

A STEWARD'S MESSAGE

Tara Leininger, Vice-Moderator

When I was a young child, I received fifty cents every Sunday morning. Half of this was to go into the plate that went by me during church. Being 6 or 7 or 8, it didn't mean much to me – only that I was supposed to do it. The other half was for later in the day when my siblings and I would walk the half-mile down to the “little store” to purchase some penny candy and split a bottle of cream soda. Two things: that mile walk never seemed long to me, and what ever happened to those little stores? (*My little store is now a bridal shop and a mile walk is now all about time.*)

The point is that when you are young, church finances were all about putting a quarter in the plate. You gave something to God, we were told. All of that changed the minute I became an Elder in the church I attended as an adult. Church finances now were the reality. It was no longer about giving something to God, it was about fixing the broken cement steps and paying the bills and planning for a donation to a mission project in South Africa.

Church finances are messy. There is a world of differences between paying your bills and taking care of a church – even though some of the outlay is much the same. The main difference is you are using everyone's money to take care of church finances, while it's your personal income you are distributing- your money, your decision. For church finances, making decisions on what gets how much is a more delicate matter.

Imagine how stewardship feels for a conference... When the budget is being planned, when the stewardship committee is considering a fundraising goal, when there is suddenly a great deal of dedicated funds for anti-racism work; this is not putting a quarter in the plate. This is about sometimes having to making tough decisions. This is about being careful with the bottom line and contemplating ramifications. This is about doing the work of Christ's church with faithfulness to God and to those who supply the funds. This is not easy!

For my first years on the Board of Directors, reading financial reports and reviewing the budget was all I had to really worry about. All that changed when I accepted the position of vice-moderator. I was sitting in Stewardship Committee meetings, where tough discussions are being made. It is easy for someone who just waits for the plate to go by to make observations and suggestions (no matter how helpful or not). It is different when you are actually making the decisions, and then having to face criticisms, suggestions, or even praise.

Like that little girl in the pew putting in her quarter, we can happily put in our quarter without much thought to what it means or what it does. You and I, we don't have that luxury anymore. We are the stewards, each of us, for our individual congregations, for our conference, for our denomination, for God's presence in the world. It takes courage and devotion to be a steward. My thanks and blessings to those who do so for us all.