

1262, 1266). The obvious lack of specificity in these canons, however, should not be taken as a sign that they may be, for all practical purposes, ignored. Sunday collections, annual appeals, spontaneous offerings, bequests and wills, and so on are all ways that Catholics have to satisfy this precept of support. Note that offerings given for a specific purpose can be used by Church authorities only for that purpose (1983 CIC 1267)¹.

The Parish Priest

The Parish priest was called by God to give service to God's people. The priest's primary obligation is to serve the priesthood of all the faithful by building up and guiding the Church in the name of Christ, who is the head of the Body (CCC §1547). He is to administer the sacraments, provide proper catechesis, and to win souls for Christ (evangelize). Unfortunately, in many cases parish priests are so burdened with administrative duties that their primary responsibilities are sometimes neglected or set aside.

It must be understood by the laity that if we want a priest who will be there for us when we need him, we have to do our part to relieve him of as many administrative burdens as possible. One of the ways that this can be done is for the laity to be responsible for the raising of funds necessary to meet the financial obligations of the parish and diocese. Information is the key to successful fundraising. Financial statements and budget needs must be publicized in order for the parishioners to be expected to provide necessary funds. That Catholics are among the most generous people is attested by the many charitable institutions which the Church maintains around the world. Catholics will give of their substance and make financial sacrifices when they know that their hard-earned money is going to be used for proper purposes.

A partnership must be developed in which the laity and priests work together. The parish priest should delegate financial responsibilities to the laity. The laity must, in turn, accept this responsibility and meet the parish needs. All involved at the parish must have the same end in mind. Signposts or milestones must be established along the way in order to keep

everyone involved going in the same direction and focused on the goals. This takes strong dynamic leadership, teamwork, and most of all communication at all levels and at all times. The chances of failure diminish in proportion to one's preparation for the task.

Catholics have an obligation to contribute to the support of the Church, not only in their own parish but also the worldwide Church and the Holy Father. Tithing is one way in which this obligation can be met.

The Blessings of Giving

The truth is, "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:32). I would also recommend that the parish tithe as a community. 10% of the parish income should be given to charity; 1/3 to international charities, 1/3 to national charities, and 1/3 to local charities. It will only be a matter of time before the Lord blesses this generosity and replaces these funds many times over. While this may seem like a radical suggestion to some, the Lord has been known to keep His promises. "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6:38).

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." - Winston Churchill

Part of this article was excerpted from the Catholic Encyclopedia, 1911 edition, published by The Encyclopedia Press, Inc.

¹ Dr. Edward N. Peters,
http://www.canonlaw.info/precepts_noaudio.htm

CIC Codex Iuris Canonici (Code of Canon Law)
CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church

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Pamphlet 348

Tithing — “It is More Blessed to Give Than to Receive”

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A tithe is tenth part of produce or other goods, which is consecrated to the Lord and used for religious purposes.

Old Testament

The custom of giving tithes reaches back into unknown antiquity. The first tithe mentioned in the Scriptures is that paid by Abraham to the priest Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20), and is mentioned without anything to indicate that it was something newly instituted. Just as Abraham is there represented as offering tithes of the spoils of the enemy to the royal priest, Melchisedech, so in Genesis 28, Jacob promised to pay tithe for all things God gave him (Genesis 28:20-22). Under the Mosaic Law the payment of tithes was made obligatory (Exodus 22:29). The Hebrews are commanded to offer to God the tenth part of the produce of the fields, of the fruits of the trees, and the firstborn of oxen and of sheep (Leviticus 27:30-34; Deuteronomy 14:22). In Deuteronomy there is a mention not only of an annual tithe, but also of a full tithe to be paid once every three years. While it was to God Himself that the tithes had to be paid, yet we read (Numbers 18:21) that He transfers them to His sacred ministers: "To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, their service in the tent of meeting."

In periods of religious decline, payment of tithe was neglected. Such was the tendency in Judah until King Hezekiah ordered that the tithe be paid (2 Chronicles. 31:4-12). Malachi told the people that they robbed God when they withheld their tithes (Malachi. 3:8-11).

New Testament

In the Christian Church provision of some kind had necessarily to be made for the sacred ministers.

In the beginning this was supplied by the spontaneous offerings of the faithful. In the course of time, however, as the Church expanded and various institutions arose, it became necessary to make laws which would insure the proper and permanent support of the clergy. The payment of tithes was adopted from the Old Law, and early writers speak of it as a divine ordinance and an obligation of conscience. The earliest positive legislation on the subject seems to be contained in the letter of the bishops assembled at Tours in 567 and the canons of the Council of Maçon in 585. In course of time, we find the payment of tithes made obligatory by ecclesiastical enactments in all the countries of Christendom. The Church looked on this payment as "of divine law, since tithes were instituted not by man but by the Lord Himself".

Apostolic Times

Nor was there less recognition of the general principle in the New Testament. We are told that Christ and His Apostles had a common purse for the defraying of their expenses. That this information comes to us only incidentally, through the narration of an event bearing no direct relation to it, shows that the Evangelist presumes the reader to take it for granted that there was a common purse for the expenses of Christ and His disciples. The Acts of the Apostles portray to us the fervor of the first Christians, who sold their lands and laid their proceeds at the feet of the Apostles that they might employ them for the needs of the emerging Church. Along with the support of the poor and the widow and the orphan, would also necessarily be included the sustentation of the clergy and the defraying of the expenses connected with the worship of God. Christ in sending forth His disciples to preach told them to accept what was necessary for their support from the people to whom they ministered, basing it on the general principle that the laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7); Saint Paul states (1 Corinthians 9) that it is Christ's command that the faithful give temporal sustenance to the clergy. While reminding the Corinthians that he himself has been no charge or burden to them, he takes occasion to inculcate on them the duty of supporting their pastors. "If we have

sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we reap your carnal things? Know you not that they who work in the holy place, eat the things that are of the place; and that they that serve the altar, partake with the altar? So also the Lord ordained that they who preach the Gospel, should live by the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:11, 13-14).

Connected with this contribution towards the support of the clergy, we find Saint Paul also alluding to the similar duty of helping the poor. In the fifteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans he states that contributions had been made in Macedonia and Achaia for the support of the poor in Jerusalem, and that he is on his way to that city to bring the contributed relief (Romans 15:25-28). In like manner (1 Timothy 5) he speaks of the Church supporting the widows. The Apostles in fact, as we learn from the Acts, charged the deacons with the ministry to the temporal wants of the poor. The Church has always been mindful of this conjoining of the support of the clergy and of church institutions with that of the poor and suffering, and hence the regulations for setting apart some of the income of holders of benefices and the employment of church moneys for the relief of the helpless and the indigent, the widows, the orphans, and the sick.

The Early Church

From the beginnings of the Christian Church history, as we gather it from the Fathers and early ecclesiastical writers, the faithful made voluntary offerings to defray the expenses of Divine worship and to support the clergy and the poor. Though these offerings would naturally be for the most part in money and in kind, yet we find also property set aside for ecclesiastical purposes. Thus the Christian cemeteries or catacombs and the "titles" or houses where Mass was offered seem very early, even in the lifetime of the Apostles, to have become consecrated to church uses. That in the course of time they passed into the possession of the Church, and became church property in the modern sense of the term, is evident from various edicts and decrees of the Roman Emperors, as, for example, of Aurelian and Constantine. These show conclusively that, even in the times of persecution by pagan rulers, the Church

had lands and edifices of various kinds in its possession. Nor was this state of things confined to the city of Rome, but it was practiced and recognized all over the Roman Empire.

As a matter of fact the payment of tithes was observed in nearly all Catholic countries until the French Revolution. Saint Augustine (d. 430 A.D.) teaches that tithes should be paid as a debt and that those who refuse to give forcibly enter the property of others, i.e., they steal their neighbor's goods, or rather they steal what belongs to God. The Council of Trent, which finished its work on December 4, 1563, decreed that tithes are to be paid in full, "and they who either withhold them or hinder their payment shall be excommunicated; nor shall they be absolved from this crime until full restitution has been made" (Sess. 25, ch. 12).

In our day, Catholics are no longer bound to set apart one-tenth of our income for the support of the Church. The Church leaves it to the ability and to the generous religious spirit of the individual Catholic, guided by particular needs of time and place. Surely, each should give in proportion to his income. All should help defray the expenses of all that regards the maintenance of our holy religion. We should also contribute to the home and foreign missions. This work cannot be imposed as a duty of justice, like the obligation to contribute to the maintenance of church and school; but it is most meritorious, for there can not be anything more acceptable to God than to cooperate in the salvation of souls for which our Savior suffered and died.

The Sixth Precept of the Church

The Sixth Precept of the Church is "You shall provide for the material needs of the Church." This precept requires the faithful to contribute to the Church according to their own abilities. "While the Church has the innate right to require from the faithful whatever is necessary to support its legitimate temporal activities (1983 CIC 1260), in fact it rarely exercises this authority. Rather, it leaves to individual Catholics the right to determine precisely when and how they will assist with the temporal needs of the Church (1983 CIC 222, 1261,