

Why do congregations ask people to estimate their giving?

The following article, written by Pastor Matthew Muters, appeared in the December 2017 newsletter of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Mason City.

Many congregations this time of year send a letter in the mail from the congregation council with the “expression of intent” card inside. Every household in the congregation is asked to fill out the card and return it to the church on or around “Commitment Sunday.” Why, you might ask, do they do this?

A faith commitment, or estimate of giving, is a promise made to ourselves and to God after prayer and discernment, seeking to answer how God is calling and gifting us to financially support the mission and ministry activities of the congregation. Estimating our giving is, therefore, an important spiritual exercise and discipline that allows us to reflect on God's gifts, and provides an avenue for us to give thanks by giving back to the church. Estimating our giving also models the importance of our spiritual lives and our commitment to a growing relationship with God and the church, especially to younger members.

“Intentional giving helps us grow in our faith and in the spiritual gift of joyous generosity.”

Aside from the spiritual reasons, there is another very practical reason for expressing our intent. Each year, congregation leaders work to create ministry spending plans that, as accurately as possible, express what they feel the congregation will be spending for ministry, and what sort of income they estimate will be coming in during the next year. This ministry spending plan is the foundation for planning the future year's events together. Thus, it makes sense that the more people who return an estimate of giving card, the more accurate is the picture of the financial resources the congregation will have to carry out the ministries to which God has called them in the coming year.

Now, full disclosure here: It is true that there is absolutely no scripture that says, “Thou shalt surely fill out an estimate of giving card each year.” However, just as the early church members were able to give more to Jesus' disciples by setting money aside in advance of Paul's coming — for example, in 1 Corinthians — each of us is able to share our financial blessings for the support of God's work more fully when we prayer-

fully and deliberately discern what God is calling us to give. Writing our decision down on a card helps us to treat our giving intentionally, as a first fruits offering to God. Giving becomes a conscious decision rather than an occasional reflex to the passing of an offering plate.



Study after study has revealed that disciples of Christ who fill out an estimate of giving card typically give more than those who don't. And people who prayerfully complete an estimate of giving using a percentage of income mindset, also give more than those who don't.

Intentional giving helps us grow in our faith and in the spiritual gift of joyous generosity. And the more we grow, the more we discover the joy of participating in all that God is up to in and through the mission and ministry of God's church, which is “Our Church” because we are Christ's body — welcoming, serving and sharing God's love in the world.

Welcoming, serving and loving with you in Christ,

—Pastor Matthew Muters

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