

## HOW MUCH MONEY SHOULD WE GIVE AWAY?

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An issue we face as a church is the amount of money we should give away. In theory we operate an 'all-in-budget', which includes not just the money we plan to spend on our own mission and ministry, but also the money we plan to give away to such causes as Home Mission and the Baptist Missionary Society. The reality, however, is that there are a host of other occasions when money is raised for outside projects. For example, we have love offerings at Christmas (last year we gave to a new hospice for young adults which one of our members is hoping to start up) and at Harvest (this year we are giving to development work in Afghanistan sponsored by BMS). As part of a town-wide project, we send boxes of food every September to Eastern Europe; and in November we send personal gifts in shoe boxes in an operation run by Samaritan's Purse. We also raise yet further money through a Bible-a-month scheme promoted by the Bible Society, a missionary birthday scheme promoted by the BMS, and there is personalised missionary support for individuals connected with the church. And then all the 'tips' from our Oasis café go to a different monthly good cause. Add too, the money which comes in for TearFund in March, and Christian Aid in May, and the sums of money for charity which are raised through donations at funerals in lieu of flowers, then we are giving away mega-bucks.

A major contention, however, is the proportion of money we should give away – and my understanding is that this is an issue in other churches too.. For some people the more money their church can give away, the better. But is that really so? After all, it is not as if the money churches retain they necessarily spend on ourselves. Surely the money retained is used for mission in one's own locality, and that is no bad thing. For at its very lowest level, if churches fail to invest in mission at home, then in future there will be fewer people to give to mission beyond their town!

When I first came to Chelmsford, the church was giving away to outside causes 20% away of all the money given to our all-in-budget. Then, as a result of committing ourselves to a major redevelopment project which ended up costing the church £2 million – and on which we still owe around £275,000 – not surprisingly we found there was an impact on the general budget, with the result that we were only able to give away only 10% of our income. There were howls of protests from certain quarters. "God will not bless us if we only give away 10%" said one irate middle-aged lady. "On what basis do you make that judgment?", I wondered to myself. Currently we now give away to outside causes 12 ½ % of money given to our all-in-budget – and as a result have put our own internal church budget under strain. Personally, I feel that churches can make a fetish of the percentage they give away. Furthermore, such calculations are often a nonsense – for they fail to take account of all the other money we give away. In our case, for instance, we are actually giving away at least 25% of our income – if not considerably more.

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