

One of the verses you may zip past without too much notice while reading through Leviticus is this one: *The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Levites and say to them: 'When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the LORD's offering'"* (Leviticus 18:26).

The main principles here are at least two: (1) it is God's purpose for the first tenth of all personal income to be brought "into the storehouse" for support of the various costs of providing worship and ministry in the community; and (2) those "professional" ministers whose livelihood comes from the tithes are to "tithe the tithes" as a similar acknowledgement of God's provision and bounty.

While this is certainly clear scriptural warrant for my tithing what I receive from the congregation—which I do, and more—there is another principle implied here, I think. This implied principle is that individual congregations, whose ministries are funded through the tithes and offerings of the people, ought also to "tithe the tithes" as acknowledgement of God's provision and bounty. And we, both individually and together, also give "offerings" above and beyond our "tithes," both as expressions of gratitude to God and as participation in the fulfillment of Jesus' Great Commission to "*go and make disciples of all nations*" (Matthew 28:18-20).

It seems to me that the biblical distinction between "tithes" and "offerings" is something like this: (1) the **tithe** is stipulated by God both in its amount (10%) and its use (brought "into the storehouse"; see Malachi 3:10); (2) while **offerings** are less specific in their amount and use. The way that works in our household is that Jill and I contribute the tithe of our income to the congregation's general budget, allowing the decisions of the congregation to determine the use of those funds.



Some of the offerings we give in addition to the tithe come to CBF (such as for the Well Project, etc.); some go to general missions causes beyond the congregation (such as to the missionary enterprises of CBF National or of the Baptist World Alliance); and some of those offerings go to specific ministries such as orphan care in Guatemala, Ukraine, and Kenya, and college ministry in North Carolina, or homelessness ministry here in Howard County, just to name a few. In my understanding, *if I am directing the distribution of my gift to a particular purpose, then that's an offering; if I am allowing the congregation to determine the distribution, then that's part of my tithe.*

To apply this to our congregational life, my understanding is that we should be giving at least 10% of our undesignated receipts (the tithes, as defined in the last paragraph) to mission causes beyond our own congregation, with specific kinds of offerings being received and disbursed for other congregational purposes from time to time. Our congregation has done this sort of "beyond ourselves" giving over the years primarily through the community ministries of Debbie McCustion-Kahl, and those gifts were considerable. Now that Debbie has retired, we have agreed together to move toward this 10% missions goal at the rate of 1.5% per year until we have reached at least the minimum of the tithe.

Like many of our household budgets, moving from where we were to 10% was more than we could accomplish in one stroke of the pen; but our goal was 4.5% last year, and by God's grace we have met that goal. Our goal for this year is 6%. In 2016, it will be 7.5%. In 2017, our purpose is to give 9% to missions; and in 2018, we should be at 10.5%.

Increasing our missionary spending in this fashion will not be possible unless we as households increase our giving little by little as well. If your household is not yet tithing, would you be willing to increase your gifts by 1.5% a year with the congregation? By God's grace, we can do this together!

In the near future, we'll be able to give you a detailed report of how our 4.5% was disbursed so that you can share the blessing of knowing how we are working together to change lives and meet needs in Jesus' Name. One of the recipients of our congregational missions giving has been "Help End Homelessness Howard County," or HEHHC, and I want to tell you a little more about that now.

HEHHC was the idea of the Kittamaquondi Community Church, growing out of their experience with Howard County's Cold Weather Shelter. Although the CWS is certainly a worthy ministry, the KC folk were frustrated that they weren't actually solving anyone's homelessness situation.

The idea, as you may remember, is that HEHHC plans to buy "distressed" condos or townhouses here in Columbia, rehab them with "sweat equity" from their own and other congregations, and then rent those properties to families vetted by the county's homelessness network for 30% of their income (these would be families with jobs of some sort). The beauty of this scenario is many-faceted:

- (1) this would be "permanent" housing, not transitional housing;
- (2) this would actually help a family become stable and successful;
- (3) this would not be horribly expensive;
- (4) this would mobilize the resources of congregational volunteers in numerous ways;
- (5) this would provide access to congregational networks of care and encouragement for the tenant families;
- (6) this approach is scalable (the goal is three houses/families in five years); and
- (7) this approach is replicable (other congregations could do it, too), potentially making a real difference in the homelessness situation in our town . . . and in other towns.

I've been on the HEHHC Board of Directors for a year now, and our own Oliver Henderson is helping us locate our first property. While it's too soon to say for sure, it actually looks as though the first property might be in our neighborhood! I'll keep you posted on these developments, but you can "feel good" already that our missions funds are helping to make this ministry come to reality!

Dave



P.S. I'll bet you know that next week is "Holy Week." The schedule of services is attached with this column, but I want to say a little more about next Thursday night, April 2. We had a "foot washing" experience on Maundy Thursday last year that was well-attended and quite meaningful. Thanks to widespread interest, we're going to do it again next week. Here's how that will work:

An Unusual and Holy Experience

You probably know that "Maundy Thursday" gets its name from John 13:34-35, where Jesus told His disciples, "**A *new command* I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**" "New command" is *mandatum novum* in Latin, and "Maundy" is derived from *mandatum*. "Maundy," then, is a reminder that we are to love one another.

You may also remember that prior to giving this new command, Jesus had washed His disciples' feet, after which He told them, "*You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you*" (John 13:13-15).



Rightly or wrongly, apart from our Primitive Baptist cousins, Baptists have not generally made a regular practice of foot washing, not believing this command to be of the same sort as Jesus' words about baptism and the Lord's Supper. It may well be, therefore, that you have never witnessed or participated in such a service; but you'll have an opportunity to do that on Maundy Thursday this year.

This service will be held in room 100 at 7 p.m. After a time of singing, we'll receive communion together, and then those who wish to do so will experience "foot washing." **It will be possible to attend this service and to receive communion without participating in the foot washing experience**, though you may wish to observe and support those who do participate.

"Foot washing" in this sense is not really "washing," so if you wish to participate, please come with clean feet. All we'll use is warm water and towels. Women will wash women's feet, and men will wash men's feet. We'll have three stations set up with two chairs each, so several people can be participating at one time. (Women, please remember not to wear stockings, panty hose, etc.)

Both persons will remove their own socks and shoes, and then we'll take turns pouring water over the other person's feet, one foot at a time, and then drying each foot with a towel. Then we'll change roles. Everything you'll need will be provided (bowls, pitchers, water, towels).

Most people who experience foot washing—and generally those who observe it as well—report that this is a powerful spiritual experience of humility and care. Again, while you don't have to participate in the "foot washing," you can participate through presence and prayer.