



How our church is funded

Introduction

The generous financial contributions of members and supporters of Grace Communion International are the primary sources of financial support for the church's work. Of course, financial contributions are only one aspect of giving, or what we often call "stewardship" (the wise and considered use of all of our resources for productive and godly purposes). Stewardship is a key part of what the Bible calls being "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1). It reflects our calling and commitment to the kingdom of God.

In our contemporary society financial giving is a vital aspect of stewardship for each of us to consider and manage. This document offers some perspectives and background to this Christian principle.

Tithes and offerings

Tithes and offerings are the primary financial resources of the church. Income from investments and from Living Today Media sales supplement the church's finances, but the financial contributions of members and other supporters of the church's work make up the vast bulk of income.

The word "tithe" comes to us from the Old Testament and meant, literally, "tenth". The tithe was part of the old covenant God made with Israel and was strictly prescribed within a controlled national economic system. Today, Christians live under many different economic systems and circumstances around the world. Individual practices of tithing and giving are thus personal commitments affected by such circumstances. Like prayer, it is a private act of worship (and which, like prayer, affects the lives of others). The new covenant does not contain the sorts of strict directions of Israel's covenant. The new covenant does, however, clearly call on Christians to:

- Give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9).
- Support the work of the church through our giving (Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9).

- Care for the poor and give to those in need (Matthew 25; Romans 15:25-28; Acts 2:45).
- Preach the gospel and provide means for the gospel to be preached (Matthew 28:19-20).
- Let our generosity be known (Luke 6:38; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; 2 Corinthians 8-9).
- Practice good stewardship in all aspects of our lives (Romans 12; 1 Peter 4:10).

To tithe has come to be understood among Christians as dedicating or regularly committing a portion of one's income to the work of the gospel. Some choose the ten percent figure as a guideline. Many people also choose to make additional special offerings. These might be in response to special blessings, particular needs, or at special times of the year when celebrating significant personal milestones, Christian festivals, or various aspects of the Christian life.

Regular commitment

Any congregation or fellowship (like any family or organisation) needs a steady and regular income to be able to plan, work and be productive. Not knowing how much income they may or may not have makes planning and use of resources very difficult. For this reason, the church asks those who support its work to commit (as each is able, recognising not all are able) to regular contributions (tithes).

What that regular contribution will be is a personal decision made between each person and God. Jesus celebrated the "widow's mite" because he could see her heart. He sees ours too. Each of us wants to please him and express our love and commitment to him in the way we use our financial resources (just as we do in the way we live all aspects of our lives). This is why it is important for each person to consider their giving in the context of their heart for God and for his work. It may be necessary for those just beginning to practice tithing and giving to start by committing only a small amount. Sometimes our circumstances prevent us from committing much at all. Again, the amount is not the issue; it is what is in our hearts and how we express our hearts that is of value and concern to God.

Starting out

If you are just beginning to support the work of preaching the gospel, here are some things to consider:

- Before making any commitments, pray about the issue. Ask God to guide you and help you.
- Don't worry about starting small. Remember, God looks on the heart.
- Budget for a regular commitment.
- Where applicable, discuss your plans with your husband or wife. Don't simply impose your decision without consideration for their concerns or wishes.
- Look for savings you can make in your current budget that will free up funds for the gospel.
- Don't neglect your family's needs by over-committing funds to the church.
- At least once a year, review your budget and your giving.

There are several means by which you can establish regular giving:

- If your congregation takes up an offering each week or has an offering box at church services, you can contribute directly as part of your regular worship (giving is part of our worship lives).
- Arrange for a regular deduction from your bank account (we've enclosed a deduction authority form for your convenience).
- Contribute by cheque on a regular date (eg., monthly).
- Ask the church office to send you a direct deposit book.

Don't forget to pray that your contributions will be used wisely and productively. The church tries hard to keep all members informed of the work it is doing as a denomination; local congregations likewise will keep members informed of what is being done in their areas. The congregational, national, regional and worldwide activities of the church are made possible by the contributions we each make; our prayers provide vital support to those efforts.

How contributions are used

In our fellowship, all contributions are received and processed centrally by the various national church offices. They are accounted for and receipted from these offices. The

funds received are applied to “accounts” for each congregation. From these accounts, ongoing congregational expenses are paid centrally as a service to congregations:

- Pastors’ salaries, fleet vehicles, and expenses including superannuation and workers’ compensation.
- Meeting hall charges. Fees such as insurance and music licenses.
- Congregations draw on their accounts as needed to pay for expenses incurred in fulfilling their local strategic plans:
 - Outreach and evangelistic events.
 - Training.
 - Equipment.
 - Congregational supplies.

Monthly income and expenditure reports are provided to each congregation’s treasurer or council.

From the contributions received, 25 percent is retained for denominational expenses throughout the nation or region:

- Administrative expenses including accounting, payroll, and legal services.
- Church development activities including conferences and training programs.
- Funding for the Pacific College of Training and Development and its various church development services.
- Communication, including Life Together, annual report, letters, and videos.
- Support for scattered brethren and congregations in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.
- Pastoral and administrative visits to congregations, projects, and offices throughout the region.

This use of these funds is budgeted and audited each year. In addition, the regional administration now seeks the regular advice and input of national advisory councils in Australia and New Zealand. Congregations and national offices also publish annual financial reports.

Wills and bequests

Through the years many people have left a lasting legacy to the church's work by including the church in their will. The impact that this can have in providing ongoing support cannot be overstated, and we are grateful to all those who include the church as beneficiaries of their estates.

To ensure that your will is put to the use that you desire, we recommend you specify the following details:

- Whether the will (or part thereof) is a general donation to Grace Communion International
- Whether the will (or part thereof) is a donation to a specific activity of Grace Communion International (such as the college, media activities, youth ministries, or humanitarian work).
- Whether the will (or part thereof) is a donation to a specific congregation of Grace Communion International.

Proceeds from wills simply listing the church as a beneficiary will be treated as a general donation for use in supporting the church's humanitarian, development, educational, media and administrative programs. Proceeds from wills listing a specific congregation as a beneficiary will be applied to that congregation (with 25 percent of the amount being retained for central funds as with any other donations (unless the will specifies otherwise).

We recommend that you specify a percentage to be applied to your local congregation and a percentage to be applied to the church's general funds.

You should, of course, seek independent legal advice about your estate and about the most appropriate way in which to word your will.

If you would like more information about leaving a legacy to the church, please contact your national office.

Working together for the kingdom

Together we are charged with the challenge of living and sharing the gospel. None of us can do that alone; that is why our loving God has brought us together to support one another and work together for his kingdom. The financial contributions we each make are vitally important in reaching people with the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ. As undeserving recipients of his eternal grace, what can we do but respond in grace and gratitude? Thank you for your continuing participation in the work of the gospel and for your financial, physical, and prayerful support.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20).