

## **Committee on Stewardship and Tithing**

**153<sup>rd</sup> TENNESSEE ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2020 - VIRTUAL**

Bishop Jeffrey Nathaniel Leath, Presiding Prelate

Dr. Susan J. Leath, M.D., Episcopal Supervisor

Host Church: Payne Chapel AME Church, Nashville, TN

Host PE: The Rev. Troy Merritt, Jr.

Associate PEs: The Rev. Sidney F. Bryant and the Rev. Alexander Gatson

Host Pastor: The Rev. W. Antoni Sinkfield, Ph.D.

Stewardship during the coronavirus pandemic has taken on a whole new perspective. These are times none of us have ever navigated, which means there is no map. No expert. No clear path. COVID-19 has changed the way the world interacts and the church is not immune to those changes. Amid social distancing and sheltering in place orders, Congregations are taking this urgent moment to change—how they worship, connect, minister, and function financially. Stewardship of the pandemic means learning how to adapt and how to be generous in new, relevant, and critical ways. Which means more than just worshipping online or utilizing e-giving technology. It is an endeavor that requires our generosity, our investment in creativity and community, and our willingness to follow the winds of the Spirit into a future of God's Zion.

Churches are now using all sorts of technology to stream worship services, share daily prayers, and convene corporately to glorify God, even if it is all online. And many churches are finding ways to support and care for the most vulnerable church members by organizing grocery and pharmacy trips so that the homebound do not have to go out and risk being exposed. I think it is in times like these that the church can show its real strength as a community of faith, that loves its neighbors, and glorifies God.

We have a call from God in the administration (stewardship) of the grace of God for service of the divine mystery revealed in Christ (Ephesians 3:2). The strength, inspiration and growth in the management of our lives must come from God through the Holy Spirit in us; otherwise, our labor is in vain. Accordingly, we must always remember the sole source of our strength in pleasing God: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* (Philippians 4:13 NJKV).

### **The Committee suggest that we consider the following:**

**BE THE CHURCH:** One of the most important things a church can do to sustain stewardship is to continue to serve the Lord and to love its neighbors.

**COMMUNICATE AND TELL YOUR STORY:** Use all the tools available to you (email, texting, social media, phone calls, etc.) and make sure your flock knows you are still there and what you are doing. Organize your officers and class leaders to just call and check on people. Share on social media daily prayer practices. Seek out and ask church members if they need help. Don't count on them to reach out to you. People feel isolated and disconnected during this time so there is no such thing as too much communication right now.

**MODEL JUSTICE:** Churches should do their best to continue paying all staff and honoring contracts with small businesses. Churches should be modeling this practice and making sure that everyone that counts on the church is taken care of.

**ONLINE GIVING:** If you aren't offering online giving, you need to start offering it immediately. This is the best way to allow people to give during this time. They need to know that for the church to make it through this crisis and for the church to continue to support people during this crisis that it will require people to continue to give. Ask during your virtual worship services for people to give and direct them to the online giving option.

**SETUP A COVID-19 ASSISTANCE FUND:** Many in your church and your community are going to be financially impacted by this crisis. Setup a special fund to provide assistance to those in need. Encourage people to give to the church as they normally do and to give to the COVID-19 Assistance Fund, in addition to their normal giving. Recognize that many in your church will need help BUT also recognize that others will still have the capacity give.

**KEEP BEING THE CHURCH:** Again, the most important thing a church can do right now is to glorify God and love its neighbors. Our approach to pastoral care is changing to meet the crisis needs. Now is the time to also develop new approaches to become better servants of God.

Remember that relationships matter most. Generosity happens when there is trust and clear vision for the ministry of the church. Disaster and disease isolate. Financial recession and unemployment compound our crisis. Racial injustice and political conflict divide. The healing ministry role of the local church has never been greater in our communities!

We believe this crisis creates a defining moment of opportunity now for you and your church leaders. *"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength"* (Isaiah 40:31).

Humbly Submitted,

The Committee on Stewardship and Tithing

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