



New Jersey Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

# STEWARDSHIP SPARKLERS

2010 LENT EDITION



**Strengthens Faith  
Enacts Justice  
Sustains the Planet**

“So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.” Deuteronomy 26:10

A couple weeks ago I was the itinerant preacher in one of our congregations. In addition to the preparation of the sermon, I should have spent time on a treadmill, conditioning my body for the rigors of sharing an offering. I nearly had to sprint after the acolyte who whisked the half empty offering plates away to a remote location after the hand-off from the ushers. I suspect the young liturgical assistant never expected that the visiting preacher wanted so desperately to share an offering. In that same worship service, (sadly) it appeared that only half of the people seated in the pews placed a gift in those same plates.

That experience of offertory athletics, superimposed over the Old Testament lesson (Deuteronomy 26:1-11) appointed for the First Sunday in Lent, causes me to re-think the importance of the offering as a faith practice and act of worship.

The text in Deuteronomy tells the story of God's promise, God's faithfulness, and the response of God's people in sharing the first fruit of the ground. The people remembered the nomadic wanderings old when, “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor...” They know they now dwell in a land of “milk and honey” and come with gifts as an act of worship, thanksgiving, and praise.

David Mosser writes words of encouragement regarding participation in the offering. He affirms that the offering reminds us”

- We are not born generous. Sharing must be modeled, taught, and learned.

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Rev. Scott Schantzenbach,

*Assistant to the Bishop ~ Stewardship Specialist*

14 Spring Meadow ~ Oxford, NJ 07863 ~ 908-453-3514 ~ [sschantzenbach@njsynod.org](mailto:sschantzenbach@njsynod.org) ~ [www.njsynod.org](http://www.njsynod.org)

- Participation in the offering enacts things that are larger than words, pointing to who we worship, what we value, how we order our life. what is valued in the community of the baptized.
- Participation in the offering is an act of faith.
- Participation in the offering reflects how God has provided for us in the past, and demonstrates our hope for the future.
- Participation in the offering models for children and others that disciples respond to the story of God in Jesus.
- First fruit sharing is a physical, concrete way to respond to God's Grace.

I want to encourage each of you to publicly participate in the offering as an act of worship, praise, and thanksgiving every time the congregation gathers for worship. I know this is the era of electronic fund transfers and on-line banking. I too use this tool to share offerings. Preaching commitments keep me on the road most Sunday mornings. Through EFT's I am assured that my offerings are at Grace Church each week. But when I calculate my first-fruit percentage gift to be sent electronically, I hold out \$20.00 a week. The money held in reserve is shared at the time of the offering, where ever I am worshipping on that day. Physically place your gifts in the offering plate, even if you must sprint after an usher to do it!

Encourage your brothers and sisters to grow the faith practice of sharing at the time of offering. Don't let the opportunity to model and witness thanksgiving to pass you by. Participation in the thanksgiving ritual in public worship is a living response to a living God. "Celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given you and to your house." (Deut. 26:11)

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