

A Fifty-Two Week Parish Member Giving Campaign

Special Note: Any and all aspects of this proposal can be adjusted and modified to fit the needs and the personality of a particular parish. Changes, however, must not compromise the basic goal of this campaign, as stated below.

This fifty-two week parish member giving campaign is constructed based on a basic goal, that the Parish Council is prepared to lead the parish toward a member giving program based strictly on scriptural and church teachings and not on the parish's financial condition. The relative financial condition of the parish, while important to communicate to the members, should not be the driving force in determining what members contribute.

- Whether or not the parish is beginning or in the midst of a building program is of no consequence to the amounts offered annually by members
- The size of any mortgage the parish has should not influence how much members contribute
- Revenue generated by parish fund raising events should not be taken into consideration by parishioners as they consider their annual offerings
- The size of parish savings accounts, the value of parish assets, including property, or the regular income generated by parish enterprises such as preschools, rental properties, parking lots, or any other type of commercial ventures should not come into play as members ponder their annual pledge forms

If the parish is comfortable with use of the term tithing, then by all means use that term. If the term tithing causes some apprehension within the parish community, then phrases like sacrificial giving or proportional giving can be substituted. The terminology used is not as important as the basic point that the amount contributed to the parish by individual members should be guided by scriptural teachings and not by any other factor.

The Parish Council, under the direction of the parish priest and others he recruits, should begin a systematic study process during which they educate themselves on the Orthodox Church's teachings about giving. This effort will begin to reveal that, in most Antiochian Archdiocese parishes, the patterns of giving are based more on local parish history and tradition, and not on church teachings. Furthermore, member giving practices are also influenced by the individual family histories and backgrounds of each parishioner and each parish family. Changing these patterns is not easy, but the fact that scripture and church history is clear makes the ultimate success of the effort assured. This study could begin with a review and discussion of the four articles included with this program, but then should expand to include any number of other excellent resources dealing with member giving in the Orthodox Christian tradition. Contact the Department of Stewardship if the parish needs resource references. In addition, the scriptural passages included with this program can be used to guide this study process.

As part of the Parish Council's study of what the Orthodox Church teaches about member giving, they are asked to consider whether or not they would want to set as a goal amending their parish's version of the Model Parish Constitution to include references to a specific member giving program as one of the requirements for being considered a "member in good standing."

If the Parish Council agrees to adopt this as a goal, they can entertain a number of methods or approaches as to how this amendment to the Model Parish Constitution could be worded, as long as the basic goal is not lost or compromised.

Section 1. Basic Criteria for “Good Standing” or “Voting Membership”

To be a “member in good standing” and a “voting member,” a person must be 18 years of age and over, must be living in accord with Holy Orthodox Tradition, and must be:

- Baptized, Chrismated and Communicated as Orthodox;
- Living in Peace and Repentance with regular Confession;
- Regularly participating in Liturgy, especially on Sundays;
- Obeying Hierarchy of God, Orthodox Bishops and Priests;
- Participating cooperatively in Orthodox parish governance.

Orthodox giving is one part of the larger reality of stewardship. The minimum financial giving acceptable to be a “member in good standing” for any one year is the Orthodox (biblical and patristic) standard of tithes and offerings. Pledging annually to give “tithes and offerings” or pledging to move with God’s help toward that biblical and patristic standard will suffice assuming any applicable jurisdictional canons are satisfied.

Section 2. “Tithes, Offerings, and Moving toward Tithing” Defined

- A “tithe” means 10% of an individual’s personal income given back to God, usually, but not necessarily only, through the parish general operating fund.
- An “offering” means a gift given to God beyond the tithe, never in place of the tithe nor reducing the tithe in any way.
- “Moving toward tithing” involves a personal commitment to a definite plan to achieve tithing over time with God’s help.

Once the parish council has completed their study process, a five week series of letters and sermons is proposed to introduce this “new” approach about giving to the parish membership at large. Each letter would be mailed on a Monday. On the following Sunday, a sermon would be delivered by the parish priest or a lay leader the priest designates that would reference the letter and its main message. Once the five week series concludes, the parishioners would be informed that for the next forty-seven weeks, a scriptural passage or another brief statement which establishes the consistency of tithing or sacrificial giving within the Orthodox Church would be printed in the parish’s bulletin. Whether that is a bulletin distributed in church on Sunday or a weekly bulletin that is mailed to each household, each passage would be designed to give parishioners a chance to study, contemplate, and, most importantly, pray on the realization that God and His Church prescribe only one method to give in thanksgiving to Him for all the gifts He has bestowed on His children.

Letter, Week #1

This letter marks the first of five mailings you will be receiving during the next five weeks. Each Monday, letters will be sent containing important information about our parish. Every Sunday during this five week period, a talk will be given following Divine Liturgy based on information in these letters. This series of letters and talks, approved by (insert the name of your parish priest) and our (insert the name of your parish) Parish Council, is designed to initiate a stewardship campaign for the year 20 __. It is our hope that everyone who receives these letters will read them carefully, consider the information they present, and, through prayer and reflection, change the manner in which the members of our parish make their offerings.

This stewardship drive is designed to give us the opportunity to thank God for the blessings He has given to us all. If we profess belief in the Orthodox faith and if we love God, we must demonstrate this through our words and our actions. In the book of Proverbs 3 9-10, we read ...

“Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”

Stewardship involves giving the first fruits of our time, our talents, and our resources to the glory of God. Everything we do at work, at play, and with our families must find us behaving in ways which glorify God. This is not only our duty as Orthodox Christians, it is a way of life which brings us the greatest joy and fulfillment.

Our parish provides all of us with a place to worship and with a place to receive the holy sacraments of the Orthodox faith. For this we must be eternally thankful. Our parish also sponsors activities and programs designed to raise funds for worthy projects and to provide fellowship for our families. Our help and support of these activities is part of what we mean when we use the word stewardship.

The goal of this campaign is to help all parishioners realize that the offering of our time, our talents, and our resources represents a way for us to show our thanks for the blessings God has bestowed on us and on our families. Truly, everything we have is a gift from God.

What does it mean to offer our, “first fruits?” We need to be very literal about this particular passage from the Bible. Before we allocate time to devote to our jobs, we must allocate time to worship God. Before we set aside time to go to the movies or to play golf, or to work in the yard, we must allocate time to serve God and the needs of His church. Before we agree to commitments for the school, sports, and other interest of our children, we need to make sure that there is time in their lives to learn about God’s love. Before we pay our monthly bills, we must set aside a portion of our resources in thanksgiving to God for His many blessings. God wants us to enjoy full and enjoyable lives on this earth, but we are called upon to do this by adhering to the teachings and practices of Orthodox Christian teachings.

Without this kind of commitment to our faith, we might be in danger of being believers in word, but not in deed. God demands from us, His children, total devotion to His word. Every aspect of our lives must be lived in accordance with His teachings. When it comes to our offerings to the church, in many cases, we need to do more to explore God’s true teaching about giving. As we begin this year-long journey together, we ask you to open your minds and your hearts to the possibility of learning information that can transform the way you give to the church. Acquiring this knowledge of God’s teachings will go a long way towards helping us not only know the joy of giving of “the first fruits,” but also knowing how to follow this practice in practical terms and within the context of our busy and pressure packed lives.

Letter, Week #2

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

In last week’s letter, we talked about good stewardship involving the giving of our time, talents, and resources as actions based on our belief in God. We are taught that our faith must be matched with action. We are blessed at (insert parish name) with many parishioners who give freely and generously of their time to church projects. We are thankful that so many of our parishioners share their talents to further the work of our parish and its various organizations and auxiliaries. Teachers, engineers, lawyers, business owners, cabinet makers, restaurant owners, financial experts, and so many others find ways to enhance church projects with their special skills. We hope this five week series of letters will encourage even more of our parishioners to evaluate their availability of time and their special talents to find ways to give them in support of our parish and the glory of God.

We also pray that this series of letters will result in our parishioners giving new thought to decisions they make about the resources they give to (insert parish name) in thanksgiving for all of God’s blessings. The Bible teaches that it is the sacred obligation of all believers to make sacrificial and proportional offerings to God in thanksgiving for God’s many blessings to us. We know many believers who tithed to their church. The ten percent they offer is seen as their obligation to God and their offering to Him in recognition of His love for us. While we pray for God to strengthen us in our ability to give with this much faith, we often need facts and figures to guide decisions about how much to pledge and give to the church on a weekly, monthly, and on an annual basis. Our ultimate goal, however, is to reach the point where the kind of statistics listed below, while important and useful to share with all parishioners, will not be major factors in determining our level of giving. The only factor that influences how much we give should be our faith in God and our desire to give in direct proportion of how much He has given to us.

Our annual parish budget of projected expenses totals \$_____.

Our annual parish budget of projected receipts from member pledges totals \$_____.

Our annual budget for projected receipts from fund raisers and from non-pledge receipts totals \$_____.

The number of pledging units (families or individuals) in our parish is _____.

The current average pledge in our parish is \$_____.

An average pledge of \$_____ per pledge unit (family or individual) would enable our parish to cover our parish budget, leaving receipts from fund raisers and other non-pledge receipts for special projects and for parish charities.

Stewards are those who assume their responsibilities with joy and with a sense of obligation. Stewards take their service seriously and they know that they must meet these obligations first, before attending to other needs. Our priority daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly is to serve the Lord and His Church by living a life that reflects His teachings. Giving generously, cheerfully, and before anything else, “first fruits,” is the discipline we must develop in order to truly be Orthodox Christian stewards in the manner intended by God.

Letter, Week #3

In letter three of this five week series, we begin to get very specific. One message we have shared is that our relationship with God is the foundation for all we do in the church. If we truly believe that everything we have is a gift from God, then the giving of our time, talents, and resources to Him is as natural an act as breathing and as necessary an act as paying our bills. Reading the Bible daily, attending church services regularly, and working on, supporting, and participating in church activities and programs are actions and deeds which reflect this love. So too is offering a proper percentage of our resources to represent the love we feel in our hearts for God.

“The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.” 2 Corinthians 9: 6-8

With a cheerful spirit and a loving heart, consider the possibility of changing the method you use to determine how much to give to the church. First of all, consider your pledge an offering in thanksgiving for God’s love. Give knowing that this is what God wants and what God needs to know that we truly love and appreciate the faith He has placed in us, His children. Second, consider changing the method you and your family uses to determine how much to give. Is the amount you gave this year simply a repeat of the amount you gave last year? Is the amount of your offering a reflection of what the parish says is the “fair share” expected from each pledging unit? Is your gift based on the fact that your family has always given this amount per week, and you continue this practice without much consideration of change? Third, think about the last ten times you spent money. Were any of these purchases for items you could have done without? With a little planning, could you have spent less for a particular item? This kind of analysis reveals to us that we could give more to the church without neglecting the needs of our families and ourselves. Finally, consider a formula for giving that would result in raising the level of our offering to a point more in line with church teachings. At your job, are you paid by the hour? If so, consider making your weekly offering to the church the equivalent of one hour’s pay. If you are paid a weekly or monthly salary, divide this amount by the number of hours you typically work. Make this hourly calculation your weekly offering. Another approach might be to take your monthly income and pledge to give a percentage as your offering. Initially, this could be one, two, or three percent, if starting with a strict tithe of ten percent is not realistic.

The point is to consider changing how you determine the amount of your offering so that it becomes more reflective of scriptural guidelines. God loves a cheerful giver. Recall the joy you feel when you give someone you love a birthday or Christmas gift. Know that feeling every Sunday when you make your offering, in thanksgiving to God for all of His blessings.

Letter, Week #4

We have arrived at week four in our five week series of letters about stewardship at (insert parish name). God has blessed us with many gifts. Stewardship means acknowledging this by using our time, talents, and resources in ways which glorify God and His teachings. The Bible passages used in this series of letters have reminded us that our gifts to God should be offered cheerfully and in direct proportion to their level of our awareness of the bountiful gifts God has bestowed upon us and upon our families. In book of Matthew, we find further guidance about how we should give to the church.

“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.” Matthew 6: 1-4

This passage leads us to ask you to continue a prayerful reflection on this subject of how much of your time, talents, and resources to offer to the church in Thanksgiving for God’s love. We know how much God loves us. How much do we love Him? Are we living every minute of our lives in a manner which reflects His teachings and our appreciation for His blessings? Consider these points as our parish begins this journey toward changing the patterns of giving in our community.

1. The amount you pledge is between you and God. Through prayer each of us must reflect on the words in Proverbs 3: 9, “Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce ...”
2. Completing and returning a pledge form is a way for you and your family to show your love for God and for the work being done at (insert parish name) to glorify His name in this community.
3. It is the policy and practice of our parish to not publicize the amounts pledged by our parishioners. We will keep our members informed of all church business, including regular financial updates, but we hope to begin moving toward a time when this information will be used to simply keep members rightly informed about parish operations. This information should not become the basis upon which we decide how much, “to give to the church.” This decision must come from our individual and prayerful reflection upon our own thoughts about the many gifts God has given us.
4. Publicizing the average pledge needed to cover parish operating expenses is useful information to provide and it can help individual parishioners evaluate their level of giving, but we always remember that our gifts from God come in many different forms. Some will give more and some will give less, but this should always be the result of decisions based upon prayer and reflection of God’s gifts and blessings.

Developing the spirit of humility suggested in Matthew 6 will go a long way towards helping us change our patterns of giving. Change is not easy, but believing the word of God requires that we challenge ourselves to live lives that reflect what we profess to believe. God will give us the strength if we will only trust in His teachings and in His love.

Letter, Week #5

For the past five weeks, we have started a journey that will last for one year. Next year at this time, we will be asking all of our parishioners to complete the pledge form enclosed with this letter. Why are we sending it to you one year early? We realize that fundamental change takes time. For the next year we hope you will join your fellow parishioners in opening your minds and your hearts to all of the wisdom of God's message to His children. For each of the next 47 weeks, we will print in our church bulletin a scriptural passage that speaks to the manner in which God expects us to give. By reading and thinking about these passages, we hope all of us will become convinced that we not only need to give more of our time, talents, and resources to the church, but we need to make these offerings with a new spirit.

Can two apparently contradictory ideas both be true? Sometimes this can be the case. On the one hand, it is true that the church of God flourishes when its members are giving generously and cheerfully of their time, talents, and resources. In this sense, the church needs what we have to offer. It is equally true that we need to offer these gifts to God in thanksgiving for the many blessings He has bestowed upon us. The church does not need our offering as much as we need to make this offering as part of the cycle of our spiritual lives. Just as we attend liturgy, say our prayers regularly, and participate in the sacraments of the church, we need to give in a manner consistent with God's teachings.

Does tithing to the church help the church? Our parish has _____ pledging units. If we figure that the average annual income of each of these families or individuals is, conservatively, \$_____, what would the total pledge revenue for the church be if they all gave ten percent? An annual total approaching \$_____. What good work could the church and our Archdiocese undertake with these kinds of financial resources? God only knows!

A passage from Luke 8: 14-15 gives us one more scriptural message to consider as we prepare to embark on this year-long journey.

“Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.”

Together we can continue to do God's work here at (insert parish name) and our efforts will rise to levels we never imagined. Putting our faith in God must be accompanied by a desire to know God's teachings and to then be committed to follow and practice those guidelines. So we come back to “the first fruits” and to the fact that when seeds fall on good ground, God's mission is fulfilled. For the next forty-seven weeks, remember these questions as you read each week's passage. “What does this message from God require from me, His loyal and obedient servant?” What must I change in my life to be able to follow this teaching in both word and in deed?”

God bless you and we look forward to taking this journey together. May God be with us.

Sample Pledge Form

(Insert Parish Name)
(Insert Parish Address and Phone Number)

Member Pledge Form for the Year _____

“Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce: then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine.” Proverbs 3: 9-10

“Freely you have received, Freely give. Matthew 10: 8

1a. Name(s) of person or couple completing this form:

Special Note: If you have completed a pledge form in the past and there are no changes, skip lines 1b, 1c, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

1b. Birth dates of person(s) listed in 1a.

1c. Names(s) and ages of children, including birth dates:

2. Family home address:

3. City and Zip Code:

4. Home Telephone: Area Code _____ Number _____

5. Family Email Address:

6. After prayerful consideration of God’s teachings and the love and blessings He has bestowed upon our household, our pledge to (insert parish name) for the year 20__ is \$

7. We intend to pay our pledge (check one)
_____ Weekly with pledge envelopes
_____ Monthly
_____ Quarterly
_____ One annual payment

8. Date this form was completed _____

9. Please return this form to the church office or place it in the collection tray on Sunday.

Thank you and God bless you and all in this household.

Continuation of the 52 week series, following the five letters and talks in church ...

Preface each week's publishing of the following passages with these questions.

“What does this message from God require from me, His loyal and obedient servant?”
What must I change in my life to be able to follow this teaching in both word and in deed?”

Week #6 - Genesis 2: 15 ... “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”

Week #7 – 1 Corinthians 16: 2 ... “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come.”

Week #8 – Psalm 24: 1-5 ... “The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon waters. Who may ascend into the hill and of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the Lord, And righteousness from the God of his salvation.”

Week #9 – Luke 8: 14 ... “And as for what fell among thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.”

Week #10 – Matthew 6: 19-21 ... “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Week #11 – Luke 21: 1-4 ... “And Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and he saw a certain poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all put their surplus into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on.”

Week #12 - Matthew 23: 23 ... “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law; justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”

Week #13 - St. John Chrysostom, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume XIII, First Series, page 69 ... “For what did not they of old do? They gave tithes, and tithes again upon tithes for orphans, widows, and strangers; whereas some one was saying to me in astonishment of another person, ‘Why, such a one gives tithes!’ What a load of disgrace does this imply, since what was not a matter of wonder with the Jews has come to be so in the case of the Christians? If there was a danger then in omitting tithes, think how great it must be now!”

Week #14 - Luke, 12:27-31 ... “Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? And do not seek what you should eat or what you

should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Week #15 – from, Tithing, Fr. Richard Ballew ... “What is the tithe? Simply put, the tithe is a voluntary offering of ten percent of one’s income, given to God. That’s right, ten percent, taken off the top. In both Hebrew and Greek the word tithe comes directly from the word ten. It is a practice established long ago whereby God’s people have the opportunity to participate in the sacramentality of life by offering back a portion of what God has given to them, As such, tithing is more than just an act of obedience. It is an act of worship.”

Week #16 - In the Creed we recite during every Divine Liturgy, we say, “...And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures...” God’s ultimate sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son is our constant reminder of his unwavering love for us. We must acknowledge this love by our prayers, our conduct, and our deeds. Tithing, sacrificial giving, or proportional giving is but one of the many expressions of worship through which we can demonstrate our commitment to Our Lord’s word.

Week #17 - Luke 12:48 ... “But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

Week #18 – St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book IV, Chapter XVII, para. 2-3 ... “And the class of oblations among the Jews and oblations in the church, but what has changed is those who offer, for the offer is now made not by slaves, but by free people.”

Week #19 – Ephesians 2: 19-20 ... “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being in cornerstone.”

Week #20 – 1 Corinthians 12: 18, 25-27 ... “But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose ... that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

Week #21 – John 15: 1, 5, 8 ... “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.”

Week #22 – John 10: 14-16 ... “As the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me.”

Week #23 – Ephesians 3: 14-15 ... “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.”

Week #24 – Ephesians 5: 23-27, 29 ... “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and Himself the Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let

wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church.”

Week #25 – Colossians 1: 13 ... “He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transformed us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”

Week #26 – Hebrews 12: 22-24 ... “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.”

Week #27 – 2 Corinthians 8: 10-15 ... “And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack – that there may be equality. As it is written, ‘He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.’”

Week #28 – Matthew 6: 28-34 ... “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Week #29 – Luke 12: 16-21 ... “Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my corps? So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my corps and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Week #30 – Acts 4: 32-35 ... “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”

Week #31 – 2 Thessalonians 2: 15-17 ... “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may your Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.”

Weeks 32 to 36 come from Again, Fall, 2005, “The Trial of the Tithe,” Fr. Thomas Zell

Week #32 - Fr. Thomas Zell ... “One of my earliest childhood memories is of piling into the back of our family car on Sunday morning and heading off to our little Baptist church in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Along with ensuring that my brother and I were properly cleaned and dressed for the occasion, my father would always drop several coins into our hands, so that we in turn could drop them into the offering plate at church. Tithing was something Dad faithfully practiced all his life, and he wanted to make sure his sons followed suit. Having lived with this tradition for so long, and loving it so much, it is hard for me now to stop and look at it objectively. But since the concept has become somewhat an object of debate today, I would like to examine both the myth and the realities behind this practice, and to follow the trail of the tithe.”

Week #33 - From the third-century document *Didascalia Apostolorum* ... “Set aside part offerings and tithes and first fruits to Christ, the true High Priest, and to His ministers, even tithes of salvation to Him. . . . Today the oblations are offered through the bishops to the Lord God. For they are your high priests; but the priests and Levites are now the presbyters and deacons, and the orphans and widows. . . . Your fruits and the work of your hands present to him, that you may be blessed; your first fruits and your tithes and your vows and your part offerings give to him; for he has need of them that he may be sustained, and that he may dispense also to those who are in want, to each as is just for him.”

Week #34 - From Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* ... “Woe to him, it is said, who doeth not alms; and if this was the case under the Old Covenant, much more is it under the New. If, where the getting of wealth was allowed and the enjoyment of it, and the care of it, there was such provision made for the succoring of the poor, how much more in that Dispensation, where we are commanded to surrender all we have? For what did not they of old do? They gave tithes, and tithes again upon tithes for orphans, widows, and strangers, whereas some one was saying to me in astonishment at another, ‘Why, such an one gives tithes.’ What a load of disgrace does this expression imply, since what was not a matter of wonder with the Jews has come to be so in the case of the Christians? If there was danger then in omitting tithes, think how great it must be now.”

Week #35 - From St. John Cassian, *The Conferences*, Chapter XXIX ... “He who retains his goods of this world, or, bound by the rules of the old law, distributes the tithe of his produce, and his first fruits, or a portion of his income, although he may to a considerable degree quench the fire of his sins by this dew of almsgiving, yet, however generously he gives away his wealth, it is impossible for him altogether to rid himself of the dominion of sin, unless perhaps by the grace of the Savior, together with his substance he gets rid of all love of possessing.”

Week #36 - A search of the patristic writings will uncover these and more quotes regarding the issue of tithing. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* summarizes this by saying ... “The payment of tithes was adopted from the Old Law, and early writers speak of it as a divine ordinance and an obligation of conscience. The earliest positive legislation on the subject seems to be contained in the letter of the bishops assembled at Tours in 567 and the canons of the Council of Macon in 585.”

Week #37 – Luke 6: 38 ... “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

Week #38 – Matthew 13: 22 ... “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”

Week #39 – Deuteronomy 14:22 ... “You shall tithe all the yield of your seed, which comes forth from the field year by year.”

Week #40 – Deuteronomy 14:23 ... “And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.”

Week #41 – 2 Chronicles 31: 5 ... “As soon as the commandment was circulated, the children of Israel brought in abundance the first fruits of grain and wine, oil and honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.”

Week #42 – Luke 11:42 ... “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”

Week #43 – Hebrews 6: 4-6 ... “Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received the tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.”

Week #44 – Word, February, 2003, “Stewardship,” Nick Hathaway ... When we stand in church, we stand among a gallery of stewards. Everywhere you look you will see the face of a steward. On the iconostasis there are many stewards. In fact, all of the saints were stewards. Their lives stand as models for all of us.”

Week #45 - Word, February, 2003, “Stewardship,” Nick Hathaway ... “Saint Nicholas’ life is one of the foremost examples of Christian stewardship. One well-known story of stewardship from the life of Saint Nicholas tells us how Nicholas saved a young woman from slavery. Her father, a widowed nobleman, had fallen into poverty. Although his three daughters had many suitors, they could not marry because he was too poor to provide them with the dowry that a bride was expected to bring to her marriage. The eldest daughter decided to sell herself as a slave in order to raise money for her sisters’ dowries. Nicholas heard about the women’s circumstance. Secretly, in the dark of the night, he lowered a small bag of gold through an open window in the eldest daughter’s room. With the dowry that Nicholas had provided, she was able to marry. On two other nights, Nicholas secretly provided the two remaining daughters with dowries of their own.”

Week #46 – Psalm 50: 10-12 ... “For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness.”

Week #47 – 2 Corinthians 8: 8-9 ... “I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

Week #48 – Ephesians 4:1-4 ... I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace. There is one body and one hope, that belongs to your call.”

Week #49 – Word, November, 2005, Fr. John Adbalah, referencing remarks by Metropolitan Philip to the 2005 General Assembly of the Antiochian Archdiocese in Detroit, Michigan ... “At our Archdiocese Convention this year in Detroit, Metropolitan Philip initiated an ear of tithing. He led the assembly to an even grater level of commitment to Jesus Christ that we had been previously called. When the assembly followed our shepherd in making this historic step, we recognized that it was time to demonstrate the freedom that began with our prayer and fasting.”

Week #50 - Word, November, 2005, Fr. John Adbalah, referencing remarks by Metropolitan Philip to the 2005 General Assembly of the Antiochian Archdiocese in Detroit, Michigan ... “Tithing, like praying and fasting, puts God first and teaches us to trust Him, rather than ourselves, as our leader. When we tithe, God is given the first part, the first tenth of the gifts that He gave to us. When we tithe, we enter into His ministry at a serious level that will allow the parish and the Archdiocese to minister as they should. Only when the parish and the Archdiocese operate at a level pleasing to God, can the people receive the ministry that God wants them to have. Contributing tithes to the Church is different than making a pledge. Tithes are based on what God has given us, not what we think the local parish needs to operate. Tithes also represent the first part, not what is left over after we pay our bills and have our recreation. Tithing represents a significant shift in thinking. That is why tithing, like praying and fasting, is a spiritual gift that deepens our relationship with God and changes our life.”

Week #51 – Mark 12: 41-44 ... “Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself, and said to them, ‘ Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.”

Week #52 – Send this letter, along with another copy of the Pledge Form, to all parishioners.

For the past fifty-two weeks, our parish has looked at the issue of how we give of our **time, talents, and resources** to the church. We hope you are now more aware than perhaps you were before that giving is an act of faith, driven by our belief in the teachings and the traditions of the Holy Orthodox Church. We hope the faithful members of this parish are coming to the realization that what we offer to the church is a reflection of our faith and not a reflection of how much the church budget is or how big our parish mortgage has become. Is there one of the passages, many from the Bible, that you have read over the past year that has been particularly meaningful to you and to your family in this quest to expand our knowledge and to deepen the level of our faith?

At the next (insert the parish name) General Parish Meeting, the parish council will introduce the following amendment to the section of our parish constitution that defines members and members in good standing of this community.

Section 1. Basic Criteria for “Good Standing” or “Voting Membership”

To be a “member in good standing” and a “voting member,” a person must be 18 years of age and over, must be living in accord with Holy Orthodox Tradition, and must be:

- Baptized, Chrismated and Communicated as Orthodox;
- Living in Peace and Repentance with regular Confession;
- Regularly participating in Liturgy, especially on Sundays;
- Obeying Hierarchy of God, Orthodox Bishops and Priests;
- Participating cooperatively in Orthodox parish governance.

Orthodox giving is one part of the larger reality of stewardship (time, talents, and resources). The minimum financial giving acceptable to be a “member in good standing” for any one year is the Orthodox (biblical and patristic) standard of tithes and offerings. Pledging annually to give “tithes and offerings” or pledging to move with God’s help toward that biblical and patristic standard will suffice assuming any applicable jurisdictional canons are satisfied.

Section 2. “Tithes, Offerings, and Moving toward Tithing” Defined

- A “tithe” means 10% of an individual’s personal income given back to God, usually, but not necessarily only, through the parish general operating fund.
- An “offering” means a gift given to God beyond the tithe, never in place of nor reducing the tithe in any way.
- “Moving toward tithing” involves a personal commitment to a definite plan to achieve tithing over time.

The goal of this constitutional amendment is to allow our parish to demonstrate their level of commitment to this new understanding of giving in the Orthodox Christian tradition. The reason we have taken a whole year to explore this important topic is because it does represent a big change for many of the faithful members of this community. While we hope everyone is ready to embrace the practice of tithing, we know that, for practical reasons, it may take a while for a person to adjust the organization of their personal finances to make this practice possible. That is why we included in the constitutional amendment proposal the reference to, “moving toward tithing.” We are asking everyone, on the pledge form, to reflect an amount that is representative of this new way of thinking about the giving of our resources to God and to His Church. The amount you write in should be an amount that is both an increase from that of past years and an amount that reflects a strategy that will move you, in the coming years, toward the tithing goal.

Our parish will continue to discuss this important issue in many ways and in many forms. We ask you to be loving and prayerful, realizing that God gives us the strength and the wisdom to accomplish more than we ever thought possible. His love for us knows no bounds. Our love for Him must grow to be equally unconditional. We ask that you complete and return the pledge form at your earliest convenience. God bless you and your family always.

