

152nd Session of the Kentucky Annual Conference
St Luke UMC,
2351 Alumni Drive
Lexington, Kentucky
Historic St. Paul AME Church-Lexington, Host Church

Bishop Jeffrey Nathaniel Leath, Presiding Prelate
Dr. Susan J. Leath, M.D., Episcopal Supervisor
The Reverend William R. T. Hale, Host Presiding Elder, Commonwealth District
The Rev. Dr. William W. Easley, Associate Presiding Elder, Louisville District
The Rev. Kenneth J. Golphin, Associate Presiding Elder, Bluegrass District
The Rev. (Dr.) Robert A. Strode, Host Pastor

Committee on Stewardship and Tithing

“The people of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of the dedicated things that had been consecrated to the LORD their God and laid them in heaps. In the third month they began to pile up the heaps and finished them in the seventh month. When Hezekiah and the officials came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD and his people Israel.” 2 Chronicles 31:6-8 (NRSV)

As evidenced by the above scripture King Hezekiah appointed “division by divisions” of priests and Levites to minister “in the gates of the camps and minister unto the people. King Hezekiah also contributed greatly unto the morning and evening offerings from his own possessions. This so motivated the people that they came from all of Israel and Judea to give their tithes and offerings. They laid them in great piles, and it took all of four months for them to bring all of them in.

We, the *Committee on Stewardship and Tithing* believe that the main point here is that the people were motivated to give. At the time of the submission of this report, tithes and offerings are down not only in the African Method Episcopal Church, but the church as a whole.

TITHING AND OFFERING IN THE CHURCH

During his early sociological period (1896–1914), W.E.B. Du Bois published several studies on the Black Church. Many topics were addressed that are relevant to the contemporary study of the Black Church and the sociology of religion. Du Bois utilized many different methods to provide a picture of the role

of the Black Church in the African American community. He addressed the social construction of African American religious identity and provided an early functional analysis of the Black Church. Du Bois was a pioneer in the area of congregational studies addressing such issues as church expenditures and membership patterns. Extensive data was collected on Black Church membership in large cities and small communities. This data makes it possible to reconstruct the Black Church religious discipline's past and a bridge to its future.(2019 Church Giving Report).

Supporting Du Bois work a survey in 2007 by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, the African-American population as a whole were found to be more religious than the US population as a whole with 87% affiliated to a religion, and 79% saying that "religion is very important in their life", compared with 83% and 56% respectively for the whole of the US. The population is "mostly Christian" with 83% of black Americans identifying as Christian. But as with every other demographic these numbers have seen a rapid decline over the last 20 years.

U.S. church membership was 70% or higher from 1937 through 1976, falling modestly to an average of 68% in the 1970s through the 1990s. The past 20 years have seen an acceleration in the drop-off, with a 20-percentage-point decline since 1999 and more than half of that change occurring since the start of the current decade.

These declines have a direct result to the decline in tithes and offerings in the church. Obviously if we don't have as many members we don't get as many tithes and offerings. But sadly, the percentages of tithes have fallen among the members that we do have. It is common for 80 percent of the effect to come from 20 percent of the effort you put into it. This is called the Pareto principle (or the 80/20 rule). In a 2013 study, "Christianity Today" found that only 10–25 percent of families in a church tithe, but they often provide 50–80 percent of a church's funding.

It is important to note that charitable giving stats and decline in church attendance is related. The highest percentage of charitable giving still goes to churches and religious institutions, but that is quickly changing.

Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964), make up the second largest percentage of the population but are responsible for nearly half of all giving in the U.S. Since the youngest Boomers are still in their mid-50s, it is likely that they will be carrying the most significant burden for a while.

But as we lose the Greatest Generation (born before 1945), and the Boomer population begins to drop, churches need to be giving some thought to how they will reach out and communicate with Generation X and Millennials. The good news is that Millennials are already proving themselves to be a compassionate and giving generation. As they grow in their earning power, we can expect to see them becoming an essential donor base.

But according to the Pew Research Center, Americans ages 18 to 29 (Millennials), are considerably less religious than older Americans. Fewer young adults belong to any particular faith than older people do today. They also are less likely to be affiliated than their parents' and grandparents' generations were when they were young. Fully one-in-four members of the Millennial generation are unaffiliated with any faith.

Indeed, Millennials are significantly more unaffiliated than members of Generation X were at a comparable point in their life cycle (20% in the late 1990s) and twice as unaffiliated as Baby Boomers were as young adults (13% in the late 1970s). Young adults also attend religious services less often than older Americans today. And compared with their elders today, fewer young people say that religion is very important in their lives. It doesn't take a genius to see that our churches today are getting progressively older.

So how can we reverse this trend among our young people and the declining number of members giving in the church? This is where the interconnectedness of tithes and stewardship makes the difference in our churches today.

The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

In section VII of the 2016 AME Doctrine and Discipline (Stewardship: Tithes and Offerings), some very important principles are stated that we believe could turn the tide of giving in our churches as well as our membership numbers.

Subheading B: It shall be the duty of every pastor to ensure that at least once a month there is either a sermon, lecture, workshop or other presentation enlightening the members of the church about tithing and encouraging them to become regular tithers.

We should be teaching our congregations about the biblical importance of tithing and supporting the church and the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. We don't have to develop a plan; God's plan **DOES NOT CHANGE!** We should be teaching from the scriptures that our mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing are a

result of God's love for us and that the giving of our selves our time and our treasures are a direct reflection of our love for God. When the spiritual needs of the congregation are met the members are blessed, they feel more connected to the church and giving is increased. But this cannot be done by the pastor alone.

Section VII: Subheading C, 2.

The stewards of the local church, Commission on Stewardship and finance and/or The Christian Education Department shall provide all members with appropriate brochures, tracts and other information and literature on the subject of tithing at least once each quarter.

With the departments and programs that the AME Church have in place there should be no member in the church uninformed on the importance of tithing and giving to support the church and the Kingdom of God. This outreach and information should be present in every one of our local churches.

Section VII: Subheading D.

D. Mandate for Local Church Members:

The numerous benefits derived from membership in the Christian Church, which is the very Body of Christ, impose upon each member the responsibility of Christian stewardship, which is the stewardship of all life as manifested in our time talents and treasure.

From the study of God's Word and the unfolding revelation of His will we are bound to conclude **“that each member of the church is a steward”**. A steward is one to whom an important trust has been committed. We hold that time talent and treasure are gifts of God committed to us and use to which we put these determines whether we are good and faithful stewards or careless and unprofitable ones. (Matthew 25:14-30).

We believe that this is the most important and probably the most overlooked mandate in the AME Discipline on stewardship and tithing, and it is the key to increasing our membership and thereby increasing tithing and giving.

Each department, each position, every person should be working toward one goal; the education and edification of the local church member. When each local member realizes that he/she is a steward of the church, that they are the church. They then will become more connected to the church, not just a social event that they attend once or twice a week, but a way of life. They will begin to see the

church as not just God's House but their house as well. And just as we have responsibility to put time talent and treasure into our own house we have that same responsibility to God's House.

When members become more connected to the church and feel they are a part of the church they will prosper mentally, physically and spiritually. And that will result not only in increased giving from our members, but a powerful outreach where each member is actively witnessing and bringing in new people into the church. We believe that the individual member is the key. They are the foundation of the church and when the foundation is cracking we don't work on the roof!

This takes us back to our opening scripture from 2 Chronicles 31:6-8. When the King, all the priests and all of the Levites ministered unto the individual believers in the gates of the camps the people were motivated and they came from all of Israel and all of Judea to bring the tithes and offerings to the House of God, so much that it took four months to bring it all. When we educate and activate the local members of our churches not only will the African Methodist Episcopal Church prosper, we can fulfill The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20;

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

Humbly Submitted,

The Committee on Stewardship and Tithing

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