



## Giving Guide for 2014-15

This year we invite you to celebrate the joy of **generosity** as you offer your Estimate of Giving card for 2015. We encourage you to find greater contentment and simplicity in your lives as you put God first in your giving and living and to experience the joy that comes from knowing how our gifts honor God and change lives. Our challenge as disciples is to continually find ways to grow deeper in our faith. One way to do this is to offer our financial blessings to God through our tithes and offerings. Through these gifts, we invest in God's vision and purpose and create an opportunity for God to work through us. Our gifts to God each week are an **act of worship**; the offerings we make are a vital part of the ministries of changing lives, transforming communities, and renewing our church. We are called to **make** all we can, **save** all we can, and **give** all we can. **Can** you?

### What does the Bible say about giving?

You may already be familiar with a number of "famous" biblical stories about giving; the story of the "widow's mite" from Luke 21:1-4, the story of the rich young ruler from Matthew 19:16-30, and others. These stories are rich with truth. They are often used in the church as we emphasize stewardship. But they are far from the only stories about stewardship and giving. This year, I offer you ten scriptures you may not have previously associated with giving. Get out your bibles and read these wonderful passages from God's eternal Word!

#### #10. 1 Timothy 6:12-19

##### "Take hold of what is truly life"

Stewardship emerges from a heart of faith that confesses Christ. In this letter, Paul urges Timothy to teach the rich to put their trust in God, not in their possessions. For it is only through God that they can do good and "take hold of what is truly life."

#### #9. Philippians 2:1-11

##### "Adopt the attitude"

A good steward, like Christ, humbly puts the interests of others before his or her own. In this passage, Paul implores the Philippian Christians to share the mind of Christ, who was humbly obedient to the point of death and was exalted by God. As stewards we follow Christ's example in obeying God's command to selflessly love our neighbor.

#### #8. Galatians 5:13-14

##### "Called to freedom ... but serve each other through love"

Good stewards rejoice in their freedom in Christ and embrace their commitment to their neighbor through a bond of love. Stewards are motivated by grace, rather than law, and freely chose to bind themselves in service to their neighbor.

#### #7. Acts 2:42-47

##### "The believers devoted themselves"

"As we worship, so we live." Stewardship extends from our corporate experience of God in worship and fellowship with one another. In Acts 2, this community, grounded in its worship and fellowship, practices good stewardship through radically sharing and redistributing their possessions.

#### #6. Luke 12:13-21

##### "One's life isn't determined by one's possessions"

What should I do with my abundance? The rich man in this parable asks a powerful question even though he does not arrive at the right answer. Good stewards are not greedy with their possessions. Rather, they realize that everything belongs to God and God has called them to share their abundance with those in need.

**#5. Matthew 10:5-8**

**“Give without demanding payment”**

We have freely received, so we must also freely give. In this passage, Jesus commissions his disciples to go out with minimal possessions to proclaim the good news and perform miracles in his name. Good stewards are givers, because they were first receivers. They trust that God will provide for them, through the community where they have been sent.

**#4. Habakkuk 3:17-19**

**“Yet, I will rejoice in the Lord”**

Stewardship is more than just an activity, it is an attitude. This attitude is not conditional; even in times of material scarcity, good stewards remember God's abundant gift of salvation that is unconditional.

**#3. Isaiah 43:1-5**

**“You are mine”**

All that we are and all that we have belongs to God. God has claimed us and promised to be with us, and we are not alone in our work of stewarding God's creation.

**#2. Deuteronomy 26:1-11**

**“The early produce of the fertile ground”**

We are stewards not only of God's creation but also of God's story. In this passage Moses commands the people to bring their first fruits of the promised land into the sanctuary, as well as to tell the story of God's salvation, promise and fulfillment for the people of Israel. Good stewards bring their gifts into the storehouse in thanks for God's relationship with God's people.

**#1. Exodus 36:1-7**

**“More than enough”**

Good stewards give exuberantly in response to all that God has done for them. In this passage, the Israelites bring more than enough offerings to Moses in order to build the sanctuary. They bring so many gifts that Moses has to restrain the people in their giving. The people offer time, talent and treasure from what they have and it is more than enough.

## **Why is giving important?**

The Bible has much to say about wisdom and finances, with approximately 2,300 verses that tell us to be generous and good stewards of our resources. Jesus taught generosity and sacrifice. He demanded that his followers serve not wealth but God, and in the parable of the talents he taught that God will hold us each accountable for what we do with all our earthly possessions.

In his book, “Giving to God,” Mark Allen Powell wrote: “We are invited to put money in the offering plate on Sunday morning not because the church needs our money but because we want and need to give it.”

For many people, this flies in the face of our typical notion of giving to the church. We may have been brought up thinking we give because the church has bills. There is a building that needs upkeep and has expenses. The church staff needs to receive a salary. And as United Methodists, there is the larger church that receives our support through apportionments. In essence, we give because of the need of others.

While these things are true, *this is not the primary reason we receive an offering during worship*. If we simply view giving as a way to meet budget needs, then we most likely will not find great joy in giving. We will more likely experience it the way we experience paying our electric bill.

If giving is about nothing else than making a church budget, then there would be no need to make the offering part of worship. We would simply calculate everyone's dues and then bill everyone for their share. But if we give because we recognize our need and desire to give, then offering becomes an act of worship and it changes

our motivation for giving. We turn from meeting an obligation to “expressing our love of God in the purest way imaginable, by giving up something that we value.”

That’s why we receive the offering during worship. Yes, the money we receive pays the bills. But more importantly, it is a way for us to actively recognize and express our love for God.

I encourage everyone to think about their motivation for giving, to have a conversation with those whom you trust, and talk about giving an offering at church. You do not have to name numbers or how much—unless it is a decision you are making together—but rather talk about what it means to you personally when you give and how you decide what to give.

## What is Jesus’ view of money?

Money plays a major role in our personalities. Money influences (a) the way we live, (b) the way we relate to other people, (c) our life goals, and (d) the way other people describe us. Contrary to popular opinion, however, the way money exerts these enormous influences in our lives is determined less by how much of it we *have* than the *philosophy* we have adopted regarding money, which tends to fall into one of four general patterns:

1. Some people insist that money is not important. “Money does not buy happiness,” they often say.
2. Other people insist that money is the most important thing in life. “Money is not the key to happiness, they say, “but if you have enough of it, you can have a key made!”
3. Still other people say that life is like *two lanes* of traffic. “Money is important in the material lane but not in the spiritual lane,” they seem to say. “To connect with God, you move to the spiritual lane—you pray. To be in touch with the real world, you move to the material lane—you run in the rat race, trying to make a buck.”
4. **Jesus held a fourth view.** Jesus said that money is *everything*—not in the usual sense of that term but in the spiritual sense. Jesus did not divide reality into two parts—the material and the spiritual. He said that the way we think and behave with regard to money impacts us both physically and spiritually. Its use and misuse affects our relationship with God and the quality of our life. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too,” Jesus said (Luke 12:34), illustrating his point with a story about a rich man who tried to achieve a quality life by building more barns to hold his wealth. The conclusion of the story says: “This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren’t rich toward God” (Luke 12:21).

Jesus’s insistence that money is both physical and spiritual explains why he spoke of it so frequently. David Buttrick’s classic book *The Parables of Jesus* lists forty-three parables. Twenty-seven of those (62 percent) refer to money and possessions. One out of every ten verses in the four Gospels (a total of 288 verses) deals with money. The Bible includes 500 verses on prayer, fewer than 500 verses on faith, and more than 2,300 verses on money and what it buys. The question Jesus illustrates so perfectly with the story of the rich barn builder is as current as the morning news. Each of us asks the same question every day of our lives: *Will I try to achieve a quality life by focusing on money or by focusing on God?*

## What is expected of me?

The Bible teaches us to give a tithe, or the first 10 percent of what we earn, to God and the church’s work. For some, giving one tenth is a very difficult goal. For others, it is the starting point, and their giving far exceeds 10 percent. The important thing is that you **start somewhere**, that your giving be in proportion to your income, that your giving reflects an appropriate offering to God given your means, and that your offerings express both your desire to serve the Lord and your investment in God’s work. Begin by determining what percentage of your income you are giving to God. If you are not yet tithing, consider taking a step toward tithing this year. For example, if you now give 3 percent of your income, consider increasing your gift to 4 percent, and add 1 percent each year until you reach the tithing goal. Our prayer is that everyone will grow in his or her faith through giving financially to the ministries of the church and experience the joy and blessings that come from financial generosity.

***Everything we have belongs to God.***

*“All tenth-part gifts from the land, whether of seed from the ground or fruit from the trees, belong to the Lord; they are holy to the Lord” – Leviticus 27:30 (Common English Bible)*

## **Why do I need to return an Estimate of Giving card?**

There are two reasons why it is important that every member of our church family return an estimate of giving card. First, the process of prayerfully asking God to guide your decision and then making a commitment to serve the Lord with your financial gifts is an act of worship, an expression of gratitude and praise to God. Second, on a more practical note, your commitment allows our church to better plan for our ministries, key objectives, and mission outreach programs.

## **What if financial hardship keeps me from making a commitment?**

Don't let your inability to give at this time keep you from worship. Remember that God honors your faithfulness and that *your acceptance at Acton United Methodist Church is not based upon your capacity to give*. We ask that everyone return an estimate of giving card, even if it is a limited financial commitment at this time. You can always increase or decrease your commitment if your situation changes by calling the church. Also, be sure to let one of your pastors know of your situation so that the church can pray for and support you during any difficulty. We also offer classes (like *Financial Peace University*) to assist members to become better managers of all that God gives them. For more information about these opportunities, call Pastor Chris at 817-326-4242 or email him at [chris@actonumc.org](mailto:chris@actonumc.org).

***Because we reap what we sow.***

*“What I mean is this: the one who sows a small number of seeds will also reap a small crop, and the one who sows a generous amount of seeds will also reap a generous crop.” – 2 Corinthians 9:6 (CEB)*

## **Why do I need to turn in a new Estimate of Giving each year?**

Financial situations change from year to year, and if we are growing in our faith, our annual commitment should likewise reflect that giving growth. Each year, our church budget is based upon the growing commitments of our congregation.

## **What about online giving?**

The Acton church now offers the convenience of **online giving**. Simply go to our website at [www.actonumc.org](http://www.actonumc.org) and click on the “giving” tab at the top of the page. You will be directed to a page where you can select a payment method (Visa, MasterCard, American Express, or Discover) and then make a gift to either the general fund or to one of several different designated funds. You can even specify an area of giving not listed by simply selecting “other” and then telling us where you want the money to go in the comments section. You may choose to make a one-time gift or you may even set up recurring gifts to honor your Estimate of Giving throughout the year. Plus, it gives you the added benefit of building point or miles on your favorite credit card! For more information on how to register, please contact either Anderia Lopez at [anderia@actonumc.org](mailto:anderia@actonumc.org) or Heath Ramsey at [heath@actonumc.org](mailto:heath@actonumc.org).

## **Should I use Electronic Funds Transfer?**

Electronic Funds Transfer guarantees that the church will receive your gifts on a regular basis, even if you are out of town or you forget one week. Plus, EFT reduces the need for additional staff to process offerings. If you choose this option, you must return an estimate of giving card each year authorizing the debit to your account. Complete the EFT information and attach a voided check for the account you will use. For more information contact the church office at 817-326-4242.

***From the one who has been entrusted with much . . .***

*“Much will be demanded from everyone who has been given much, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be asked.” – Luke 12:48b (CEB)*