

# starters for Sunday

## **Moderators' Worship Notes: Very Rev Lorna Hood**

### **Stewardship Season**

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank the Very Rev Lorna Hood, Minister of Renfrew: North, for her thoughts on the stewardship of money.

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## Introduction

Christian Stewardship is a fundamental part of Christian Discipleship. It is concerned with the gifts of God and the way we use these gifts. It is concerned with the love and commitment of God to the world and its people, and with our response to God's love and God's commitment.

Worship has a pivotal role in any consideration of Christian Stewardship in the life of the Church. In worship we give thanks for the gifts of God; we confess our failure to use these gifts as God expects them to be used; we explore the pages of the Bible and engage in theological reflection on God's giving and our response; we offer to God our time, our talent and our money to advance the kingdom.

Four former Moderators of the General Assembly kindly agreed to take us on a journey through some of their personal thoughts about the stewardship of money. They offer us prayers, sermon notes and hymn suggestions. These worship notes are offered in the prayerful hope that they might help worship leaders to tackle the sometimes prickly theme of "money" during worship. However, it is up to the reader to adapt these as he/she sees appropriate.

I wish to express my gratitude to the contributors for their time and assistance in writing this material which can be found on the Church of Scotland [Starters for Sunday pages](#) and on the [Resourcing Mission](#) website, where additional archive material can also be found.

Rev Alan W Gibson

Head of Stewardship



## Readings

[1 Corinthians 16: 1-4](#)

[Mark 10: 17-27](#)

### Now regarding the collection...

“Want to preach a great stewardship sermon (without asking for any money)...?” So began a well-known commentator on one of my favourite web sites. I have to admit that if I hadn’t been asked to write this sermon on the theme of money, such an article would have been very appealing. They say confession is good for the soul so I must begin admitting that I feel a bit of a fraud! Looking over thirty five years of sermons, very few actually focus on money and giving. Stewardship campaigns – and there have been many over the years- I have guided towards talents and the giving of our time. Of course the ‘money’ element was there but only very subtly; almost a subliminal influence.

And confession number two; the Bible is full to overflowing with references and stories about wealth and poverty. In ‘The Call to Conversion’ (a book quoted in the Christian Giving Campaign of some years ago) Jim Wallis, comments that study of what the Bible has to say about wealth and poverty showed that it is one of the most central themes in all of Scripture, pervading the Old Testament and including five hundred verses of direct teaching on the subject. He goes on to say, “Jesus talked more about wealth and poverty than any other subject.” Yet the truth is most of us are reticent- but with no justification and no excuse- about preaching on the subject of money and giving. Preach about the Kingdom of God, and everything else including money will fall into place has been the mantra for so many of us. But as we embark on another Stewardship Programme, the reality tells us otherwise.

#### **1. We give not because we must or we can, but to quite simply says thanks to God.**

“Now about the collection...”. These words at the beginning of chapter 16 in 1 Corinthians, always stir a childhood memory in me. As a youngster getting ready for Sunday School, my mother would always have two questions. “Do you have a hankie?” quickly followed by, “Do you have your collection?”



Collection, offering, gift, whatever we want to call it goes to the heart of our worship. In the Old Testament no-one ever came before God without some kind of offering as an expression of gratitude for all that God had done. Deuteronomy 16:9-17, lays out the example and closes with the reason –they were not to forget they were slaves in Egypt.

From a pragmatic point of view we could expound on a number of matter-of-fact reasons for contributing generously and realistically to the work of the Church. We know that bills have to be paid and work at home and abroad is year upon year hit by ever increasing costs and like everything else subject to inflation. If we want a church and the work it does in our name then we have to pay for it, just as we have to pay for our golf club or gym or running our car. Though this makes good business sense, like much business it can seem cold and calculating. It relates giving to a balance sheet, a simple mathematical response to what is needed or desired. It does not speak to us spiritually.

Unfortunately ‘stewardship’ has so often been a euphemism for ‘fundraising’ relating the need to give to the crisis of funding within the church or to a specific fabric problem or building project. Gratitude does not rate high on our reasons for giving.

However giving - our collection – our gift, whatever we prefer to call it, must be seen in the context of gratitude. We give out of love and thankfulness because of what God has done for us in Christ.

That has never been put more succinctly than in the beautiful hymn by Isaac Watts

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were an offering far too small;  
love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all.

In other words the giving of our money must be recognised as crucial a part of our spiritual life as the time we spend in prayer and Bible study.



## 2. We give of our money as part of our life and witness to the world.

Although in 1 Corinthians v16 Paul opens with very practical words about our offering he had in the previous chapter soared to the heights with his discourse on the ‘Resurrection of the Body’ and the life of the world to come, ending with the wonderful and comforting declaration, “Death is destroyed: victory is complete. We are then jolted back to earth with a bang, “Now about the collection...” Paul’s teaching to the young church was not restricted to theological dissertations on the meaning of salvation and explanations of the atonement. Woven in between the theology we find practical guidelines for the administration of the church and daily living. Paul saw no distinction between the two. We are to live out in the world what we believe about the coming of Christ into the world and the mission of the Church. Belief and practical day to day living are but two sides of the same coin.

The Old Testament prophets were critical, bitterly critical of the enormous gap between the people’s gift offering and their practice, particularly when that practice meant the poor and the widowed suffered.

Nowhere is that put more clearly and powerfully than the words of Micah in chapter 6.

6 *With what shall I come before the LORD  
and bow down before the exalted God?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?*

7 *Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

8 *He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the LORD require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God. (N.I.V.)*



That gap between belief and practice is explored in the New Testament with the story of the one whom we call 'The Rich Young Ruler'. It is one of the saddest in the Gospels; that Jesus looked on him with love; that he walked away and Jesus let him go.

In the main we focus on the first part of the command, "sell what you have", and we discuss the enormous problems for us in giving up what we have and letting go of our possessions. Recently however my attention has been drawn to the second part of the command, "give to the poor."

We are stewards of our wealth but stewards for a purpose – to care for all God's people especially the poor and the marginalised.

It was Ronald Reagan who said: "Ask yourself, Are you better off now than you were four years ago? Is it easier for you to go and buy things in the stores than it was four years ago?"

But that could have been said by any of our politicians. We too hear it at every election campaign, as we are coaxed to seek what is best for us whether it be in tax benefits or better saving advantages. It's about me and never mind my neighbour.

In the weeks preceding the Referendum, 'Life and Work' published prayers offered by those who led the Church of Scotland's key committees. A prayer by Iain Cunningham touched on this very issue:

I am conscious of the responsibility placed on me  
to choose what is best  
not just for myself  
but for my neighbours  
and for generations yet to come.

'Imagining Scotland's Future', the dialogue initiated by the Church and Society Council, discovered that personal prosperity was positioned well below justice, equality, fairness and well-being, in the ranking of key values for a future Scotland.

Asking ourselves and sharing with others what we believe about giving leads us to discover the values –Biblical values- that underpin or should underpin our lives. And money – how we acquire it and what we do with it- is so very much part of our lives.



Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians lays out a simple plan: “Every Sunday each of you must put aside some money, in proportion to what he has earned...”

The plan is for systematic giving, not to make life easier for the church treasurer, but rather weaving our response into the fabric of our daily living.

Stewardship isn't primarily about giving money to the church; rather, it's about taking care of all of our resources in light of God's commands and promises.

Mark Twain famously said, “It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.”

We give out of God's love and generosity to us- that is the simple yet complex truth.

## Prayers

Loving God our Father,  
day in day out you have blessed us  
and showered your gifts upon us.  
But we forget that you are the Giver;  
the one who gives and never ceases to give;  
the Giver of all that we have, and of all that we are.  
Yet we are never satisfied always seeking more  
and never willing to share what we have.  
In Jesus Christ you offered your very self,  
Showing the profound depth of your love for us.  
But we struggle in returning that love.  
Forgive us, loving God.  
Forgive us for the meanness and selfishness.  
Forgive us for our constant hungering after more.  
Forgive us for all the ways we fall short  
of living as your generous people.  
Restore us to the new life you promise.  
This we pray in Jesus name. Amen.



## Further Advice

For any advice or ideas on Stewardship Programmes for your church, please contact:

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## Additional Resources

### Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

### Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [Living Stones](#) is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



### Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

### Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

### Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

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*Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.*

