

Outreach at St. Martin's: Reaching out in Love

Reaching out in love at St. Martin's encompasses numerous actions by individual members, such as weekly food collection, coordinating meals served at the Parish Hall, serving on nonprofit boards and many hours of time devoted to other charitable and spiritual causes. We also reach out in love through an action that we take together as a church family, which is the dedication of a portion of our budget to charitable purposes.

Each year, St. Martin's distributes church funds in the community according to the tenets of Matthew 25: *"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."*

This tradition, also known as the "mission tithe" or "Matthew 25" dates back to 1967. That's 54 years! It is truly humbling to consider the unity of purpose expressed by generations of parishioners who have made this commitment faithfully each year for more than five decades. For some of us, it is what drew us to St. Martin's as a church home; for others, it has been the defining feature of our identities as members of this parish.

Those of you who are relatively new to St. Martin's may be asking yourselves, as I have, why is this donation called a "tithe"? My previous understanding of tithing was limited to the tradition in some Christian denominations of encouraging church-goers to commit to giving a tenth of their income *to the church*. In fact, the English word "tithe" dates back to approximately 1200 CE and is an Old English word that eventually became "tenth" for purposes of numbering, and remained "tithe" when referring to an amount dedicated to clergy, or in some traditions, to charity. There is also a Jewish tithing tradition (dating even further back in time!), which is referenced in several books of the Old Testament and involved a tenth of the harvest to be devoted to priests in certain years of a multi-year cycle, and a "poor tithe" for charity in other years.

The clearest biblical explanation of the meaning and importance of the tithe appears in Leviticus 27:30: "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord: it is holy to the Lord." This ties the concept of tithing to the fruits of agricultural work but also reminds us that whether we are farmers or pharmacists, a portion of what we consider to be the fruits of our labor belongs to God. This passage also tells us that the tithe is *holy* to the Lord.

In our parish, a portion of "pledge and plate" (annual pledges and proceeds from weekly collection plates) is set aside each year for charitable giving to organizations addressing the needs expressed in Matthew 25. Long ago at St. Martin's parishioners made a decision that they would tithe together as a church and this tradition has endured.

As we enter into the season of stewardship and you are asked to provide financial support to the church, I invite you to consider what your financial support means not only to the church,

but to the community at large. At St. Martin's, we all reach out in love by together dedicating to charitable causes a portion of the money that we, as individuals, have committed to the church. When you make a commitment to pledge an amount to the church, you are participating in this important tradition.