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**THE SPIRITUAL EMPHASIS PLAN**

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## THE SPIRITUAL EMPHASIS PLAN

**W**ho are we when the risen Christ is with us? For individuals and congregations, this is the central question of the Easter season. What are we like when He walks with us on our own road to Emmaus? What opportunities and challenges for ministry do we see? What are we willing to risk and sacrifice in order to embark on the adventure of a world in which the living Christ is present? How do answers to these questions call us to change our behaviors, especially in the allocation of our time and money?

The strongest hope of the designers of the Alleluia Fund - Build My Church was that the time of the annual offering would also be an exciting, energizing time to focus on our mission, as individuals, congregations, dioceses, and as a Church. In truth, they felt that the spiritual emphasis aspect of the offering was more important than the fundraising. To paraphrase their conclusion, “If the spiritual emphasis work is well done, time and money will follow.”

Though each diocese will want to create their own spiritual emphasis plan, here are a few ideas for activities and materials to get you started.

## PRAYERS

- Write one for each year’s Alleluia Fund. These should be specific and include mention of the particular work to be supported by that year’s offering.
- Encourage a time of regular prayer for individuals and families. A prayer card, either a bookmark or tent card to put on the dining table, with the prayer printed on it can serve as a reminder.
- Enlist the support of praying groups like Daughters of the King, or a diocesan prayer network. Get them started in the beginning, Phase I Create the Vision, and encourage them to pray all the way. Keep them informed as the work progresses so they can pray with accuracy for the work that is going on. For example, when it comes time to recruit workers for Phase III Fund the Vision, this task is much easier when intentional praying is going on.
- Schedule a prayer vigil.
- Schedule a weekly prayer minute. Pick a time and ask everyone in the diocese to set their alarms and pray. There could be a good diocesan newspaper story here, something along the lines of “where were you” and how did you make room in your schedule for the prayer minute.
- Don’t forget to plan for thanksgiving prayers when the offering has been collected.



## MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES

Create a spiritual emphasis guide to be distributed to each household. This can take several forms, including but certainly not limited to the following ideas.

- A series of brief daily reflections written by persons in the diocese.
- A series of longer one-a-week pieces that might reflect on the Sunday Gospel and/or the ministries to be funded.
- An invitation for families to talk about the Alleluia Fund for the diocese. Include a few ideas for explaining it to children.

Invite people to create their own response to the Easter season. Perhaps there might be an opportunity for them to send the stories, poems, drawings, songs, and other creative responses to the prayers and readings of the season.

Instead of a single booklet, how about a series of weekly mailings with a story about the ministries that will benefit from the offering, Gospel reflections, poem, prayers and other items.

Schedule an Easter season or Alleluia series of speakers, music events, or noontime meditations.

In other words, there are countless possibilities. The important thing to remember is that planning the spiritual emphasis aspects of the Alleluia Fund offering is the place to start. The mission of the Church is driven by the spirit, not the budget, though strengthening the spirit does strengthen the budget. Before worrying about who can give how much and who can ask for it, do everything possible to turn people's attention to the one who gave everything that we might have the everything of eternal life.

# HOW GIVING AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH ARE LINKED

It is possible that the church has no business raising money if it does not also see it as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Jesus talked more about money and material possessions in the Bible than any other topic. It is hard not to draw the conclusion that there must be a strong link between money and the nurture of our spiritual lives. Why else would he focus so much of our attention on it? Some would think that the way we handle our money is a window into our souls. Let's look at what the Bible has to say to us.

## EVERYTHING BELONGS TO GOD, WE ARE CARETAKERS

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth ...* Genesis 1:1

*You are not your own. For you were bought with a price* I Corinthians 6:19-20

*The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof* Psalms 24:1

No matter how hard we have worked or how talented we are, once we start to unwrap where it all came from, we end up at God's front door. We, along with everything in the world (even opportunities), are His creation.

## EVERYTHING WE ARE AND EVERYTHING WE HAVE IS A GIFT, GRATITUDE IS THE ONLY RESPONSE

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only son...* John 3:16

Jesus paid the debt for our sins, therefore our lives are built on grace. The primary motivation for giving is gratitude. It is one of the most powerful positive forces in the world. Gratitude is the door to inner peace and wholeness. Gratitude fosters a sense of abundance and therefore frees us to be generous.

## GOD IS A GIVER.... THEREFORE WE ARE GIVERS

*Riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name ... for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.* I Chronicles 29: 12-14

We are made in the image of God. He is generous, therefore we are generous. This must be why it feels so good to be helpful and do nice things for others. When we are giving, we are reflecting the likeness of God. It is our basic nature to give of ourselves. The act of clinging to, worrying about, and protecting our worldly things is actually a very restricting and suffocating way to live. Sir Winston Churchill said it this way, "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."

## ABUNDANCE IS THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE

*He took the seven loaves and the fish and when he had given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples and they in turn to the people. They all ate and were satisfied. Matthew 15:36-29*

*And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. I tell you do not worry about your life. Matthew 6: 25-34*

No wonder we get confused and are filled with fear. We live in a culture that is driven by a market economy that needs to create scarcity so it can fill our needs. We receive as many as 5,000 messages daily designed to convince us to spend money we don't have to buy things we don't need to impress people we don't even like. Even the poor among us have more than most of the people who have ever lived. Our self-worth is measured by our net worth, but Jesus wants us to live in the opposite frame of mind. How many times in the Bible do we find the words "fear not?" We are, after all, in God's loving care. We must learn to think, "I am rich, I have enough, I have more than I need, and I choose not to focus my life on unnecessary things."

## GIVING IS A WITNESS TO OUR FAITH

Raising money for the church is an opportunity for spiritual experiences and learning about our relationship with God and our "things." The Biblical standard of giving is the tithe. Ten percent of all we have and are given back to God as a symbol of our gratitude. It becomes our most tangible witness to the world of our love for God. The Christian witness is very clear and has been consistent down through the ages. God is good, trustworthy, and will care for us. God knows our every need and is faithful. We receive by giving. Giving is a way to step out in faith and see the hand of God in our lives.

At the General Convention in 2000, members of the Standing Commission on Stewardship and Development proclaimed the following message to the church:

**WE BELIEVE** .... We are children of God, and we need to give. In every aspect of our lives, we are entrusted to be stewards of God's creation. God invites us to give freely and to exercise joyfully our gifts through mission and ministry.

**WE COMMIT OURSELVES** ... to boldly claim God's abundant provision in our lives; to offer extravagantly our time, talent, and money to do God's work; and to practice tithing as a minimum standard of giving.

**WE CHALLENGE MEMBERS OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH** ... to confront our fears of scarcity; to embrace a new vision of stewardship through a joyful response to God's extravagant gifts; and to empower the mission of Christ through generous giving.

**WE INVITE**...all leadership groups in dioceses and congregations to develop their own stewardship statements in order to promote response to the gospel.