



Guidelines for preparing the

Offering Schedule

It's more than a collection

Learning the joy of giving

It is time to eat. Our two-year-old grandson devoutly folds his hands, closes his eyes, and prays, "God is great, God is good, let us thank him for our food. By his hand we all are fed, give us Lord our daily bread. Amen." "Dig in", he invariably adds, grabbing his spoon and triumphantly thrusting it high in the air, a great big smile on his face.

Every time I see that smile, I wonder. Does the Lord enjoy it as much as I do? He must, because the Lord loves the cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). Giving thanks for his food and then "digging in" is a most enjoyable event for our grandson. He loves to eat, and he loves to share also. If I ask him, "Can I have a bite?" he loads up his spoon and puts it in my mouth with that same happy smile.

I believe we all can learn from this little guy, especially when we start thinking about the offerings we bring in our worship services and the blessing we receive when we give.

When we give an offering, we actually say: "God is great. God is good. I want to thank you for all you have given me, Lord, and for all that I am. You are a grace-giving God. You have shown that in Jesus Christ. You want me to excel in the grace of giving also (2 Cor.8:7), to be as you are, to act as you act. And that is a real privilege. Thank you, Lord. So here is my gift, my talent, my share of what others badly are in need of. Amen."

Just as my little grandson receives, gives thanks, and in turn freely gives, you and I can give and receive. When we give to God, not only of our money but our time and talents as well, we are blessed. God gives back ten-fold; we become recipients of our giving.

So dig in, people, dig into God's grace, love and mercy, his salvation, justice, and liberation.

And our prayer can be:

"Lord, send the blessing of giving our way, so that we may share it and so know the joy of giving."

The offering is more than a collection; that's clear. That means the preparation of the schedule is more than a collection schedule. It is a careful plan of how to help God's people "... excel in this grace of giving" (2 Cor. 8:7). There are a number of parts to this matter of growing in the grace of giving.

Give regularly (1 Cor. 16:2)

The time of the offering is meant to help people bring the offering that they have set aside for the first day of the week. It is essential to people to have this regular pattern in their giving.

Give of our firstfruits (Romans 12:1)

The time of the offering is more about the people's need to give than the church's to receive. Giving is an expression of our *thanksgiving response* to God for His gift to us in Christ. We need to be able to offer our firstfruits as a symbol of our offering ourselves as a "living sacrifice."

Give generously (2 Cor. 8:2)

People give generously because their hearts are open to God's grace and they want to thank God for the work of grace in their lives. That does not come naturally. People need to learn how to give generously; they need to do so for

their own spiritual wellbeing (2 Cor. 9:5,11).

Give proportionately (2 Cor: 8:3)

People need to be encouraged to give in proportion to how the Lord has blessed them. That is not a flat rate for everyone. It assumes differences in the ability to give. It invites people to give as they "... are able." In fact the Bible invites people to consider giving *sacrificially* when it goes on to say, "...and even beyond their ability."

Give cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7)

We need to help people discover the joy of giving. The spirit of thankfulness needs to be primary also in the time of offering in the worship service. Especially when we present the information about the offering, we can do so with joy!

Give knowingly

The congregation assumes that some careful thought has gone into the preparation of the offering schedule. They assume that the deacons know enough about each cause that it deserves to be a priority in their giving. That is also why it is so important to **explain** each offering so that the people can give "knowingly".

About this handout

This handout is meant to give the diaconate and others involved in preparing the offering schedule some practical guidelines. You will find:

- biblical guidelines on giving
- suggestions for promotion
- guidelines for preparing the offering schedule

We can only make suggestions; you will need to make the important decisions. We hope this helps you as you lead the congregation to "grow in the grace of giving".

Some guidelines

A pastor, commenting on offerings and observing the variety of ways people give, wrote, "The various approaches are not the heart of the issue of giving. The best reasons for giving are heartfelt love and apparent need."

Planning an offering schedule is a **serious** exercise intended to help those who come on Sunday to celebrate and worship their Lord and cheerfully present their offerings.

An offering schedule needs to mirror your church's stewardship plans and reflect the direction the congregation is going in its ministry.

Some Do's...

- Each offering should have a purpose;
- Each offering should be based on need;
- Each offering cause should be carefully researched and selected.

...and Don't's

- Do not repeat last year's offering schedule;
- Do not base offerings on tradition;
- Do not plan offerings for miscellaneous causes.

➤ 1 Decide

who of the deacons will plan the offering schedule. Include one or two members of the congregation.

➤ 2 Announce

the offering schedule preparation to the congregation and ask for input.

➤ 3 Determine

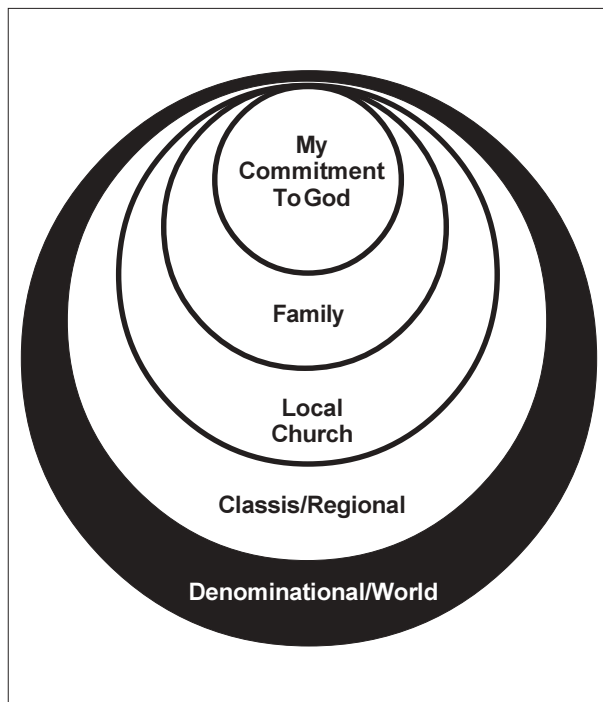
the number of offering opportunities. Each year has 52 Sundays, in addition there are special days: Prayer day, Thanksgiving, Good Friday, Ascension Day, Christmas, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. The number of offerings taken in each church is not the same.

➤ 4 Sort

the requests in denominational/classical ministry shares, diaconal ministries, Christian education, and others. Remember that some causes are recommended by Synod (see CRC 2001 Yearbook p. 613).

➤ 5 Request

additional information on ministries and organizations that ask for your support such as: mission statements; description of ministry; financial statements; and the number of people they help each year.



Some guidelines to consider

1. Keep the congregation's ministry priorities clearly in mind.
2. Benevolence offerings should be based on need not on tradition (i.e., one offering for the deacons each month).
3. Budget "ministry shares" and know which CRC ministries do not receive ministry share support (i.e., CRWRC).
4. Budget for local congregational activities (e.g., Church education, GEMS, Cadets, Youth and Senior programs, evangelism outreach). Funds needed for these activities need not necessarily come from offerings.
5. Develop a policy for support offerings (e.g., Christian Education) and be very specific in informing the congregation of the amount required and the schools that will be involved.
6. Add your own...

Making the schedule

Here are some basic steps to remember:

1. **Make a list of all offerings** based on the guidelines to the left.
2. **Use a calendar**, we've enclosed a 2002 offering calendar in this mailing for your convenience.
3. **Identify on which Sundays specific offerings are requested** (i.e., Home Missions (Easter), World Missions (Pentecost), World Hunger (1st Sunday in November) these are already listed on the offering calendar and on the handy Offering Worksheets, also enclosed).
4. **Identify special Sundays in your own congregation** (i.e., Lord's Supper Sundays, benevolent funds, diaconal causes, CRWRC; Mission Sundays (Missionary support); Christian Education (Christian school, high school, college, tuition support)). Deduct the above identified offerings from the total yearly offering spaces.
5. **Touch base with the pastor, worship committee or others** in the congregation who plan the church's yearly activities.
6. **Use creativity in completing and assigning the balance of selected offerings** which may include specialized outreach or organizational programs (local Back to God Hour, Chaplaincy ministries, Gideons, Salem, Beginnings, Friendship program, Disability concerns), or specific community needs.
7. **Plan an effective way of informing the congregation** and explaining each offering. Tell the congregation about the ministry. Explaining how people are helped by this cause is helpful in inspiring giving.
8. **Pray for the ministries you support.** First pray about which ones you should support and then pray for them before or after the offering is taken. Be as specific about the ministries' needs as you are able.

Want more resources?

Diaconal Ministries has some resources that may be helpful as background to this.



Simply call, fax, write or e-mail:

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