

OFFERTORY MOMENTS 2012

JANUARY 4

We recognize January 6 as “EPIPHANY,” the time of the visit of the Wise Men to worship the baby, Jesus. Why did the Wise Men come to Bethlehem? They came to WORSHIP Jesus. How did they worship? They brought gifts! These were sacrificial gifts, and the Wise Men expended great energy and effort to place them before the Son of God. Giving is one of the most important acts of worship. We worship the Baby Jesus and the Full Grown Jesus, the Crucified and Resurrected Jesus. This worship calls us to make WORTHY gifts, for the newborn king. Let us now give God’s tithes and our offerings.

JANUARY 11

In the wonderful play, *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye is a poor farmer, trying to make ends meet. He leads his lame horse into the village, taking milk and bread to sell to his friends. There, he meets a newcomer to the village. He offers the young man a piece of bread. The stranger hesitates to take the gift, and says, “I have no money, and I will not beg.” Tevye responds, “But, it is a BLESSING to me to GIVE it to you.”

There it is...the real reason we give. IT IS A BLESSING TO US to give generously. It is a matter of spiritual enrichment for us to give. WE are the ones most blessed when we give. So, let us now give generously as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

JANUARY 18

A Christian author named Leo Buscaglia wrote a book called, *Living, Loving, and Leaving a Legacy*. The author says that God put every one of us here to live, to love and to leave a legacy. It is through our giving that we make love visible, and when we give boldly and live life to its fullest, we leave a legacy. It was Winston Churchill who said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” What will our legacy be? Will we give boldly and make a life that is really life? Let us now give God’s tithes and our offerings.

JANUARY 25

We all know that Jesus said it would be more difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Someone has said that people have spent centuries trying to find ways to shrink that camel. Jesus knew that whenever we let money come between us and God, we place ourselves in a dangerous position. Money becomes our God. The tithe of 10% of our income is at least one way we can know we are being obedient to God. It may just shrink that camel a little bit. Let us give generously to God’s work as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 1

In Paul’s letter to the people of Philippi, he says, “Live in such a way that you are a credit to the Message of Christ.” That is a challenging and instructive way to form our behavior and our lifestyle. How can we be a credit to the Message of Christ? There are many ways. One way, for sure, is through our generous giving of our time, our talents and our money. When we are generous, we reflect the person of Jesus, and do credit to his message. Let us give generously as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 8

Roberto Benigni, (pronounced Be nini,) Oscar winning actor for LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL, has said, “It’s a sign of mediocrity when you demonstrate gratitude with ‘moderation’.” We know that God has been anything BUT “moderate” in giving us life, love and salvation. Therefore, let us not be “moderate” in our response, but let us be *extravagant* in our generosity toward God just as God has been extravagant in loving us. Let us now give God’s tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 15

In three days, the Christian Church will observe "ASH WEDNESDAY." This day invites us all to be aware of our shortcomings and sins, to practice repentance, and to begin the season we call "LENT." In our tradition Lent is the time to reflect on the sacrifices made on our behalf by Jesus, and to make some sacrifices in our daily living. One way to symbolize our sacrifice is to share our gifts with the church, in the form of our offerings. A challenge used by many is the effort to truly give 10% of our income during this period of Lent. Let us give this prayerful thought as we now give God's tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 22

A word that has crept into our vocabulary over the past years is "lifestyle." It means, quite simply, "The way we live." Some live extravagantly and frivolously. Others live conservatively and quietly. We know of immoral lifestyles and prudent lifestyles and many others. One of our callings as Christians is to develop and live GENEROUS lifestyles. In Luke 12:48, Jesus says, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required." When we develop the attitude and the lifestyle of generosity, giving becomes a means of Grace for us. Our lives become giving lives. Let us do it. Let us live generously, as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 29

When we are asked to give to the ministries our church supports, it is not about the budget or the bills. It is about our growth in Christian Discipleship. Generosity is a Fruit of the Holy Spirit, and sacrificial giving is an expression of our spiritual maturity. Jesus never condemned prosperity, but he often condemned selfishness and stinginess. When we give generously, we participate in the ministries that seek the redemption of the world. We save and transform lives through relating people to Jesus Christ. We grow spiritually as we give generously. So let us give generously of God's tithes and our offerings.

MARCH 7

Though we never know what March might bring, it looks like, and hopefully feels like Spring is peeping around the corner. We always love the feeling of new life and warmer weather that comes with Spring. The coming of flowers, the greening of grass and trees, all reminds us of the continuing creation of God. God's love is eternal, constant and faithful. We can respond to God's love and presence by being generous to the work of God's goodness. When we give sacrificially and generously, lives are renewed and transformed by the ministries we provide as God's church. Let's celebrate Spring as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

MARCH 14

What causes you to be grateful? Are you grateful to be alive? To have fresh air to breath? Did you have breakfast this morning, and will you eat lunch after church? Do you have clean, fresh water to drink? Do you have a comfortable house and a nice car? Beyond all these "things," you have come here because God loves you, and you are grateful to be in a church that reaches out to people. Are you grateful? Have you thanked God for all your blessings? How do you express your gratitude? One way to do that is in our generous giving to God's work through the church. Let's be grateful as we give God's tithes, and our offerings.

MARCH 21

An author named Gordon MacDonald says, in his book, *Generosity*, that God and money are total adversaries. Jesus says that we can't serve two masters, and that we cannot serve God and Money. Perhaps the only time that God and money are NOT adversaries is when we use money to SERVE God. In that case, money may become a HOLY TOOL. As we now receive our offering, let us turn our money into a HOLY TOOL for the service of God, as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

MARCH 28

In I Timothy 6, Paul writes, “*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*”

We are among the rich, whether we want to admit it or not. With roofs over our heads, our own private transportation, food on our table and clothes on our backs and in our closets, we are more wealthy than most of the world’s population. We are also wealthy in God’s love. Let’s listen to Paul, and be rich in doing good deeds, and in our generous sharing, as we now give God’s tithes and our offerings.

April 4

Easter Sunday is the most triumphant day in the year. Jesus Christ is Risen! We are singing the songs of Resurrection and experiencing the wonderful exhilaration of our hope and faith! We are assured that the presence of the Holy Spirit always surrounds us. It is likely that today, there will be more people in church than on any other day of the year! So, in celebration, and in gratitude, let us express our thanksgiving, our appreciation and our commitment. Let us give God’s tithes and our offerings.

APRIL 11

No one should give to support the Church! No one should give to help meet the Church’s budget, or keep the lights on, or to pay the salaries. We should give to praise God, and to make a worthy effort to honor God. Does your giving honor God? Does our giving reflect the level of gratitude we have for God’s love, grace and goodness to us? Though our gifts do, in part, support the church, meet the budget, keep the lights on and pay the salaries, our gifts are to GOD! May we give in such a way that we honor God, and we now give God’s tithes and our offerings.

APRIL 18

One of football’s greatest coaches, Vince Lombardi, once told his team, “Think about three things; Your God, your family and the Green Bay Packers, in that order.” His team almost tore the doors down to get out on the field and annihilate their opponent. What are our most important things? Is God first? In second place, our family? And then, whatever comes in third for us.

If this is the order of our priorities, and God is first, how do we live this out? Do we give our best to God? Do we give our first fruits to God? We give, not to enrich the church, but to enrich our lives through the blessing of generosity. Let’s give God our best, as we give God’s tithes, and our offering.

APRIL 25

An author by the name of Chip Ingram wrote a book called *The Genius of Generosity*. In it he says, “We tend to think that giving our money is a big deal, but it’s actually God’s training wheels for growing a generous heart.” We all want that, don’t we? We’d rather be considered generous than selfish. God gives us the avenue....the training wheels to generosity, when we begin to give proportionately and sacrificially to God’s work. Let us learn the lessons of generosity as we give God’s tithes and our offerings.

MAY 2

A church sign boasted, "God is like Coca Cola. He's the "real thing." This deserves a rebuttal. God is not like a soft drink or anything else. It MIGHT be said that the soft drink has SOME likeness to God, as far as being "the real thing," because God is the TRULY REAL ONE. All that exists has it's reality in the realness of God. Without God, we are nothing. So how do we respond to the realness of God? One way is to give generously to the work that God does in the world, showing compassion and love to everyone. Let us now give God's tithes and our offerings to something that is truly the REAL THING...the Kingdom of God

MAY 9

When we honor our mothers on this Mother's Day, we remember that mothers bring us into the world, they nurture us, teach us, protect us and guide us. In many cases, our mothers are a principal source of spiritual example. Jesus honored his own mother by seeing that she was to be cared for. Today, we give gifts to the ministry of Jesus in the world, that all persons may be nurtured, taught, protected and guided into a life of discipleship. Let us give generously as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

MAY 16

In the movie, "The Apostle," Robert Duvall plays the part of a discredited and disgraced pastor who tries to make amends by starting a new church in a rural town. With the first new members, the church starts to give away, anonymously, bags of groceries and other household items, to people in need. As people discover what the new church was doing, they begin to flock to this ministry of giving. The church thrives because it was a giving community. When we are a giving community, made up of giving people, our spiritual journey thrives. Let us give generously to God's work, that God's spirit may thrive among us, as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

MAY 23

An old story tells about the operator of the community mill who was asked to be the church treasurer. He agreed with the condition that no one ask him any questions until time for the annual report. At the end of the year he reported that all the church's obligations had been paid, the debt was retired, the amount given to missions was doubled and there was money in the bank. When they asked him how he did it, the miller replied, "When each of you brought your grain into my mill for processing, I simply put ten percent of your grain into the church's account. You never missed the ten percent, and the church, and God's work has prospered." That is what tithing is all about. We don't miss the ten percent, because it is God's to begin with, and the work of God's kingdom prospers. Let us give God's tithe and our offerings.

MAY 30

An author by the name of Michael Durall writes, "The basis for true stewardship is the meaning and joy that people derive from sharing in adequate measure. Being a generous person or family is one of life's great privileges- one of the hallmarks of a life well lived." It IS a real privilege to be generous, and a real pleasure to be able to give. In thankfulness to God, let us exercise the privilege of generosity as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

JUNE 6

Today, around 2,000 persons will gather at Lake Junaluska, NC to participate in the yearly meeting of Holston Annual Conference. (_____ will join me as a conference member from our church/charge.) During this time we will set mission priorities, elect persons to conference responsibilities, be inspired by worship and music and reaffirm our community life as United Methodists. As we worship here, and present our offerings, we are part of a world-wide movement

with the goal to make disciples for Jesus Christ. May we give generously to that goal, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

JUNE 13

It is a startling fact that average household giving today as a percent of income is LESS than it was in 1933, at the very heart of the Great Depression. How can this be? Are we worse off? Do we care less? Are we more selfish? It is also true that households with LOWER income give a GREATER percentage of their household income than persons with higher incomes. What percent of your household income do you believe God is calling you to give? Will you pray about that question, and ask God to guide you? May we be more committed Disciples to Jesus Christ as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

JUNE 20

Jesus never condemned prosperity, but he consistently criticized stinginess, selfishness and the lack of compassion for those in any kind of need. It is not wrong for us to have material resources, but it is shameful for us to be selfish with those resources that God has led us to earn and have. The Biblical standard for the avoidance of stinginess and selfishness and the lack of compassion is the call for us to tithe....to give ten percent to God. By doing so, we participate in the joy and fulfillment of the generous life. So let us joyfully give God's tithes and our offerings.

JUNE 27

As we move toward July, we know the summer has come in full force. And in the middle of this week we will celebrate Independence Day...the founding of our country. Since our founding, our nation's greatest crises was the War Between the States. Abraham Lincoln, in his Second Inaugural Address counseled that we move forward "With malice toward none, and charity for all." That advice is very much like the teachings of Jesus, and it is good for us to remember and practice today. So, let us do away with malice, and practice charity and generosity, and celebrate our independence by giving generously to God's work, as we present God's tithes, and our offerings.

JULY 4

Would you like to honor God? I hope you would. And if so, how can you go about doing it? You can live life in appreciation for God's blessings. You can take care to attend to the spiritual disciplines of worship, scripture reading, prayer and faithfulness to God's will. You can show compassion and kindness to God's children. One thing we can do which for sure a part of our spiritual journey is to give the full tithe of our income to God's work through the church. When we do this, we honor God. Let's do this honor as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 11

An old Chinese proverb goes like this:

If you want happiness for an hour...take a nap;

If you want happiness for a day...go fishing;

If you want happiness for a month...get married;

If you want happiness for a year...inherit a fortune;

But if you want happiness for a lifetime.....HELP SOMEONE ELSE!

There is a lot of wisdom in this proverb. There is great joy in generosity, and when we grow in our spiritual life, we grow in our generosity. Is your spirit ready to grow? Give generously as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 18

Researchers are discovering that generous giving provides many benefits. Generosity promotes greater longevity, reduction of stress, better functioning of the body's immune system, improved cardiovascular circulation, healthier sleep and general help with good health.

It is very true that we give generously because we NEED to do it, not because God requires it, or because the Church's bills need to be paid. We give out of gratitude, and as a part of our spiritual discipline. Let's get better at our generosity. It's good for everyone. Let us now gratefully give God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 25

A writer by the name of Nicholas Butler said, "People can be divided into three groups; those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened. When we give generously to God's work, we join that group who "make things happen." We provide for the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the needy, housing for the homeless, healing for the sick. We do this because generosity breeds generosity, and the Church, through our giving, is able to help transform the world. Let's make things happen as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

AUGUST 8

An old song by George Gershwin goes, "Summertime, and the living is easy." The song spoke of easy and lazy living in the heat of the summer. Maybe we are able to be lazy, or to have some easy living every now and then. We are blessed with life, with breath, with love and with opportunity. When we count our blessings, and pray and provide for those with fewer blessings, we become a little closer to the disciples God created us to be. As we are blessed, let us share our blessing through the giving of God's tithes and our offerings.

AUGUST 15

Did you know that 70% of the world's wealth is concentrated in countries that represent less than 15% of the world's population? And did you know that we live in one of those wealthy countries, and that most people in the world would consider us...including those of us in this place of worship...to be vastly rich?

We are rich in material ways, and we are enriched by God's love, and the teachings and example of Jesus, the Christ. To share our wealth, both in material and spiritual ways, let us give generously as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

AUGUST 22

Each Sunday we mention "God's tithes and our offerings." What does that mean? The Bible sets a standard for our giving as the "tithe....10 % of our household income," to go to God's work through the church. The Biblical standard of the tithe was not so much a law, but the faithful response of God's people to the blessings of God. Our "Offerings," are those gifts BEYOND the tithe.

If we are not yet giving 10%, let us prayerfully move toward that goal. If we are giving 10% or more, let us continue our generosity by increasing our "offering." Let us now give God's tithe and our offerings.

AUGUST 29

On Labor Day, we honor honest and productive work. We remember those who have provided for us by their labors, and we are thankful for the opportunity we have had to work productively for a good living. So many people contribute by their labor to the benefit of everyone by their various jobs and functions. It is our privilege to live and work together in this atmosphere. In the church, we also work together for the good of all. Let us generously share the produce of our labor so that God's children everywhere may benefit, as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 5

In I Corinthians 12, (the Message version) we read, "Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it...Everyone benefits" Then the Apostle Paul lists the various gifts given out by God. No one has all the gifts, but everyone has at least one. We are ALL the recipients of at least one of God's gifts. And one gift we can ALL exercise is the gift of generosity, when we share the blessings we have received. And, as we do so...as Paul says..."Everyone benefits." Let us share our gifts and use our gifts, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 12

If we choose to worry, we can find many reasons, can't we? The weather. The traffic, Our health. Our family. The household finances.

But there are some things we can be sure of. God's love. God's faithfulness to us. God's promise to always be with us. God is here, even now, not to take away our problems, but to walk with us.

How do we respond? Surely it would be with gratitude and generosity!

As we let go of our worries about what we cannot control, let's be intentional about our gratitude and generosity to the God who assures us, as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 19

Someone has said that a church budget is our way of imposing limits on how much God's Grace will be at work in our midst. When we give just to reach a budget, we tell God how small our vision for ministry can be. When we give from generous and thankful hearts, we join with God to explore the heights and depths God's love can reach.

Let's give to the vision God has for God's will as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

September 26

A certain United Methodist Church has developed Seven Holy Habits for the members. They are: Praying, Caring, Giving, Serving, Inviting, Worshipping and Learning. (Print these in your bulletin or put them up on your screen.)

Which of the Holy Habits are you practicing? We would all hope to practice each of them as often as we have opportunity.

As we worship, pray and learn in this hour, let us also practice the Holy Habit of Giving as we now give God's tithes and our offerings.

OCTOBER 3

A certain preacher said in a sermon, "Money is a taboo topic. But there is no topic more crucial to our spiritual lives than money. Money is first and foremost a spiritual matter." Martin Luther said, "There are three conversions necessary; the conversion of the heart, of the mind, and of the purse." The pastor then said, "If our purse and pocketbook are not converted...if your pocketbook is not baptized too, we are spiritually diminished. At stake is our own spiritual life and health. Generosity is life-giving and health-giving!"

Let us choose life and health and generosity as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

OCTOBER 10

According to a 2010 report of the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving, United Methodist households give 1.6% of their household income to their church. Of particular interest is the fact that people with NO faith connection give 1.1% of their household income to some kind of charity. As a denomination, we give only ½ of a percentage point more than people who don't belong to ANY religious organization. Does there seem to be something wrong with this picture? Without comparing ourselves to the lowest common denominator, what percentage of our household income is God calling us to give? Let's pray about that, and see if we have a worthy response, as we give now God's tithe and our offerings.

OCTOBER 17

In Eugene Peterson's version of the scripture, called The Message, he interprets II Corinthians 9:6-7 this way, "I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving."

God does not want us to give from pressure or obligation, but wants us to give out of the joy and the delight of being generous. Since God is so generous to us, let us be generous and delight in the gift as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

OCTOBER 24

From Eugene Peterson's version of II Timothy, we read, "This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God." Since God is so extravagant in giving to us the means by which we live, let us be extravagant in our gifts to God, as we return God's tithes, and our offerings.

OCTOBER 31

As you all know, after months of political advertisements, claims and counter-claims, there is an election coming up this next Tuesday. It is a hard-won privilege for us as citizens to have a vote in the affairs of our nation and our community. Though we may grow weary of the political process, we are blessed to have this opportunity. Hopefully we will exercise our right to vote and take the time to let our own voice be heard.

As we exercise the privilege to vote, we also remember the blessings we have through the Grace of Jesus Christ, and the love of God. We respond to these with the privilege of GIVING, because it is our Spiritual opportunity to participate in the Kingdom of God. Let us now give God's tithes and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 7

A certain man hired a worker to help him complete a task. No mention was made of salary or pay. When the task was complete, the man had to choose what he would pay. He could pay a paltry sum, for the worker needed any pay he could receive. He could pay the minimum wage, which would be what anyone might expect. But, instead, he chose to pay a more elaborate sum. The worker was surprised and said he was not worthy of so much generosity. The man replied, "It is not about how worthy you are. It is about what is an amount worthy of my gratitude.

When we give to God, do we give what is worthy of our gratitude? Let us give a worthy gift, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 14

Feast, family and football! Is this what Thanksgiving day is all about? And the day after Thanksgiving is one of the busiest days in the year for bargain-hunting, buying and spending. Is that what it is all about? Hopefully, we will take some time during the busy weekend coming up to give appreciation to God for giving us all the opportunities we have to live life, to love and to share. As we share in the harvest of God's goodness, let us also share in the giving of our gifts, God's tithes and our offerings, as we show true thankfulness for God's abundance.

NOVEMBER 21

If this is Thanksgiving weekend, can Christmas be far behind? The retail merchants think of this weekend as one of the two or three biggest sales bonanzas of the year. They count on us to go spend a lot of money in preparation for Christmas. But, because Christmas is about God's greatest gift to us, we also need to think of Christmas as the season of generosity and giving. So as we

prepare for the many blessings of this time of year, let's prepare our spirit of generosity as we give to God our gifts to commemorate God's extravagant gifts to us. Let's now give God's tithes and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 28

Today is the first Sunday in the season of Advent. It is the time when we PREPARE for the coming of Jesus into the world. In Eugene Peterson's version of the Bible, *The Message*, we find in Galatians 6:9-10, these words. "So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good... Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all..." Advent helps us to see the meaning of the coming of Christ as a way for us to work for the benefit of all from the blessings God has provided for us. When we give, generously and sacrificially, God uses our gifts to save lives, feed the hungry, clothe the naked and heal the sick. Let's share the blessings of doing good as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 5

More than a hundred years ago, Amy Carmichael, a missionary to India said, "You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving." During Advent, we think, dream and talk a lot about love. The coming of Christ into the world signals the depth of God's love for us. How do we exemplify our love for God, for the church and for the Children of God everywhere? According to Amy Carmichael, we cannot love without giving. Let's give generously to the God who first loves us, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 12

In the lyrics of the hauntingly beautiful spiritual, "Sweet Little Jesus Boy," we hear these words. "Sweet little Jesus boy, we made you be born in a manger. Sweet little holy child, we didn't know who you was. Didn't know you'd come to save us Lord; to take our sins away. Our eyes were blind, we couldn't see. We didn't know who you was."

That may have been true in the first century, when Jesus was born in a manger low. But, now we know who he came to be. We know he is the savior of the world, and our savior too. Because we know, we can respond to the amazing, generous, unmerited love of God, as we now give God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 19

This week we enter the High Holy Days of Christianity. We receive the greatest gift ever given. We will celebrate with family and friends because God loved us enough to send his own son to live as we live and to show us the way of true faithfulness. For Jesus, that way meant giving everything he had. For us, it means giving sacrificially and generously to the work Jesus calls us to continue. So, let's give generously and sacrificially to His work in the world as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 26

We sincerely hope everyone had a joyous Christmas this past week. We look now to a new year and the symbols it brings of new beginnings and new hopes. Let us resolve in this new year to serve God as in the lyrics of the music from the musical, "Godspell;" Day by day; Day by day; Oh Dear Lord Three things I pray; To see thee more clearly; Love thee more dearly; Follow thee more nearly Day by day. To see God more clearly, Love God more dearly and Follow God more nearly is a challenge worthy of our calling. One way to be sure we approach the challenge is by our generous and sacrificial giving to God's work. Let's begin that anew as we give God's tithes and our offerings.