

764

765 The text goes on to speak of what to do if the journey is too far to take your produce.
766 You can turn it into cash and when you arrive at the Temple, purchase whatever party
767 supplies you want (including wine and strong drink!). The tithe is about gratitude and
768 honoring God for what we have. And it is to be *shared* – shared within the community
769 and with the priests (who do not have an allotment of land) and [every third year] with
770 the sojourner [resident alien], the orphans and the widows. They [those in need] are to
771 eat their fill – because there is plenty enough for all.

772

773 In Deuteronomy 26, the tithe is detailed again, and this time the focus is on the liturgy
774 related to the making of the offering.⁸⁸ At the center of the liturgy is both God and the
775 Land. When the gift is placed on the altar, the following statement is to be made: “A
776 wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an
777 alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When
778 the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried
779 to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction,
780 our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and
781 an outstretched arm, with terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and

⁸⁶ Gen 14:17-20

⁸⁷ Deut 14:22-24

⁸⁸ Deut 26:1-15

782 he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.
783 So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me. ⁸⁹

784
785 This liturgy is the rehearsal of Israel's salvation story. It acknowledges, at an even
786 deeper level than the previous text, that God is the source of every blessing. It is not
787 just what the land produces, but the fact that they are in the promised land itself. Their
788 freedom to live in the land has happened by the providential action of God. It is a
789 prayer of great thanksgiving, not unlike the moment of the Eucharist for the church,
790 where the main actor is God and those Divine actions on our behalf are remembered
791 with awe and gratitude. To apply this to the church, it would be like repeating our
792 confession of faith when we make an offering. "I believe..." and so I respond. To make
793 an offering is to worship God, and the ground of that worship is thanksgiving.

794
795 Here again, the inclusive nature of the gift and its recipients is repeated. "Then you,
796 together with the Levites *and the aliens* who reside among you shall celebrate with all
797 the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and your house."⁹⁰ There is enough
798 for everyone to share because of God's abundance. Hospitality is extended beyond the
799 normal boundaries of tribe and race because there is sufficient supply. This is not
800 simply a nice thing to do, but a command of God.

801
802 When the question is raised about the tithe and its value for the church, these
803 understandings should not be overlooked. The tithe establishes a community norm that
804 is viewed as obtainable by all. Church members often wonder what is an acceptable
805 gift? "How much should I give as an offering?" The tithe sets a benchmark; it is a
806 starting place.⁹¹ The tithe, when understood as worship, creates a moment to
807 remember the source of blessings, our own salvation history, and an opportunity to
808 respond to the grace we have received.

809
810 In some circles there is debate about whether a tithe should be made "on the net" or "on
811 the gross." For Israel, there was only "the gross." However, if God's people would do
812 either with faithfulness, there would be plenty of resources so as to make such a
813 question moot! When the tithe is discussed, others want to maintain that we pay taxes
814 that support many programs for the poor and thus "our share" should be adjusted
815 accordingly. It is good to recall that beyond the tithe, which was done annually on the
816 total produce of the land, that each male was to come with an offering [different from the
817 tithe] three times a year. No one was to come empty-handed! This offering was made
818 at the festival of unleavened bread, the festival of weeks, and the festival of booths.
819 The size of the gift was determined as each was able to give based on how they had

⁸⁹ Deut 26:5-10

⁹⁰ Deut 26:11

⁹¹ We say a starting place because it is clear, that at least within ancient Israel, multiple offerings were made beyond the tithe. This would make the tithe "the floor" rather than the ceiling! At the same time, 10% may seem to great a sum for people not in the regular practice of giving. In such a case, the tithe becomes a "first goal" toward which one might grow, perhaps a percent or two at a time.

820 been blessed.⁹² On top of this expectation was the practice of alms-giving.⁹³ These
821 were gifts that did not count in either the tithe or the offerings, which suddenly makes
822 10% instead of seeming like too much, look like a bargain! Generosity was/is expected
823 of God's people.

824
825 Is the tithe (which is viewed by some as "under the Law") required by the church (which
826 views itself as living "under grace")? Nowhere does the Second Testament suggest that
827 we are to do anything less in our giving than what was required prior to the arrival of
828 Jesus. Paul advises in giving to the Jerusalem offering, each one should give according
829 to how they have been blessed (reminiscent of the three annual offerings mentioned
830 above), but nowhere do we read that this replaced the tithe. To consider the tithe "law"
831 is to not fully appreciate its intention (provision for the entire community) or recorded
832 practice (celebration and gratitude). We do not serve our cause well if we equate
833 *expectations* with burdens, demands, or obligations. That in many congregations we
834 have established low expectations regarding giving, worship attendance, education, or
835 other forms of participation and investment may well be related to an experience of
836 decline in those same communities of faith. While the tithe cannot be fully argued as
837 being *required* of the church via Second Testament citation, the benefits of teaching the
838 tithe seem to out-weigh any potential liabilities.⁹⁴

839
840 ***Stewardship and the "Prosperity Gospel"***: The tithe is also mentioned in the book of
841 Malachi. Here the prophet, on behalf of God asks the question: "Would a man rob
842 God?"⁹⁵ The prophet answers that indeed the people are robbing God by their failure to
843 give the "whole tithe." The indictment is followed with this promise: "Bring the full tithe
844 into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test,
845 says the lord of hosts: see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour
846 down for you an overflowing blessing."⁹⁶

847
848 We understand this to be a specific statement to address a particular situation. During
849 a time of famine, the people (out of fear) withheld their full tithe offering, creating a self-
850 imposed shortage in the very system that was designed to assure their sustenance. The
851 problem (the presence of locusts) was not that God did not love them or care about
852 them, but that they had failed to trust God, choosing instead to cling tightly to what they
853 *individually* possessed. Rather than establishing a quid pro quo [give and you will get],
854 the statement "test me" is a call to action to give the *full* tithe – the result of doing so will
855 be that there will be enough for all of the people. Indeed, there will be an abundance so
856 that no one is without. The "test" is to trust the *system God established* of the tithe,
857 which, when faithfully practiced, assures provision for all.

⁹² Deut 16:16-17

⁹³ Alms giving is referred to in the deuterocanonical books of Tobit and Sirach, as well as being mentioned in Matthew, Luke, and Acts.

⁹⁴ For further reflection on the potential resources created by teaching and practicing the tithe, see *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money*; Smith, Emerson, Snell. Oxford Press, 2008.

⁹⁵ Mal 3:8 (KJV)

⁹⁶ Mal 3:9-10

858
859 However, this passage has been used by some to suggest that the “test” is to give in
860 such a way so as to entice God into giving more to the giver as a reward for giving. By
861 giving, the individual is assuring wealth and prosperity for themselves. We see this as a
862 difficult rendering of the Malachi passage and challenge the church to explore whether
863 such an understanding is appropriate. Given both the communal nature that pervades
864 the biblical texts regarding blessing and salvation as well as the understanding that it is
865 God’s nature to give without provocation or human endeavor, we find this approach
866 fraught with difficulty.

867
868 There has been a growing movement since the middle of the 20th century, primarily
869 within certain Evangelical and Pentecostal streams of Protestantism, which seeks to
870 use this text as foundation for understanding giving as a way of getting more.⁹⁷ Best
871 identified as “the gospel of wealth” or “the prosperity gospel,”⁹⁸ a key component of this
872 theological position is that it is God’s will to be physically well and financially well-off.
873 Further, proponents believe that such wellness and increase of wealth can be secured
874 by strong faith (right belief), positive thinking/speech, and giving to religious causes.

875
876 Poverty and illness are understood within this school of thought to be the result of sin
877 and/or spiritual forces. Because of the cross, the belief is that there is no reason to be
878 sick or poor. The Bible is viewed almost as a contract that implies if a person does
879 certain things certain ways (such as to tithe), God *has to* bless that person with health
880 and prosperity. While an over-simplification, the point becomes clear – within the
881 prosperity gospel there is a quid pro quo: do this, then God *will do* that. Give and God
882 will bless you with greater wealth. Giving in this belief system is not based on gratitude
883 or response, but is motivated by a desire to increase personal [not communal] power or
884 position.

885
886 We would not dispute that to give is to be blessed! The very fact that one has
887 something from which to give is a sign of God’s provision. Further we can affirm that it
888 is the nature of God’s economy that in giving, we do intrinsically receive more than what
889 we have offered. However, to suggest that God’s actions to bless are to be mandated
890 based on our activities denies the very sovereignty of the Divine. We cannot accept a
891 position that teaches a collection of “magic words” or finding the “exact formula” of
892 dollars to be given to charity that will cause God to bless any individual at the expense
893 or in place of another. Additionally, we take exception to the restriction of God’s blessing
894 to be seen only in the physical act of healing or via the increase in material goods. The
895 church should be suspicious of a belief system that seems to sanction the

⁹⁷ Additional texts often cited include Luke 6:38; Luke 11:9; James 1:5, among others.

⁹⁸ It can also be named the “health and wealth gospel” or “gospel of success”. Earliest proponents can be traced back into the late 19th century, but the more prominent purveyors of this ideology arose during the 1950s within the Pentecostal healing traditions. Oral Roberts, Rev. Ike, A.A. Allen, and Jim Bakker were key figures in the later half of the 20th century. Early in the 21st century, Joel Osteen, Bruce Wilkinson, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Bishop Eddie Long, Joyce Meyer, and Creflo Dollar are among many names that have risen to prominent association with this theology. Leaders of this movement have even been the subject of a congressional investigation regarding a possible conflict between their lavish lifestyles and the organization’s tax exempt status.

896 acquisitiveness of the culture and which places achieving material success ahead of
897 service to others.

898
899 It creates tremendous theological issues as to what exactly is the nature of a god who
900 would personally see to it that one can live in a mansion and drive a Rolls Royce while
901 the neighbor goes without shelter or food. We don't deny the reality that this happens,
902 just the belief that God sanctions it to be so. It is inconsistent with the gospel and
903 antithetical to the way the early church lived out its faith by seeing that no one among
904 them had any need.

905
906 We affirm that our giving is a response to having already received. In much the same
907 way that the author of 1 John states that "We love, because God first loved us,"⁹⁹ we
908 give because God first gave to us. We understand our giving is not an attempt to
909 manipulate God to act in our favor, but rather an acknowledgement that God has
910 already acted in our favor [for the whole of creation], and we are grateful. Further, as
911 disciples who hope to see the Realm of God break deeper into our world, we see our
912 giving as an agent of change and transformation – a sign of the spirit of God at work
913 within us.

914
915 That God desires wholeness for all of creation is a given. That the death and
916 resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate testimony to God overcoming the power of death
917 and conquering evil is unquestioned.¹⁰⁰ However, the Realm of God, while revealed, is
918 not yet fully manifest among us. Powers contrary to the work and will of God still hold
919 influence in individuals and within structures that abuse and misuse material and human
920 resources. Systemic racism, for example, continues to oppress an entire class of
921 people based on the color of their skin, denying opportunity and locking generations into
922 crushing poverty and oppression. It is not for their own lack of faith that people of color
923 suffer in this system. It is not because they fail to practice generosity that resources do
924 not flow into their lives and neighborhoods. This is where the "gospel of wealth"
925 ultimately fails and where a different understanding of what it means to be a steward is
926 needed for not only the sake of the church, but the world. Stewardship is related to
927 justice, as its faithful practice moves resources to promote and enable systemic
928 changes toward that which affirms and secures human dignity.

929
930 ***Stewardship as Transformation:*** We affirm that it is God's good intention to bless the
931 earth and all that is within it. God's desire is for all of creation to flourish and the human
932 creatures have been entrusted with the responsibility to make it and keep it so. When
933 we have failed at this task, God has held us accountable through the admonitions of the
934 prophets – and those same prophetic voices have simultaneously continued to hold out
935 a vision of how the world is supposed to be. The reward for living in the world on God's
936 terms is the very blessing we desire and God seeks to bring us abundance. The
937 consequences of choosing our own terms results in the brokenness and scarcity we
938 fear most.

⁹⁹ 1 John 4:19

¹⁰⁰ Col 1:20

939
940 Our world is broken – but we also believe that it does not need to stay that way. We
941 believe that in the power of Jesus Christ, the in-breaking of the Realm of God has
942 begun and cannot be turned away by any power or principality. The question is, will we
943 choose to be participants in its coming to fullness? That God is at work on behalf of the
944 poor, the disenfranchised, and the marginalized is without exception. Luke proclaims,
945 while Jesus *is still in the womb*, that through his ministry, “His [God’s] mercy is for those
946 who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he
947 has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the
948 powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good
949 things, and sent the rich away empty.”¹⁰¹ The way things are is not the way they are
950 supposed to be and - because of Jesus - they are not going to stay that way!

951
952 God’s intention is going to be fulfilled. When John’s disciples come to Jesus with their
953 inquiry on behalf of their imprisoned teacher, Jesus answers their question as to
954 whether or not he [Jesus] is the one or should they look for another with a simple
955 statement: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their
956 sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the
957 poor have good news preached to them.”¹⁰² The transformation is not just a promise for
958 some distant time – in the ministry of Jesus it is becoming reality now.

959
960 In each of the synoptic gospels, Jesus commissions the disciples to do these same
961 things.¹⁰³ John’s gospel tells us that Jesus promised his followers would “do even
962 greater things.”¹⁰⁴ The work of the disciples, and thus the work of the church in any age,
963 is the work of Jesus. By our actions, the Realm is further revealed and comes closer.
964 The Books of Acts demonstrates the ideal vision of the church operating under the full
965 influence of the Holy Spirit. A group that could best be described as fearing for their
966 lives suddenly becomes emboldened by the Spirit on Pentecost, and they find their
967 voices to proclaim the gospel (an act of stewardship). Those who hear and respond to
968 the message, now powered by the Spirit, forge an egalitarian community in which the
969 worship of God, the adherence to the apostles teaching, the breaking of bread, and
970 prayer are the hallmarks of their new life together.

971
972 The community demonstrates the presence of Jesus, both by the signs and wonders
973 done by the apostles and by their “holding all things in common.” Most importantly, they
974 share from their resources: ...they would sell their possessions and goods and
975 distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time
976 together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and
977 generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by

¹⁰¹ Luke 1:50-53

¹⁰² Luke 7:22-23

¹⁰³ Matt 10:5-15; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6

¹⁰⁴ John 14:12 We should note that this does not necessarily mean they would be more powerful than Jesus, but rather by the sheer multitude of “realm agents” turned loose by the multiplication of disciples, more [greater] work would be accomplished.

978 day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.¹⁰⁵

979

980 This is a word of encouragement to the church as it pertains to stewardship. When the
981 church proclaims the gospel and engages in sharing of its resources for the benefit of
982 all, the church grows! In a time when the church is seeking to find its place in a shifting
983 culture, reclaiming stewardship may be the best way to find our footing going forward.
984 We can point people beyond the mere acquisitiveness of self-indulgence endorsed by
985 our society to instead use their resources to transform not only their own lives, but the
986 world in which they live.

987

988 **After Thoughts:**

989 Sources vary in their count, but most agree that the bible talks about money and related
990 financial terms/issues about 2,300 times! Many Second Testament scholars suggest
991 that Jesus talks about money (and uses related financial terms/issues/examples) over
992 60% of the time. To say that this topic is important within the Canon is no doubt an
993 understatement. To believe that we can cover this topic thoroughly in this document is
994 wishful thinking. We have attempted however, to give broad coverage, spanning both
995 Testaments, from which we can draw some solid conclusions and offer direction for the
996 church.

997

998 Because of the sheer volume of texts that relate to this topic, it may seem odd that the
999 church in the last 50 or more years has attempted to keep the conversation about
1000 money and faith in separate, seemingly unrelated domains. Beyond that, in yet another
1001 arena of taboo, the church has also intentionally segregated the necessary political
1002 ramifications of these teachings and their raw, unsettling power as they interface with
1003 empire and impact community.

1004

1005 Our faith tradition has long practiced a “confession of faith” in Jesus Christ that is an
1006 intimate expression of our aspiration to be in a reconciled relationship with God, and
1007 God’s provision in Jesus Christ to affect such a desire. We in no way dispute,
1008 disparage, or disregard the nature of a personal relationship with Jesus! However, a
1009 faith that is solely privatized is contrary to the actual biblical portrayal of faith as
1010 practiced within community in both the First and Second Testament, and seems to be
1011 the antitheses of the early church as described in the Book of Acts. Private faith must
1012 still have public expression and significance beyond the individual.

1013

1014 The Christian faith of the contemporary Western world has, in some places, been
1015 distilled to a very individual and personal experience, disconnected from communal
1016 accountability, rendered devoid of any social welfare responsibility (which we might
1017 refer to as the “common good”), and segregated from certain material aspects of life.
1018 This is counter-intuitive to the practice of stewardship, which sees the individual as a
1019 part of a larger network of relationships. For the Christian steward, the world is viewed
1020 through the wide-angle lens of “the whole” and the tangible benefit of community.

1021

¹⁰⁵ Acts 2:45-47

1022 The church should consider the value of reemphasizing the communal nature of the
1023 faith that we share. We recall that in both Testaments, salvation and blessing generally
1024 come not to individuals, but to communities. The prayer of Jesus repeated every
1025 Sunday in most of our congregations makes this distinction. “Our Father...Give *us* this
1026 day *our* daily bread...Forgive *us our* sins as we forgive those who sin against *us*...Lead
1027 *us* not into temptation, but deliver *us* from evil.” The hope for the Realm to come and
1028 the petitions for sustenance, faithfulness, and protection belong to the collective whole,
1029 not just the individual. Whether it is the promise made to Abram that “...in you **all** the
1030 families of the earth will be blessed”¹⁰⁶ or the cosmic Christological claim in Colossians
1031 “...and through him [Jesus] God was pleased to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether
1032 on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross,”¹⁰⁷ the workings
1033 of God benefit individuals by their association with/in/through communities.

1034
1035 There may be substantial benefit for both the local congregation and the Christian
1036 Church (Disciples of Christ) to think more clearly about ways to articulate and claim the
1037 necessity of being “members of one another” for authentic discipleship and true
1038 spirituality. As we see worship participation shrinking in the beginning of the century
1039 and the definition of “regular” church attendance dropping from nearly four Sundays a
1040 month to less than two Sundays a month, we are clearly at risk of being less connected
1041 within congregations and across our covenantal relationships. Are there ways we can
1042 encourage more interaction between members across our communities of faith?

1043
1044 **Stated Assumptions:**

1045 Stewardship is a spiritual discipline, not a religious-sanctioned shorthand term for
1046 fundraising. It is as essential to the process of faith development as study, worship,
1047 prayer, and service to others. The biblical understanding of stewardship is that it
1048 touches every aspect of our lives and is grounded in the abundant love and provision of
1049 God.

1050
1051 Stewardship is about choices, many but not all of which have financial implications and
1052 a connection to our possessions. It is also about living in gratitude, understanding that
1053 all we have come to possess, share, and know is ultimately a gift from beyond our own
1054 individual capacity or agency. Stewardship embraces the concept that life itself is a gift
1055 and measure of grace.

1056
1057 Understanding oneself as a steward is fundamental to Christian discipleship,
1058 indispensable to the creation of healthy communities, and necessary for fulfilling the
1059 practical command to love both self and neighbor. Expressions of stewardship may be
1060 found in the intentional care for creation, the observance of Sabbath, the loving
1061 attention to our minds and bodies, the sharing of the gospel, and the appropriate
1062 management of our material resources. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but
1063 rather instructive and an entry point into deeper dialogue.

1066 Gen 12:3
1067 Col 1:20

1065 A church body that can only embrace a narrow view of stewardship as it relates to
1066 funding budgets, maintaining church property, and the operation/survival of the
1067 organization/institution will be self-focused, less able to freely share, and thus hindered
1068 in its efforts to fully love the neighbor, welcome the stranger, advocate for (and share
1069 with) the poor, and not as likely to break away from cultural norms that may diminish
1070 others. Such a community is driven by the anxiety of scarcity, which often leads to
1071 hoarding and withdrawal from the neighbor and the stranger for fear of not having
1072 “enough” for itself. Its prophetic witness is moderated by the risk of alienating its
1073 members [contributors], who may find varying levels of comfort in the current culture
1074 and have investment (knowingly or unknowingly) in maintaining the status quo.
1075

1076 In contrast, a church body that is committed to the holistic practice of stewardship will,
1077 as a fruit of that devotion, not only be a careful manager of its resources, but also will be
1078 a witness to justice, a builder of community with the neighbor, a gracious place of
1079 welcome, an advocate for the poor and disenfranchised, and by nature, will find itself
1080 opposed to culturally-imposed definitions that delineate any human being as something
1081 less than a child of God. Such a corporate body acts with confidence in speaking truth
1082 into the culture because it believes in the abundance and provision of God without the
1083 fear of scarcity. It boldly lives out its mission and ministry.
1084

1085 It should not surprise us to learn that many recent studies confirm that within the marks
1086 of growing, healthy, and thriving religious communities the focus of ministry is directed
1087 “outward,” *toward the neighborhood* and larger circle surrounding the congregation’s
1088 context.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, one consistent characteristic of struggling communities of faith is
1089 that their focus is almost entirely “inward” and self-serving (not necessarily with malice
1090 or intent) within the literal walls of the specific congregation or organization *with an eye*
1091 *toward survival*. We ignore this correlation at our own peril.
1092

1093 It follows that churches and communities of faith who understand and live into a holistic
1094 sense of stewardship, including the practice of confident generosity, are likely to have
1095 resources for the mission that God has called them to perform. They will also have the
1096 capacity to share resources (human and financial) with their covenantal partners across
1097 all expressions of the church to jointly enact the larger vision that God has given all of
1098 us: *To be a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world*.
1099

1100 **For Consideration:**

- 1101 1. We should not be afraid to have high expectations about what it means to be a
1102 follower of Jesus Christ. The church must take seriously the study of holistic
1103 stewardship and teaching stewardship as an act of discipleship to its leaders, its
1104 members, and its affiliated partners.
- 1105 2. Pastors, elders, and elected officers should commit to growth in the personal
1106 practice of generosity, to lead by example and with integrity.
- 1107 3. The church, in all its expressions, should engage in an audit of its practices as
1108 they relate to environmental concerns. Consumption of energy, water, the use of

¹⁰⁸ Barbara Lynn Fullerton, *Growing Generosity: Identity as Stewards in the United Church of Canada*, May 2009.

- 1109 renewable resources, the practice of “reduce, reuse, and recycle,” and efforts to
1110 tread more lightly upon the earth should be evaluated, and conservation
1111 measures put into place. Congregations modeling such practices can then more
1112 effectively teach their members to do the same.
- 1113 4. The church should be encouraged to reflect about the acquisitive nature of our
1114 culture and the consequences of continuing to consume resources in ways that
1115 are not sustainable, and, in some cases, harmful to the environment and our
1116 brothers and sisters. How might we change our own expectations and behaviors
1117 around what is “enough”? What is our prophetic responsibility to give voice to
1118 this issue in this time and place?
 - 1119 5. Congregations should commit to a practice of generosity, and consider
1120 establishing a *minimum* goal of 10% of operational receipts to be invested
1121 beyond the immediate needs of the congregation. If we are going to teach the
1122 tithe, we must also practice it.
 - 1123 6. Understanding that clarity of mission is essential to enlisting successful resource
1124 support, congregations and related organizations are encouraged to establish or
1125 reevaluate current plans for ministry to be certain they are still applicable to the
1126 congregation’s capacity and context. People give their time and money to
1127 organizations that they believe are making a difference and are responsible with
1128 their finances.
 - 1129 7. As a matter of achieving financial wellness (and creating an environment of
1130 trust), congregations and related ministries of the church should invest in
1131 understanding industry-agreed-upon standards for the handling of money and
1132 financial resources. Known as “best practices,” issues of transparency, internal
1133 controls, audits, the creation of budgets, and the published reporting of all assets,
1134 liabilities, and fiscal policy should be followed and periodically reviewed
1135 (regardless of the size of the congregation or its annual receipts/expenses!).
 - 1136 8. Because money often creates anxiety that impacts individuals and family
1137 systems, congregations should consider providing personal finance classes that
1138 teach the effective management of money and increase the capacity to practice
1139 generosity.
 - 1140 9. The church should actively engage in teaching children, youth, and young adults
1141 about the power, proper use, beneficial aspects, detrimental risks, and effective
1142 management of money, as one portion of a deeper commitment to teaching
1143 biblical stewardship as a critical part of the faith development curriculum. This is
1144 a mission for the entire church, as the proper use of our resources (natural,
1145 human, and economic) is essential to the long-term health and well-being of the
1146 earth and all parts of God’s creation that call it home.
 - 1147 10. Congregations might consider a year-round method to the stewardship
1148 conversation. Rather than seeing the annual campaign as a three-week sprint
1149 (and the only time the word stewardship is often mentioned), a more circumspect
1150 approach that keeps all aspects of stewardship in play over time may prove to be
1151 more effective.
 - 1152 11. Communities of faith should consider the importance of having discussions with
1153 members about the importance of having a will *and* the congregation should
1154 have clear policies in place that would make receiving a testamentary gift a true

- 1155 blessing rather than a point of contention! Teaching stewardship, including
1156 stewardship at the end of life, could make receiving such gifts the norm rather
1157 than a surprise or rare occurrence. Such gifts can expand the ministry and
1158 mission of the congregation or church-related institution well into the future. Until
1159 Jesus comes again, there will always be a need for the gospel and its related
1160 ministries of care and compassion.
- 1161 12. Congregations and other church-related organizations who hold assets should
1162 consider their own legacy plans and have clear policies in place as to how their
1163 mission and ministry will continue, should it becomes necessary to cease its
1164 visible presence.
- 1165 13. Prayerful reflection is needed on what it means to be a covenantal partner in the
1166 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), with attention to the financial support of
1167 these common ministries we share that extend from our doorsteps to the ends of
1168 the earth. What is the nature of our relationship and how do we support each
1169 other so that our shared witness can reach its fullest expression?
- 1170 14. Mission and ministry priorities should drive financial decisions. Budgets should
1171 serve the church, not the other way around. All organizational structures with
1172 fiduciary responsibilities across the church should be encouraged to adopt this as
1173 an operational policy and cultural practice.

1174 **Practical Applications of Stewardship in Our Time and Place in the 21st Century**

1175 ***A Broad Perspective of Stewardship in Context:*** Recent shifts in the socio-political
1176 spectrum draw attention to the need for holistic understandings of stewardship as the
1177 church seeks to negotiate its way in this changing landscape of the early 21st century.
1178 The rise of separatism in Western Europe, incursions by governments into the south
1179 China Sea, and the trend toward a political climate of nationalism in the United States
1180 all suggest global trends toward more isolating and greater privileged positions
1181 (economic power) being sought by nation states in competition (rather than cooperation)
1182 with each other. This ultimately undermines values witnessed to in both Testaments as
1183 signs of the presence of the Realm of God because: a) it is contrary to the radical
1184 welcome of hospitality (because nationalism raises the fear of the stranger from outside
1185 our boundaries), and; b) the sharing of economic gain by the *whole community* is
1186 abrogated due to a concentration of wealth to be controlled within a nation's
1187 government and/or powerful elite.

1188
1189
1190 Historical perspective suggests that as nations become more parochial and less
1191 cooperative across real and ideological boundaries regarding resources and the control
1192 of economic factors, the risk of conflict is heightened. These circumstances often
1193 marshal resources toward non-life-giving purposes and, in escalated conflict, lead to the
1194 loss of life and damage to the environment. Whether the conflict is "cold" or develops
1195 into a fully-waged war, such conditions usually impact the poor and the marginalized in
1196 disproportionate ways.¹⁰⁹ *"Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every*

¹⁰⁹ *At the most basic level, resource allocation to the military/industrial complex in times of international conflict directs resources away from meeting basic social needs of the poor including nutrition support, health care, and housing. But it is not only the poor. This redistribution of economic priorities also impacts those things that enrich life for the mainstream of the country including parks and recreation, the arts, general infrastructure, investment in*

1197 *rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed,*
1198 *those who are cold and are not clothed.”¹¹⁰*

1199
1200 If biblical stewardship suggests (and we believe it does) an alternative reality relative to
1201 the establishment of the beloved community, as well as the proper use of possessions
1202 for the sharing of wealth generated by the earth’s resources *so that none are in need,*
1203 then the church is necessarily an interested party with a needed voice in this context.

1204
1205 ***A Specific Example of Engaging a Social-political Issue Based on Stewardship***
1206 ***Concerns:*** Potential impact to both the environment and the further overt concentration
1207 of wealth within the United States exists, as evidenced by a subtle rule change to the
1208 Congressional Budget that was passed with little public notice on January 3, 2017. The
1209 rule relates to reporting the cost of transferring federal lands to local control. This
1210 seemingly innocuous piece of procedural legislation, while not doing so directly, makes
1211 it possible for future legislation that can place lands (currently held in the public trust as
1212 a legacy for all United States citizens) for sale to developers and to industry, creating
1213 privatized access and the potential for the land’s resources to be exploited for private
1214 gain.¹¹¹ The church that is concerned about stewardship both as care for the earth and
1215 as proper management of resources for the *common good* will be compelled to speak to
1216 this issue. It is one example how streams of stewardship issues converge - in this case,
1217 economic interests and care for the earth¹¹² - and how they have political implications.

1218
1219 These are two simple ways that suggest practical applications regarding the relevance
1220 of stewardship in this time and place. The number of examples that may be cited is
1221 legion. We offer these in the broad and narrow sense as a starting place for a future
1222 conversation within local, regional, and general expressions of the Christian Church
1223 (Disciples of Christ).

1224
1225 ***Final Comment:*** The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) seems to be uniquely fitted
1226 for this time and place, especially as we seek to reach “the next generation.” Study
1227 after study suggests that those who make up the generations we refer to as Millennials
1228 and Gen X have been turned off by religions that they see as banal, bigoted, and
1229 boring. Our method of reading scripture implies you don’t have to have bad science to
1230 have good religion. Our assertion of the radical welcome of God at the Table speaks
1231 boldly to a generation that wishes to rise above bigotry and the marginalization of
1232 people based on what they believe are tired and irrelevant social classifications. Our
1233 structure, as one that is covenantal, fits with generations seeking authentic relationships
1234 over and against joining institutions. Our freedoms, as expressed in local autonomy give
1235 rise to worship, spiritual formation, and mission that fit contexts in the unique

non-military research, and education. When the conflict becomes a war, those civilians caught in the wake of battle as” collateral damage” are left homeless, without basic resources, and become refugees, often at the mercy of foreign governments to provide aid and comfort.

¹¹⁰ Attributed to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th president of the United States.

¹¹¹ David Horsey, The Los Angeles Times, January 5, 2017.

¹¹² This is further exacerbated in a political context that seeks environmental deregulation in mining, forestry, and other heavy industry because it is perceived to increase cost and limit production.

1236 communities in which congregations are located. At our best, we can be relevant and
1237 adaptive.

1238
1239 The truth of the matter is that we should be growing in this century, and we assume one
1240 of the reasons we are not doing so is the failure to effectively invite others into our story.
1241 We are hiding our light under a bushel! Along with teaching the importance of faithful
1242 financial generosity to sustain the Church's mission of reconciliation, in the 21st century
1243 we must rediscover our evangelistic zeal and fully embrace what it means to be a
1244 steward of the gospel. This seems particularly important in a time of deep cultural
1245 division, which is where the church finds itself now when this document is presented for
1246 consideration. We possess a great treasure of hope that calls people beyond anything
1247 that might separate us from the truth that we belong to God and thus to one another.

1248
1249 This vision of the prophet Isaiah (Chapter 55) is offered as a closing reflection:

1250 Ho, everyone who thirsts,

1251 come to the waters;

1252 and you that have no money,

1253 come, buy and eat!

1254 Come, buy wine and milk

1255 without money and without price.

1256 ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
1257 and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

1258 Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,

1259 and delight yourselves in rich food.

1260 ³ Incline your ear, and come to me;

1261 listen, so that you may live.

1262 I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

1263 my steadfast, sure love for David.

1264 ⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples,

1265 a leader and commander for the peoples.

1266 ⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know,

1267 and nations that do not know you shall run to you,

1268 because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,

1269 for he has glorified you.

1270 ⁶ Seek the Lord while he may be found,

1271 call upon him while he is near;

1272 ⁷ let the wicked forsake their way,

1273 and the unrighteous their thoughts;

1274 let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,

1275 and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
1276 ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
1277 nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
1278 ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
1279 so are my ways higher than your ways
1280 and my thoughts than your thoughts.
1281 ¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
1282 and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
1283 making it bring forth and sprout,
1284 giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
1285 ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
1286 it shall not return to me empty,
1287 but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
1288 and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
1289 ¹² For you shall go out in joy,
1290 and be led back in peace;
1291 the mountains and the hills before you
1292 shall burst into song,
1293 and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
1294 ¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
1295 instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
1296 and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
1297 for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.¹¹³

1300
1301 **The General Board recommends that the General Assembly**
1302 **ISSUE GA-1732 for study by the Church.**
1303 **(Discussion time: 12 minutes)**

¹¹³ This, and all scripture citations in this document, are from the NRSV @1989 National Council of Churches of Christ.

GRR Proposed Resolution 2018-5 ADVOCACY FOR THE POOR

WHEREAS, we are a people of the Book and see the Bible as the foundation of our prophetic ministry today. The prophet Micah calls us “to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with the Lord” (Micah 6:8). Jesus inaugurates his ministry by quoting the prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.” (Luke 4:18)

As Disciples of Christ, we seek to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. As the Gospel of Matthew states that “when we have done it unto the least of these we have done it unto me,” Disciples stand in solidarity with the poor and oppressed; and

WHEREAS, while we as Disciples open our hands to the poor and engage in direct service, we need to question the policies and practices that keep the poor in poverty; and

WHEREAS, we are a pro-reconciliation anti-racist church with a long history of working for racial and economic justice, and we recognize that,

“Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12);

WHEREAS, we acknowledge our inherent weaknesses and seek to strengthen the courage and resolve of our fellow brothers and sisters by promoting consistent, deliberate and meaningful discourse regarding the social, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic disparities that threaten what we believe as Disciples of the Christian faith;

WHEREAS, we firmly and unequivocally believe in protecting the rights of all people to live free from discrimination and commit to doing our part to encourage equity and inclusion of our brothers and sisters; and

WHEREAS, we as members of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, further commit to provide the spiritual support necessary to further lift up the teachings of Jesus Christ in the spirit of truly being our brothers' and sisters' keepers and to encourage our growth in being a moral example to others in our discipleship and in furtherance of the Great Commission.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2018 Regional Assembly meeting in Shreveport, Louisiana, calls on its member congregations as people of deep faith and moral courage to examine the ways in which their work and ministry address the needs of the poor, and wherever possible to strengthen and further develop that work; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of the Great River Region shall explore ways to encourage its congregations in this work; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED THAT as a people of the Book we, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), affirm that:

“The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and shall be like a water garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

“Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.”

(Isaiah 58:11-12)

* * * * *