

On Tithing
by Scott Hicks

I was about 10 years old. On Sundays I went to church with my cousins in the suburbs. My mother worked all week. My father was absent you might say. She needed Sunday to help her mother. Things were tight but she did a fine job of taking care of my baby brother and I.

Church was Ok. I loved my relatives. It was a bit stuffy with a lot of “damnation hellfire” stuff but ultimately I found Jesus.

Eventually they began to teach us about tithing so we would bring our contribution to Sunday school. Richard was not one of my favorite people so it made it worse when he noticed the thin shiny dime in my hand and exclaimed, “You’re only giving a dime! Most of us give at least a quarter.”

I’m afraid I was a rather serious and prideful young fellow. It cut to the quick. I wanted to punch him but knew that would embarrass my aunt so simply sat there stupefied and red faced. I discerned some empathetic looks and a girl nearby admonished him but the damage was done.

Slowly but surely I ceased to go to Sunday school. My aunt was in fear for my soul so I had to attend big church. At 12 I was baptized.

It was a year later. I had begun to associate with some other boys from “broken” homes. I don’t think we were bad kids. There just wasn’t the kind of supervision some had. I had also become deeply aware of life’s injustices ... the American Indians, the holocaust, child abuse, starvation, war, battery, alcoholism ... drug addiction. I couldn’t help but wonder. What kind of God let’s stuff like this happen?

Well Mom dropped me off a little late for church and I hustled over to the sanctuary in spite of the fact that I did not want to be there.

When I lightly opened the big door, heart pounding from the run, there beside the pulpit stood Reverend Abernathy next to a big cardboard thermometer. It was marked at each level with dollar signs. The “fluid” in it was blood red.

Reverend Abernathy was shouting, “Give your money to the Lord. You can’t take it with you. All glory to the Lord. Give up your worldly goods to the Lord.”

I’d heard a lot of sermons over my few short years. Way too many had been about this subject. I had enough. I turned and walked out that door and other than a few compulsory visits to appease someone did not return for 30 or so years.

The day came when I wanted and needed to go to church again. I searched, found a home and began to participate. In so doing I learned about the inner workings. As a father and business owner I knew all about paying the bills. In budget discussions I came to realize the huge task there is in creating a balanced assessment of assets and liabilities. I saw first hand how much the church did in the community and world ... how much the plant needed work.

I felt the tension in the lean years and heard the stories of those who went through the depression and sacrificed even more to see that the church survived. So I learned that the folks trying to keep all this together need to know what they are going to have so they can decide how the church is going to operate the next year.

St. John’s doesn’t have a cardboard thermometer with dollar signs on it. They don’t shout and they don’t preach a sermon on giving every week. They just quietly serve and ask that we let them know what we can do.

It’s been a tough few years for my family. St. John’s has been there and never faltered. I give what I can and I try to let them know what it’s going to be. Please send in your pledge card or let somebody know what you think you can do so they can make a budget. This message just has to continue and you see ... we are the messengers.