

Reconciliation Report



Christine McKibbens received Christ in the Westside ministry then joined a local church on her birthday. She graduated from Brainerd high school (pictured with Judi Sutherland).

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*Researching, Teaching,
Mobilizing, for the Name—
Serving Primarily African-
Americans*

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Media:

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I used to try to help people attain financial freedom and motivate them to give at least a tithe to the Kingdom, which generally meant to the church.

I aimed way low. It's great to master money and to give to the Kingdom. It's fine to be free from debt and financial worries—whether we have much or little—to tithe and to have prudently planned for emergencies and old age. But financial freedom can actually lead to pride, indulgence and to a self-centered Church.

As a whole, professing Christians are rather penurious, except for Evangelicals (those believing the Bible and who share their faith, among core values). Globally Christians (including the nominal) received \$16,300 billion in personal income and gave \$320 billion away to Christian causes—2% of personal income, in 2002¹. Income to global mission organizations was \$18 billion or .1% of personal Christian income. Coming home, the Barna Group found that tithing US households dropped from 8% in 2001 to 3% in 2002. Born again Christians (38% of Americans) gave 14% in 2001, but only 6% in 2002. Among Evangelicals (6% of the US population) only 9% tithed in 2002².

The stock market in 2002 lost chunks of money for the third year in a row. But that shouldn't affect tithing. If income goes down, the face amount of the tithe would go down, but not the number of tithers. The same percentage should tithe whatever the income, since giving is proportionate to income (1 Cor. 16:2). What may have happened is that personal debt was high, and fixed, so that some stopped tithing to service debt. A reordering of priorities and lifestyle and aggressive budgeting, together with eschewing further debt, would be needed in such cases³. Over 20 years of looking at spending patterns of Christian counselees convinces me that Christians waste buckets of money. One unspectacular example is a counselee who paid \$75.00 in monthly interest on a credit card debt of less than \$700 and 30% interest on a car loan, while spending about \$300 eating out each month.

A church near Atlanta offers a trip (not billed as a missions trip, to her credit) to watch their Bishop "preach to the masses" in Kenya—a luxury jaunt, ensconced in 5-star hotels, sampling gourmet cuisine, riding hot air balloons, with plenty of leisure—for \$3500 (visits to missionaries the church supports at extra cost). Not a single act of service is expected on the whole church trip to a needy nation.

I seriously propose that churches give a minimum of 30-35% of gross income to ministries outside the church—possibly 2/3 of this globally and a third to local needs, since local ministries have more ready access to donors than do many global missions, and because US government agencies operate to assist with mercy needs. Then watch what God will do. Barrett estimated that in 2000 the average Christian worldwide gave \$7.94 to global foreign missions⁴. Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church gives intentionally 50% of its income away—over \$1,000,000 annually—divided about 50/50 between local and global ministries.

Why give a tithe to the local church if it simply will be consumed by the local church upon its own members? I recognize that the mission field is coming to the US, and cross-cultural ministry and ministry to non-Christians are not funds spent upon herself. But why give money to

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\$ix Giving Levels

build another educational wing or pave the driveway or upgrade the organ or grounds or carpet or hire more staff, unless that church is in mission and must facilitate mission by doing so. I've seen only two churches in Uganda with carpet—in the aisles. I remember few American churches without it.

Giving is an act of faith. It's parting with the seen—trusting the Unseen that more will be seen. Here are six giving levels, which apply equally to individuals or churches—where are you at this moment?

1. Giving little or nothing. Giving is not a particular concern and there is little reference to God or the Bible. Among Baby-busters (18-35) only half gave anything to the church in 2002⁵. Such folks may have no self-imposed spending controls—but are controlled by desire and credit ceilings, or don't give due to a conviction such as atheism. If from indiscipline, this is bankruptcy waiting to happen. One church spent zero on global missions, but funded the annual men's breakfast.

2. Inadequate giving. Giving less than a tithe of income, which is the least God asks of us (Larry Burkett), is inadequate. Giving is sporadic and from what is left after the bills are paid, if paid at all. Individuals may put a \$5 or \$10 in the offering plate. A church may take up isolated offerings for missionaries—who have a right to be nervous. There is no ongoing plan, no consistent giving, but a tendency toward stinginess, coupled with a desperate need for a transfusion of grace. If married, we're looking at marriage counseling—otherwise we are an emergency waiting to happen.

3. Obedient giving—the tithe. This is far beyond what most Christians give, but we don't seriously consider anything beyond a tithe. Giving is formulaic and cheerless. Tithing is good, but an encounter with the Spirit is waiting to happen. [I don't think the NT specifically teaches tithing for Christians, but rather teaches proportionate and generous giving, with a tithe being the minimum.]

4. Giving beyond obedience—offerings beyond a tithe. I suspect that Barnabas is an example when in Acts 4:36 he sold a field and distributed the income through the apostles. This is yet better, but unlike Barnabas, we can actually be ungenerous *in spirit*, even if we give more proportionately than does almost everyone else, . We're still wondering how much we *have to give* (rather than how much we *can give*) and aren't truly generous. Generosity is waiting to happen.

5. Generous giving—This is "sharing well." Generosity is actually commanded of the rich (that's us, the upper 9% of the world, making \$10,000 and above⁶). What does being "generous" and "willing to share" (2 Cor. 9:6; 1 Tim. 6:18) look like for you or your church? It's being led of the Spirit—with loose boundaries. Grace has arrived. We understand that what we have is God's and that we are simply stewards. We may bump the perimeter of feasibility and prudence—but we're led by the Spirit, rather than by guilt or pressure or whim. A breakthrough has arrived.

6. Surpassing generosity--This is giving out of God's bounty and supply, rather than our own, whereby we are conduits of God's riches on "every occasion" (2 Cor. 9:8, 10-11), while all our own needs are met. This also is Spirit-led and God-enabled giving. Giving is a grace-gift of the Spirit, and includes the gift of giving. Grace was the engine behind the Macedonian generosity (2 Cor. 8:1). Beyond generosity—it is "surpassing grace" (2 Cor. 9:14). A miracle of supply has begun.

Paul spoke of the Macedonians: "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability...And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. (2 Cor. 8:3,5) It's impossible to give beyond your own ability, but possible if you're a conduit of God's ability, since everything is His (Ps. 24:1). R.G. LeTourneau, who gave away 90% of his income, illustrates this. At the other end of the spectrum, George Mueller, who lived on a vow of poverty—supported not only 2,000 orphans, but missionaries around the world from gifts sent in response to prayer. Jonathan Goforth is another example of a missionary who saw God provide for what his denomination couldn't/wouldn't.

Do we believe, for example, 2 Cor. 9:11—that God is able to provide in abundance, so that we'll have all we need and can be generous on all occasions? We then get into synch with God, and become a conduit for His grace and blessing. God is a generous God giving amazing wealth. A stingy church or Christian is an ungodly church or Christian, because of God's generosity.

Generosity needs discernment. No one lacks people asking for money. We need to complete the work God gave us to do (Eph. 2:10). Due to the volume of requests, we can assume that God doesn't want us to meet them all, because all requests aren't made in the Spirit. Is this my work, someone else's, or no one's? A generous spirit must be married to a discerning one.

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UGANDA 2003 TRIP: PLEASE PRAY



A word to African American Christians:

The doctrine of God's Providence is foundational in the Black community. You are the most grateful, the most sensitive to even the most-assumed of God's gifts. Of all peoples you should show that you understand this attribute of God by being like God—godly—in that same way. So the AFAM church, which thanks God for waking her up this morning, and keeping her in her right mind, and providing all things these past centuries—of all churches of which I'm aware—you should be the most generous. Not in total giving, but in giving proportionate to income—in percentage. You need, by your knowledge of God's providence—to teach your sister churches what a people whose DNA is stamped by God's providence can do in providing for the needs of those inside and outside the Kingdom of God. You should be the model of the grace-kissed Bride of Christ—because you radiate the knowledge of the great and little gifts of God. Here are some African American missionaries who could use financial support:

Celeste Allen serves in the United Kingdom. Her support is low, and a large supporting church can't manage to send regular gifts. In response to the question: "What is the biggest challenge that you face?" she wrote: "Lack of support from my church. 1) As a church they make virtually no effort to be in contact with me (even the missions committee) despite my regular updates to them. (It's a large church with a lot of turnover, and I'm apparently out-of-sight-out-of-mind.) 2) They have pledged substantial financial support, but in fact their gifts are sporadic." She is under-supported on an already bare-bones salary.

Veteran Prince Parker, wrote to me that his biggest challenge was "The lack of finances to accomplish all that I dream to do on the mission field." Marcia Williams working with Malawians in the US said that her biggest challenge was financial. Marjory Patrick serves in South Africa. Her biggest challenge is "Having sufficient funding for ministry needs." Contact us for more information.

"And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving." 2 Cor. 8: 5,7.

- 1 Barrett, David B. and Todd M. Johnson. 2003. "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2003." *Int'l Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 27:1, p. 25.
- 2 Barna, George. "Tithing Down 62% in the Past Year." 5/19/03, accessed at www.barna.org on 5/19/03
- 3 See www.RMNI.org/financial/how_to_budget.htm and "Philosophy of Budgeting" at www.RMNI.org/financial/philbudget.htm
- 4 Barrett, David B. and Todd M. Johnson. 2001. *World Christian Trends AD 30-AD 2200*. p. 655.
- 5 Barna, George. "Americans Were More Generous in 2001 Than in 2000." 4/9/02, accessed at www.barna.org on 2/7/03.
- 6 David Barrett, George Kurian, Todd Johnson, Eds. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2001, p. 1:6

Jim Sutherland

Prayer and Praise



↑ Ten of us are planning to serve Ugandans. Please pray that our service will please God and be acceptable to the Ugandans. Please pray for safety and excellent health and for God's anointing upon all aspects of the ministry. We have a prisons/youth team, an evangelism team, and teaching teams both for ladies and men. We have a packed schedule.

↑ Research has been almost on hold. Continue to pray that we'll locate all current

AfAm crosscultural missionaries and for their help with a survey. Please pray for good progress in

August.

↑ Tim is searching for an engineering job in Raleigh, NC, where he now lives. Naomi replaces him at our home for 6 months and Ethan resumes airplane mechanic studies in August. Susanna has begun data collection for her master's thesis.

↑ Co-workers are needed once again for the Westside ministry. But Friendship Bapt. Church now has a bi-weekly ministry there.

↑ Pray for a seminar

September 15-18 at the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Associations, with the aim of increasing the number of African American missionaries.

↑ Two missions seminars were taught in Black churches representing two of our Uganda Team. Please continue to pray for new seminar opportunities and thanks for any previous prayers.



RMNI is networking with Africa Inland Church (AIC), as well as Saving Grace Refugee Services in Uganda and Look-out Mountain Presbyterian Church (which provided the \$10,900 funding) to sustain 3 Sudanese Christian elementary schools. Income from a diesel-powered corn grinding mill is to fund the operations. Top left: primary school (location withheld for security); Top right: Bibles in the Acholi language for the students; Left: one of 3 teacher-training workshops in Sudan

Uganda

