The What? Yes, the Tithe!

By Pastor Nancy Larson
ELCA Director for Evangelical Mission

Last month I began my article by identifying two key concepts of stewardship—tithe and first fruits—and then I proceeded to write about first fruits. Well, you got me figured out, this month I'm going to share some thoughts about the tithe. Tithe is a biblical term that is about giving a portion of what we have received or that for which we have responsibility.

Proportionate Share • Ten Percent
Gift of Gratitude • God's Blessings Returned

These are all phrases that define tithe. We acknowledge God's goodness and grace toward us and respond according to our means. You can think about it like this, I have 10 one-dollar bills in my hand. I give one for God's work in and through the church and keep nine for myself. That's one for God and one for me, one for me, one for me, one for me, one for me, one for me, one for me, one for me, and one for me. We maintain control of nine out of 10 dollar bills. We do OK in that equation don't we? However, many of us do not respond to God's gracious generosity in quite this way.

Average giving in ELCA households is actually less than two percent. That means if I have 100 dollar bills in my hand it would be one for God and almost another one for God and one for me, one for me, one for me, one for me, one for me, one for me, one for me, one for me, and for me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me plus 73 more for me!

When we talk tithe we are not talking about law or obligation; we are talking about opportunity. Tithing gives us the opportunity to discover the freedom and joy that comes from trusting in God's presence and promises. In II Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul writes using the example of the Macedonians "…they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means 'because they wanted to.'" It really is a matter of the heart. The heart of God and the heart of God's people beating in rhythm with one another.

My prayer is that all God's people could live in the "joyous freedom" of giving to God through the church an appropriate portion of the resources with which they've been blessed. God's grace becomes our motivation for generosity. I've heard it said often at youth events, "God is good, all the time…All the time, God is good!" May we celebrate this truth with joyful generosity.

To download this article or for more stewardship and mission support resources, visit ***www.neiasynod.org/synod_resources/Stewardship-MissionSupport.asp***.

Synod to host Steward Fest

Saturday, Oct. 19, 2013, St. John American, Cedar Falls

Plan to join "Steward Fest" Sunday, Oct. 19, to learn new ideas and inspirations in stewardship, network with others, and hear from some of the top steward leaders in the ELCA. Presenters include Pastor Charles Lane, author; Mark Quade, stewardship consultant; Pastor Kurt Nordby, consultant with Generosity Coaching; Neil Bullock, Macedonia Project coordinator-ELCA; Pastor Sara Yotter, assistant to the Bishop, South-Central Synod of Wisconsin; and Pastor Lanny Westphal, ELCA director for Global Church Sponsorships.

The event will be from 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m. at St. John, Cedar Falls. The registration fee is $5 per person or $15 per congregation group. Lunch is included. Watch for more information at **www.neiasynod.org/events**.

Middle School Lock-In

Oct. 4-5, 2013
UNI Wellness Center
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Mark Oct. 4-5 for the annual Middle School Lock-In at the University of Northern Iowa Wellness Center. Youth will gather for devotions, recreation, Bible study, group activities, food and fun.

Watch for more information at **www.neiasynod.org/youth**.