



Angus Rothwell, delegate, Irish Mission Session October/November 2013, (copyright Irish Mission/BUC)

“Brother President, we need more Pastors”!

It’s the most frequently heartfelt question members ask at a Union/Conference/Mission Session. Usually raised on the final afternoon, and addressed to a member of the administration, it runs something like this:

“If the conference leadership is serious about addressing the great mission needs of our territory, when can we expect to see more pastors employed? Are you aware many members see their pastor only one Sabbath per month? There are even some districts, who’ve been without an assigned pastor for years. I appeal to you brother President, on behalf of the delegates, for you, your officers, and the new executive, to address this situation as a matter of urgency!”

The leadership respond with a predictably brief answer:

“Thank you for your question. Be assured, we understand and share your concern. We would love to be able to provide a pastor for every district, but due to our limited financial resources, we cannot take on and employ, any new pastors at this time.”

And with that answer, the deflated delegate walks away from the microphone, wondering if the leadership recognises the seriousness of the problem. Let’s replay the scene again, this time with a different answer:

“Thank you for your question. Be assured, we understand and share your concern, but we have a problem we cannot ignore any longer. It’s one which directly impacts on our ability to increase the number of pastors we employ. In times past, the conference could rely on most members returning a faithful tithe to the storehouse. No longer is this the case – and it’s impacting our mission.

Many members do not see the significance of tithing as a reflection of their faith in Christ. Many, do not see how their faithful tithe return impacts the mission of the church. It’s the case that in recent times, for several reasons, our biblical understanding of ‘the storehouse’, has become somewhat foggy.

*Let me explain by challenging you, with some *‘tither’ pictures, to help see ourselves as we are. I use with caution, and grace, not to label or judge, but to help answer your question. I recognise that tithe return is a private and personal matter, not something we wear as a badge or a label, but please indulge me for a moment:*

- **Picture 1 - The Faithful Tither**

I want to thank the Lord for every member who returns 10% of their income consistently to what the bible describes as the ‘storehouse’. You are living examples of putting God first in your lives. Your commitment to God is a tremendous help to the mission of the church. Thank you for placing your tithe return into this local conference/mission treasury, where you reside.

- **Picture 2 - The Part-tither**

We need to admit that there are members of our constituency who give a percentage of their income, less than 10%, as and when they choose, or feel able. Often in the form of a token tithe, €50 / €100 / €150 per month. To these members, we want to express our thanks for your help and support and at the same time, invite you to grow in your faith, but to return a full and faithful tithe. With your increase in faith, the dream of more pastors becomes a reality.

- **Picture 3 - The Reluctant Tither**

Some of our members return tithe with a great sense of obligation and duty, feeling put upon by the Lord, and the church. Tithe return is 'a deal' with the Lord, like an insurance policy. "I'll return my tithe Lord, but don't you forget the promised blessing." It is worth making these members a matter of prayer, for the Holy Spirit to convict them, that returning a faithful tithe brings joy. While the tithe return will not increase, a greater commitment to the Lord will be visible in a variety of other ways blessing the local church, not least a happier member.

- **Picture 4 - The Tithe Diverter**

In many and various ways, diverting tithe seems legitimate. I am very hesitant to use the term 'divert', but some of our members, in this constituency, intentionally send their tithe to their preferred/favourite Supporting Ministry. Others use tithe to support ADRA, or the local church short term-mission project. New members, some originally from abroad, feel a compelling need to send tithe 'back home'.

We need to have a deep, long, sensitive and prayerful conversation about this, more than time will permit now. But sure enough, if the 25%+ members of our conference who divert their tithe for whatever reason, returned a faithful tithe into the local 'storehouse', the impact on our mission would be dramatic."

With that, a difficult Session conversation between the leadership and members began to move forward. Working together, they would find a solution to a serious problem.

To be continued next week (bulletin 9): Ideas for solving tithe-diversion challenge.

* (The term 'tither' may be unfamiliar, first noted in recent times, by the Stewardship Department of the Australian Union, South Pacific Division).

- **'Motives of the Heart' 3-minute video** with John Matthews, wondering this week if some of us practise 'selfish generosity'. Connects well with the musings above.



LESSON 8. THE IMPACT OF TITHING BY JOHN MATHEWS

Stewardship Ministries videos of the Sabbath School Adult Lesson Study Guide for the 1st Quarter of 2018 by John Matthews, author of the lessons. Use these ...

- **From South Pacific Division Stewardship Ministries, comes another video commentary:** This week Eva Ing, Chief Financial Officer for the Greater Sydney Conference, explains on location beside the River Nepean, how tithe works, using Ellen White’s water metaphor.



- **5 Q's for Life Change**

This week’s study attached – here’s the opening icebreaker statement to get the conversation going:

“In today’s cultures, the majority of Christians give relatively little to fund the mission of God. If every Christian gave (returned – Ed) an honest tithe, the result would be almost unimaginable, simply astonishing, nearly beyond comprehension.” (Christian Smith and Michael O. Emerson. *Passing the Plate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). P.27)

- Lesson Notes (attached): Created for those who want to dig deeper into the Word. Authored by Shevanthi Bastiam Pillai. Class teacher or group leader? Don’t miss these studies for providing both breadth and depth. Here’s a couple of thoughts from this week’s notes:

“In the world, income determines giving. For a Christian, his giving determines his income.”

“The spirit of liberality is the spirit of heaven. This spirit finds its highest manifestation in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In our behalf the Father gave His only-begotten Son; and Christ, having given up all that He had, then gave Himself, that man might be saved. The cross of Calvary should appeal to the benevolence of every follower of the Saviour. The principle there illustrated is to give, give. "He that says he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." 1 John 2:6. (Acts of the Apostles: A Liberal Church. p 339).

All video introductions for this series of lessons can be found at <https://stewardship.adventist.org/online-videos?channel=1326917>

AND FINALLY

“If every Christian would tithe, the church would begin to make an impact on the world that could change it. The church instead is paralysed. Tithing Christians could make a big difference but because most Christians do not tithe, the Church remains generally discouraged..., I am sure becoming a tither provides a definite breakthrough for every Christian. It unlocks the door of the mind, heart and will. It releases. It emancipates. It frees. Becoming a tither is a milestone in a Christian’s life.” (R. T. Kendall. *Tithing – A call to biblical giving* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982) P. 12).

Cheers and best wishes,
David
David Neal | Stewardship Director

Faithful stewardship – more than a merely optional Christian grace.