

THE CHURCH IS SUPPORTED FINANCIALLY BY GIFTS

Introduction: Our churches have many and varied material needs, but are never in business for the raising of funds to meet such needs. How then are these needs satisfied?

- 1 They are brought before the Lord in prayer;
- 2 They are brought before his people by means of reports and explanations;
- 3 They are supplied by the Lord through the fruits of the faith of his people;
- 4 All of which prompts many thanksgivings to be addressed to the Lord for his gracious providence.

The needs of our churches are satisfied by gifts from God. The flow-chart of giving begins with him and flows back to him. For that reason:

-1-

THE NEEDS OF OUR CHURCHES ARE BROUGHT BEFORE THE LORD IN PRAYER

Both the Old and New Testaments of Holy Scripture present to us invitations to "ask" of the Lord, and the results of such "askings". There are many such references, we will select a few to establish this point.

In II Chronicles 20 we read that a "vast army" of the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to make war on Jehoshaphat. "Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to ask of the Lord . . . 'O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you . . . we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us . . . O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.'" (6-12 selected)

In reply the Lord says to them, "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours,

1024

but God's . . . stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you . . . do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you." (15-17 selected)

In response to the total victory, they praised the Lord; they returned to Jerusalem and went to the temple of the Lord with harps and lutes and trumpets. (26-28)

In I Kings 3 we hear how God appeared to Solomon at Gibeon and said to him: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon asked for a "discerning heart" to carry out his call to govern and judge God's people.

"The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked . . . moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for -- both riches and honor --. . .'" (10-13 selected)

Psalm 105 would have us recall with thanksgiving all of the Covenant-Lord's wonders which he has done for his people. Considerable attention is given to the Lord's concern for and supply of his people's material needs: ". . . He brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold, and from among their tribes no one faltered . . . He spread out a cloud as a covering, and a fire to give light at night. They asked, and he brought them quail and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. He opened the rock, and water gushed out; like a river it flowed in the desert. For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham. He brought out his people with rejoicing, his chosen ones with shouts of joy; he gave them the lands of the nations, and they fell heir to what others had toiled for--that they might keep his precepts and observe his laws." (37-45 selected)

In chapter 10 of Zechariah the Lord declares his care for Judah and invites: "Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime; it is the Lord who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men and plants of the field to everyone . . . the Lord Almighty will care for his flock, the house of Judah . . . for I am the Lord their God and I will answer them." (1-6 selected)

In teaching his disciples, Jesus directed them: "Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (7-11)

In Mark 8:35-44 we have the familiar details of Jesus feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fish. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of leftovers!

Jesus addressed his grief-stricken, depressed disciples (John 16) with the admonition: "Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me for anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete!" (22-24)

How assuring are the words recorded for us in I John 5:13-15, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him."

Note: Testimony of the experiences in beginning ILC.

THE NEEDS OF OUR CHURCHES ARE BROUGHT BEFORE HIS PEOPLE BY MEANS OF REPORTS AND EXPLANATIONS

Reports concerning financial (material) needs are often difficult to understand. Spread sheets, balance sheets, costs, estimates, interests, debts, balances, and other aspects of the attempt to budget and remain good stewards -- are sometimes understood by the financial secretary, the treasurer, the finance committee, the trustees, but are seldom comprehended as such by the membership of the organization at large.

For that reason, reports need explanations (yes, even the more simple financial reports!) Explanations invite questions, and allow for the expression of doubts or misgivings concerning the urgency, magnitude or reality of the need(s). Charts, graphs, pictures, drawings all help to communicate the needs.

We are reminded of the amount of explicit detail recorded in the preparations for the building of the temple. King David, specifically through the guidance of the Holy Spirit did the planning, prepared the drawings and spec-sheets, specified the materials to be supplied for the work, and detailed the human resources needed for its construction. Then David addressed the congregation and said (I Chronicles 29:1-5):

"My Son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the Lord God. With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God -- gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble -- all of these in large quantities. Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: three thousand talents (c. 110 tons) of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents (c. 260 tons) of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings, for the gold work and the silver work, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen. Now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?"

NOTE: we think of the needs for the mission fields in Nigeria and in India, along with the special needs of the orphanage in India. We think of the recent needs in India due to the devastating cyclone that struck in May of this year. And again, we think back to the history of the founding of ILC.

-3-

THE NEEDS OF OUR CHURCHES ARE SUPPLIED BY THE LORD THROUGH THE FRUITS OF THE FAITH OF HIS PEOPLE

This is made evident as we continue to hear the sacred record of I Chronicles 29:6-18 (selected):

"Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king's work gave willingly. They gave toward the work on the temple of God five thousand talents (c. 190 tons) and ten thousand darics (c. 185 pounds) of gold, ten thousand talents (c. 375 tons) of silver, eighteen thousand talents (c. 675 tons) of bronze and a hundred thousand talents (c. 3,750 tons) of iron. Any who had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the temple of the Lord in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite. The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly...

"...But who am I and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and

we have given you only what comes from your hand. . . O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. . . And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. O Lord, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you."

In thirteen columns of references in Young's Concordance the words "give", all have reference to the Lord giving to man. Finally, there appear references to "give" and "offer" that show how the Lord distributes his gifts in the fruits of his people's faith.

We take, for example, Paul's second letter to the Corinthians 9:7-11:

"Every man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work . . . You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."

The Apostle Paul had, in keeping with the above, also counseled the Corinthians:

"On the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up. . ." (I Corinthians 16:2)

Note: The reported instant, generous offerings for the cyclone stricken brethren in India; the instant, generous gifts at the beginning of ILC and on to our present ILC needs.

THE LORD'S GENEROUS PROVIDENCE PROMPTS MANY THANKSGIVINGS TO BE ADDRESSED TO HIM

Go back once more to I Chronicles 29. When David and his people rejoiced at the generous response that the Lord had stirred up in them, David praised the Lord in the presence of the entire congregation:

"Praise be to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands

are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now,
our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name."
(10-13)

Then David said to the whole assembly, "Praise the Lord your God."
So they all praised the Lord, the God of their fathers.

When Solomon had completed the building of the temple, he prayed
for the mercy of God upon his people. Then he admonished the
congregation to praise the Lord. At the dedication of the temple
the king and his people offered thank-offerings before the Lord ...
then the people went home "joyful and glad in heart for all the
good the Lord had done for his servant David and his people
Israel." (I Kings 8)

The Apostle Paul, in the letter wherein he taught how the Lord
provides for the needs of the church by providing for his people
in abundance, so that they (in faith) can give generously of his
gifts in response to needs, goes on to show how such giving in the
church causes thanksgivings to abound toward God:

"...your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This
service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of
God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of
thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved
yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that
accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ, and for
your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.
And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you,
because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks
be to God for his indescribable gift!" (II Corinthians 9:11-
15 selected)

Thus the flow-chart of Christian giving: it begins with and flows
from God to man; by the Spirit-worked faith in the believers God's
giving is passed on horizontally; which causes praise and thanks-
giving to abound vertically.

The church denies the faith and dishonors God when she enters the
business of raising funds, and adds insult to the denial by com-
peting in the market place for the satisfaction of her needs!

From this preserve us, Heavenly Father!