

A LETTER FROM DR. SEAN LUCAS

November 12, 2020

My dear Friends:

The other day at worship committee, we were talking about the element of worship called “the presentation of offerings.”

Over the past many years, as more and more of us have gone to electronic banking, we have gone to making our tithes and offerings electronically. And to assist with that, our church not only provides for electronic bank transfer, but also allows you to give directly through the IPC app. That means when the offering plate is passed, many of us (including the Lucases) don't put anything in them because we've already given electronically. Then, you throw COVID into the mix—and we've stopped passing the offering plates altogether. Instead, as you know, we've put offering boxes in the rotunda and narthex areas and encouraged the congregation to give via the mail as well.

It is this combined reality—the rise of electronic banking and so electronic giving and then our pause on passing the offering plate because of the virus—that led to our discussion the other day in worship committee.

It was a good and important conversation because there is something valuable in this element of worship called “the presentation of offerings” (PCA Book of Church Order 47-9). Certainly, there are biblical examples of God's people bringing offerings and contributions to the Lord—not just sacrifices, which were sin offerings, but contributions that sustained the life of God's people together (Exodus 25:1; 35:4-5, 21-22; Deuteronomy 16:16-17; Psalm 54:6; 56:12; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:3-13; 9:6-15; Philippians 4:18; 1 Timothy 6:17-18; Hebrews 13:15-16).

But there is also a formative value in this embodied act of giving, signaling to my own heart and to the Lord that this portion that I am putting in the offering plate on Sunday represents the entirety of my life. Don't we sing it? “Take my life and let it be/consecrated, Lord, to thee.” Our entire lives have been set aside to the Lord; and so, when each of us puts money in the offering plate, we have a physical, tangible reminder that is the case. In that regard, when we put money in the plate, we are tapping into something that is not only profoundly biblical, but also profoundly Reformed.

John Calvin, the sixteenth-century French pastor-theologian, had as his personal seal the image of an open hand outstretched with a flaming heart. The motto that went with that seal was, “My heart I give to you, Lord, promptly and sincerely.” In many ways, when we put money in the offering plate with our outstretched, open hands, we are saying to the Lord, “My money, my life, my heart, my very being—it is all yours, Lord. I belong to you. I give myself to you promptly and sincerely. If I could, I would climb into this offering plate. Since I can't, I give you this money as a representation of what I truly believe.”

Perhaps, in this season where we aren't passing the offering plates or when we've switched over to giving electronically, we've missed this consecrating act of worship. Maybe this Sunday, as the choir sings what is still listed as “the offertory,” you might join me in praying silently, “Lord, though I'm not putting money in a plate right now, please see what is true: I give myself to you in this moment promptly and sincerely.”

In the grip of God's grace,

