

**Practical Stewardship**  
**September 2018**

**Why Would I Want To?**

Jerry Keucher

A mother says to her teenage son, “You should take Latin next year.”

The young man replies, “Why would I want to do that?”

Like most parents, religious leaders are fluent in the language of obligation — have to, ought to, must, should, God is calling you to...

This is unfortunate, because the point of the Christian life is not about following the rules. People are always motivated by desire. The point of the Christian life is to put us in touch with our deepest desires and to move us to aim our misdirected desires straight toward God’s heart of love. The Christian life is about healing the will, so we come to do the right thing because we want to.

**The language of obligation and control**

The people in churches today are there only because they want to be. There is no social cachet or economic advancement to be found there. They are looking for a spiritual connection. They want a relationship with God. They have not come to hear the clergy and lay leaders tell them what they should do or to communicate their own anxiety.

The language of obligation goes hand in hand with a need to control. Before Christian leaders can begin to speak in the language of desire, many of them need to deal with their own control needs. This would be a good thing anyway, because the Christian life is not about controlling others.

I realized years ago that telling people what they should do is simply ineffective. It isn’t wrong or bad, it just doesn’t work. What works is being able to explain why anyone would want to do what we’re talking about. There are plenty of things that might motivate a high-schooler to want to study Latin; there are other things that might motivate Christians to want to move more deeply into the mystery of God.

Yet church leaders constantly use the language of obligation as if it were sufficient, while the congregation, like the young man, wants to know why they would want to do what we’re telling them they must do.

**Money and obligation**

The problem is especially acute when we talk about money. Once, after giving a sermon and demonstration on proportional giving, a woman in her eighties said to me, “Thank you. That was the first sermon I’ve ever heard about money that didn’t make me mad.” I thanked her and we chatted, but later I thought, “This woman has been in church every Sunday for eighty years. That’s more than 4,000 Sundays. She has heard hundreds of sermons about money, and they have all made her mad.”

When we communicate guilt, obligation, anxiety and budget need in our talk about money, it makes our hearers resistant and sullen, if not downright angry.

### **Scrub obligation from your giving language**

The language of obligation is often shorthand for the language of desire. In an emergency, it might be appropriate to yell at a child about to step into a busy street, but in church, we need to unpack the language of obligation. We need to find the desire underneath and talk about that. We need to explain why people might want to give.

Look to your own experience, and scrub obligation completely out of your language. Why do you do what you do for the Church? Why do you give? Why are you here? It may take a while to get under the layers and layers of obligation and duty that have been laid on us, but dig until you can say how your giving and your Church involvement are helping align your will with God’s and helping you grow closer to God.

That includes what I call the passive-aggressive obligation language of “God is calling you to....” Be very careful about telling others what you think God is calling them to do. If you ever say that, make sure that you aren’t just trying to lay your own preferences onto others. For example, God is probably not calling people to increase their giving so you can balance the budget. In that situation, God is probably calling the leadership to identify new revenue streams and to outline a compelling vision that the congregation will want to support.

You will have to think carefully about what you want to say, and you will probably need to write it out. We slip so easily into the language of obligation that you can’t trust yourself to speak extemporaneously until the language of desire becomes your mother tongue.

And then you will be able to tell others something that may inspire them to want to do the same.

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#### **Resources:**

- [The Giving Connection](#) by Anne Ditzler, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 6, 2011
- [Stewardship: Gratitude or Obligation?](#) by Mark Beckwith, Vestry Papers, September 2015
- [Preaching About Money](#) an ECF webinar by Scott Gunn, September 26, 2017
- [Why We Give](#) by Nancy Davidge, Vestry Papers, September 2016

#### **Five Positive Ways to Ask for Money**

Arik Thormahlen

I was sixteen and sitting in my grandmother's living room when I received my first real lesson in stewardship. Out of nowhere, she said "so I stopped tipping the paperboy," and then, almost to herself, "he never says thank you." The service had not changed. She still loved the paper—and the crossword, but she was frustrated that she was not recognized.

Since that early lesson, I have learned that stewardship is more than saying thanks; it's how we involve our community in the life of our organization. There is a wonderful saying in fundraising—*Nobody wants to cut stone, but everybody wants to build a church*. Asking people to give without engaging them in the mission of your organization is asking them to cut stone. It might work for smaller gifts, but true philanthropic investment requires connecting donors to the overall impact of their gift.

Donors are giving more than ever to causes that provided meaningful engagement. According to Giving USA, more than \$410 billion was donated to charity in 2017, with nearly one third of the total to religious causes. When you build relationships with your donors, you connect them to the difference they want to make in the world.

Use your solicitations to learn more about your donors and extend their connection with your organization. A well-planned solicitation should be a rewarding experience for everyone and a time to explore new opportunities, share exciting ideas and learn what matters most to the people who are deeply committed to your organization. To build a positive solicitation experience you should:

**1. Be upfront.** Set yourself up for success when setting the meeting by letting the donor know you are coming to discuss a gift. Donors don't want to be ambushed, and nobody likes meetings with

ulterior motives. Make it clear at the outset: “I would like to meet to share our plans and see where they might align with your philanthropic interests.” When everyone at the meeting is on the same page, the conversation will be more productive.

**2. Be inspiring.** Share your vision. Explain how your project is changing the world / improving the community / strengthening the Church and why the person you are meeting with is in a unique position to help effect that change. Engage visionaries within your organization like program coordinators, clergy, laity and program beneficiaries to help tell the story. Their passion for a project is infectious.

**3. Be specific.** You’ve discussed philanthropy and shared your vision. Now it’s time for an ask. Make sure to ask for a specific dollar amount. Donors want to know what is expected of them and what is required financially to make a program successful. Ask amounts should be based on program costs and set at a level the donor can meet. “Launching this program will cost \$10,000 and I would like you to consider championing our efforts with a gift of \$5,000.”

**4. Be silent.** You’ve provided a lot of information to think about and asked for a specific dollar amount. Respect your donors. Give them the time they need to process your request without interruption.

**5. Be grateful.** Regardless of outcome, there is always a way to say thank you. Thank them for the gift, thank them for sharing their time, thank them for listening, you can even thank them for letting you know that this is not the right project for them at this time.

Your donors are drawn to the influence you have on their life, their family, their community and the world. When creating communications, providing volunteer opportunities and soliciting gifts, clearly connect their actions to your mission. Make your donors partners in building your church.

***Arik Thormahlen** has worked with numerous nonprofits, including Habitat for Humanity of New Orleans, Tompkins Cortland Community College, Columbia University, University of California, Berkeley, Mount Sinai Health System, and The Hospital for Special Surgery in a fundraising career spanning nearly 20 years. He has extensive frontline fundraising experience working on capital campaigns and transformational gifts up to \$10 million.*

*As a board member for AFP's New York City chapter and Chair for Fundraising Day in New York 2019, Arik is deeply committed to learning and sharing best practices in fundraising and promoting the growth of the overall philanthropic sector.*

#### **Resources:**

- [Planning and Recruiting for Stewardship](#) an ECF webinar by Erin Weber-Johnson, May 6, 2015
- [Four Lessons in Speaking About Money](#) by Brendan O’Sullivan-Hale, Vestry Papers, March 2018
- [Fundraising and Fellowship](#) by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, November 3, 2016

- [10 Common Mistakes in Fundraising for Congregations](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, Vestry Papers, September 2017
- [All Saints' Mad-lib Pledge Card](#) an ECF Vital Practices tool submitted by Beau Surratt

## **Mindful Stewardship**

Lisa Fischbeck

I wonder what it would be like for each of us to see all our so-called possessions—fossil fuels and trees, farms and churches, our talent, skills, bodies, minds and money—as things we have been given to tend for God’s purpose, even those we worked hard to gain. I wonder what it would be like truly to share what we have with a sense of gratitude and abundance, holding it all lightly.

Especially money. Because God knows money matters. It does. God knows that what we say, do and believe about money, affects what we say, do and believe about others in the world around us. It affects what we say, do and believe about ourselves. And about God.

## **Money and faith**

It's all interrelated, all co-mingled. Every time we give or spend or save or borrow a dollar, it is an expression of faith, an expression of what we value, of what we believe to be true.

Jesus and the Gospels teach us to hold money lightly, to give of it generously, that it shows where our treasure and our hearts are. Life with God is about abundance and about abundant generosity. *Sell all you have*, Jesus tells the rich young ruler who wants to follow him. *It's easier for a camel to get through the narrow eye of the needle gate than it is for a rich person to live in God's Kingdom. Look at the birds of the air—if God looks after them and provides them with all they need, surely you don't need to worry about your financial security....*

Oh, really?

It isn't easy. Because we live in a culture that lures us into thinking that we *need* more than we've got, we *want* more than we've got. And unless we are extremely wealthy, most of us can look around and see other people with a whole lot more stuff and resources than we have. It's tempting to want more. It's hard to know how much money is enough. Especially when we want to pay for education or live without debt or provide for our children or avoid burdening them as we age or retire without anxiety about finances or enjoy some of the incredible things and places that this world of God's has to offer.

## **The church's mission and ours**

The mission of the church offers a good lens for assessing the way we use God's stuff. The church's mission, according to the Book of Common Prayer, is to restore all people to unity with God and with our fellow human creatures in Christ (p. 855). This is helpful.

Before I do something or give something or spend, keep or borrow something, I can ask myself, Does this thing I am about to do, this money I am about to spend, give, save or borrow, help in that great restoration project of God's? Or does it break things down further? It's a good question, and it gets at the heart of what we might call 'mindful stewardship.'

### **What is mindful stewardship?**

Mindful stewardship involves careful attention to:

- How we spend our time and how we use our resources, including, perhaps especially, our money—all the dollars we spend, save, give and borrow.
- What corrupts, destroys or offends the people of God, what sets us at odds.
- What restores us and others to God and to one another, what brings us together, what pulls us apart, what puts a burden on us or others and what gives us or others more freedom.

Mindful stewardship asks us to:

- Pause and to think before we act.
- Strike a balance between the convenience of individually wrapped portions of our cereal bars or nuts, and the potential for less waste if we were to buy in bulk, or at least in a larger package.
- Consider not only how much time we spend surfing social media, but the tone and content of what we post.
- Sleep in an extra hour or take the stairs instead of the elevator (if we are able) in order to honor the gift of our bodies.
- Pause to appreciate the craftsmanship and subtle flavors of a dish or beverage before consuming it with gusto.
- Consider the percentage point gained on our investment over and against the employment practices and investments of the corporation that provides our credit card or that percentage point of interest.
- Give, freely and abundantly, a measurable portion of our resources to those institutions, individuals and organizations that make known the loving, liberating and life-giving way of Jesus, because we realize that we actually have enough to share.

What we soon discover when we practice mindful stewardship is that this way of being, spending and giving, is itself loving, liberating and life-giving, restoring us to God and to our fellow human beings in the Spirit of Christ.

The world of faith and life and love expands. And it is good.

***The Rev. Lisa G. Fischbeck** is the founding Vicar of the [Episcopal Church of The Advocate](#), a 21st century mission in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, known for its engaging liturgy, the [Pee Wee Homes](#) (a model for church-hosted affordable housing), [The Piedmont Patch Collaborative](#) (restoring native flora and fauna to the Piedmont, one patch at a time), and its transplanted and restored 19th century chapel. Fischbeck is particularly interested in how the church can participate in the restoration of the world around us in new and collaborative ways.*

## Resources:

- [Christian Stewardship](#) by Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, September 2017
- [Stewardship for the New Millennium](#) an ECF webinar by Terri Mathes and Erin Weber-Johnson, September 10, 2013
- [Simple Giving](#) by Lisa Meeder Turnbull, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 7, 2011
- [Generations Walking the Way](#) an ECF webinar by Angela Emerson and J. R. Lander, September 24, 2014
- [Wholehearted Stewardship](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, Vestry Papers, September 2013

## **Because God Always Gives**

Rhonda Rogers

How would I answer the question, *why do I give to the church?* There are plenty of references in the Bible about the generosity of our God. James 1:17 and Psalm 145, especially verses 13c-18, come readily to mind. Part of my answer is that giving is my response to God's grace and mercy, because God always gives. It is also because people in my life showed me the privilege of giving and generosity in action.

## **It began with my grandparents**

I view giving to the church a privilege because of my maternal grandparents. As a child, I would spend most weekends with my grandmother and step-grandfather. On Sunday mornings we would attend St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Atlantic City. The preparation for church included laying out our clothes, setting our hair and polishing our shoes. My grandfather didn't have any hair to set, but polishing our shoes was his forte.

There was one more thing they always did. They would get their boxes of envelopes and choose the one for the upcoming Sunday. The envelopes were printed with a number that meant the envelope was theirs. They placed bills inside and sealed them. Grandmom's went in her purse; Grandpop's went in the inner pocket of his jacket.

Sunday morning, as the plate was passed, they would give their envelopes to the church. I would put in my coins but I wanted an envelope too. I didn't understand tithing or stewardship yet. But watching their intentionality and the dutiful way they gave each week made giving seem a privilege. I still feel that way.

## **Love of neighbor in action**

When I was about 10 years old, my mom had hernia surgery. My neighbor came to tell me there was a woman looking for my mom. It was one of my mom's coworkers. She was standing by her car with the trunk opened. Inside were paper bags filled with groceries and household goods. There were two more cars with paper bags in their trunks as well.

I took the woman into my mom's room and went to help bring the bags in. When we were finished, I returned to my mom's room. She was crying and hugging the woman. On the bed was an envelope filled with bills.

There was no disability insurance in those days. There would be no paycheck for my mom for the six weeks she would be out of work. Her coworkers knew this even though I didn't. Parents didn't talk with their children about stuff like that back then. My mom's coworkers made sure we had food and that my mom had some cash to take care of what was needed. Generosity in action; love your neighbor in practice.

### **Lessons in giving**

Those experiences taught me about giving. I saw that one of the responsibilities as a member of a Christian community was to give from what we have been given. I saw my grandparents and my mom's coworkers giving with a grateful and joyful heart. I didn't realize it at the time, but those examples touched me deeply.

I witnessed the work of the church, the people of the church, as we cared for the homeless in our midst, the homebound in our congregation, new parents and even the buildings and grounds. It was done with the same intentionality and duty as my grandparents' giving when I was a child.

There were times when I struggled to make ends meet and my giving was meager. Friends passed along hand-me-downs, shared meals and prayed for me. By God's grace and the generosity of others, I managed to keep us fed and a roof over our heads.

I give because of God's grace and the experience of seeing what happens when you give what you can. I give because it is a privilege to share what's been given to me. I give because loving your neighbor includes generosity in action. I give because God always gives.

***Rhonda Rogers** is a senior in the IONA School of Ministry in the Diocese of Texas. She completed Education for Ministry (EfM) in 2003 and served as an EfM mentor. She became a parishioner at Trinity, Houston, TX after moving from Rochester, NY in 2010. Rhonda sits on the Rev. John Dublin Epps Chapter UBE board and is a member of the Commission on Black Ministry. An Associate with the Order of St. Helena and a member of Daughters of the King, Rhonda worked as a chemical engineer for Mobil and ExxonMobil for over 38 years before retiring in 2016.*

### **Resources:**

- [Year Round Stewardship: Talking About Money](#) an ECF webinar presented by Chris Harris, February 11, 2014
- [New Heights](#) by Jeanie Sablatura and Terry Nathan, Vestry Papers, September 2011
- [Creating a Culture of Giving](#) by Angela Emerson, ECF Vital Practices blog, January 27, 2012
- [Stewardship Presence-Making: A Parable](#) by Charles LaFond, Vestry Papers, September 2012

## **Porque Dios siempre da**

Rhonda Rogers

¿Cómo contestaría la pregunta *por qué doy a la iglesia?* Hay muchas menciones en la Biblia sobre la generosidad de nuestro Dios. Santiago 1:17 y el Salmo 145, especialmente los versículos 13c a 18, me vienen a la mente. Parte de mi respuesta es que dar es mi reacción a la gracia y misericordia de Dios, porque Dios siempre da. También es porque gente en mi vida me mostró el privilegio de dar y la generosidad en acción.

## **Empezó por mis abuelos**

Considero que dar a la iglesia es un privilegio gracias a mis abuelos maternos. De niña pasaba casi todos los fines de semana con mi abuela y mi abuelastro. Los domingos por la mañana asistíamos a la Iglesia Episcopal St. Augustine's en Atlantic City. La preparación para la iglesia era dejar lista nuestra ropa, arreglarnos el cabello y lustrarnos los zapatos. Mi abuelo no tenía mucho cabello que arreglarse, pero lustrar sus zapatos era su punto fuerte.

Había una cosa más que siempre hacíamos. Ellos abrían sus cajas de sobres y escogían uno para el próximo domingo. Los sobres estaban impresos con un número que significaba que el sobre era de ellos. Ponían billetes adentro y los sellaban. Abuela sacaba dinero de su cartera, abuelo del bolsillo interior de su chaqueta.

Los domingos por la mañana, cuando se pasaba el plato entregaban sus sobres a la iglesia. Yo ponía mis monedas, pero anhelaba tener mi propio sobre. Todavía no entendía el diezmo ni la mayordomía. Pero observar su intencionalidad y sentido del deber al realizar sus donativos todas las semanas causó que pensara que donar era un privilegio. Y todavía me siento así.

## **Amor de vecinos en acción**

Cuando yo tenía unos 10 años de edad, operaron a mi mami de la hernia. Mi vecina vino a decirme que había una mujer buscando a mi mami. Era una de las compañeras de trabajo de mami. Estaba parada junto a su carro con el baúl abierto. Adentro había bolsas de papel llenas de comestibles y productos para la casa. También había otros dos carros con bolsas de papel en el baúl.

Llevé a la mujer a la habitación de mami y salí a ayudar a entrar las bolsas. Cuando terminamos, regresé a la habitación de mami. Ella estaba llorando y abrazando a la mujer. Sobre la cama había un sobre lleno de billetes.

En ese entonces no había seguro de discapacidad. No habría cheques de sueldo para mi mami correspondientes a las seis semanas que no podría trabajar. Sus compañeros de trabajo lo sabían, pero yo no. Cuando yo era niña los padres no hablaban con sus hijos/as sobre ese tipo de cosas. Los/as compañeros/as de trabajo de mi mami aseguraron que tuviéramos comida y que mi mami tuviera un poco de dinero para las cosas que se necesitaran. Generosidad en acción, amar al prójimo en la práctica.

## Lecciones de dar

Esas experiencias me enseñaron sobre dar. Vi que una de mis responsabilidades como miembro de una comunidad cristiana era dar de lo que se nos había dado. Vi a mis abuelos y a los/as compañeros/as de trabajo de mi mami dar con un corazón agradecido y jubiloso. En ese momento no lo noté, pero esos ejemplos me tocaron el alma.

Observé la labor de la iglesia, la gente de la iglesia cuando nos ocupábamos de los/as sin hogar en nuestro entorno, de los/as confinados/as en sus casas en nuestra feligresía, de los nuevos padres y hasta de los edificios y el terreno. Se hacía con la misma intencionalidad y sentido del deber con que mis abuelos donaban cuando era niña.

Hubo ocasiones en que luché para llegar a fin de mes y mis ofrendas eran escasas. Mis amigos/as me daban ropa y objetos usados, compartíamos comidas y oraban por mí. Por la gracia de Dios y la generosidad de otros logré mantenernos alimentados y con un techo sobre nuestras cabezas.

Doy por la gracia de Dios y la experiencia de ver lo que ocurre cuando uno da lo que puede. Doy porque es un privilegio compartir lo que se me ha dado. Doy porque amar al prójimo incluye generosidad en acción. Doy porque Dios siempre da.

***Rhonda Rogers** cursa el último año de la Escuela de Ministerio IONA en la Diócesis de Texas. Finalizó su Educación para Ministerio en 2003 y fue mentora en dicha institución. Después de mudarse de Rochester, NY, en 2010, se unió a la Iglesia Trinity, en Houston, Texas. Rhonda integra la junta directiva del Capítulo Rev. John Dublin Epps de la Unión de Episcopales Negros y es miembro de la Comisión del Ministerio Negro. Está asociada a la Orden de Sta. Helena y es miembro de Las Hijas del Rey. Rhonda se desempeñó como ingeniera química en Mobil y ExxonMobil por 38 años antes de jubilarse en 2016.*

## Recursos:

- [Nuevas Alturas](#) de Jeanie Sablatura and Terry Nathan, Vestry Papers, septiembre de 2011
- [Vivir la mayordomía](#) un webinar de ECF de Sandra Montes, agosto 22, 2017
- [Estudio Bíblico para la Mayordomía](#) una herramienta de ECF Vital Practices
- [La mayordomía Cristiana](#) de Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, septiembre de 2017