

# TORONTO UNITED CHURCH COUNCIL

## Connecting Resources with Ministry

### Church Development Resources

**TITLE:** The Power of Offertory Prayer

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I once heard the chair of a pastoral relations committee say that if he were about to have the privilege of helping to select a new pastor, he would first of all want to hear the pastor pray. No prayer in the act of worship is more important than the offertory prayer. Even a casual look at Biblical history reveals the major attention our faithful fathers and mothers gave to the selection and the presentation of an offering as an act of worship.

The Bible indicates to me that offerings and sacrifices are synonymous. Though there are occasions like that in II Kings 10 in which offerings were received as designated gifts (e.g. refurbish the temple), most offerings were personal acts of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Some good Protestant historian could probably tell me when our acts of giving became "collections" and we began "lifting it", but whenever it was and whenever it happens today, it is a sad day.

I continually remind myself and my staff that we must never consider the offering as a casual act. When I see members of my parish regularly giving \$20, \$40, \$100 a week (of course, I know what they give – "A shepherd knows his sheep") as an offering during worship, I know that there is a high level of trust in God being expressed. I know also that such giving indicates that they also trust God with their lives and service. Incarnated generosity is the fiber out of which the Church is built.

Some pastors pray before the offering is received. These prayers are seldom heard. Christian givers do not need this get ready time for the offering plate. Christians are prepared and anxious every time they come to worship to present evidence of their high level of participation in the will and way of Jesus Christ being expressed through the Church.

I never really knew how important my offertory prayers were until one Sunday I prayed a prayer I had read in *Stewardship Facts*:

*"Lord, no matter what we say or what we do,  
Here is what we think of you. Amen"*

The choir director said that the fact of this prayer destroyed the mood of the choir. They couldn't sing!

## What Are the Guidelines for Content In Offertory Prayers?

- They must pass the test of theology.
- They must clarify what persons are doing when they give.
- They must highlight the givens of our faith, the prior grace.
- They may contain an act of blessing on the gift (we usually do this) and the giver.
- They may speak of certain goals that are being supported.
- They must speak of the evidence of faith they demonstrate.
- They must speak of how they identify the giver with the goal.
- They must be seen as a teaching opportunity, never as a time to plead or threaten.
- They must be spoken of as a time of witnessing.
- They must speak of the response they indicate.
- They must speak of our other ethical actions that these offerings represent.
- They must wipe out every idea that these gifts are dues or taxes.
- They may speak of the partnership at the heart of the gospel.
- They must be deliberate (I have found that a brief pause after the offertory music helps gain the congregation's full attention).
- They must be planned, written, tested.
- They must be direct and brief and clearly enunciated.

## Offertory Payers

Here are some offertory prayers, written and used in my parish, to illustrate:

*Eternal God, we do not have lambs, or doves, or pigeons to offer to You this holy day, but there is blood in our offerings, our blood. Some of us have worked long and hard for what we bring. This is not a casual act. We want and need your blessing. Amen*

*Lord, last Sunday there was \$5,200 on the altar when I prayed. I really don't know where all this money comes from, but I am sure that again this morning these people here are saying that they love You. Amen*

*At your instruction, Lord, we are trying to be more aware of the needs of others and less and less absorbed in selfish concerns, so we pray that you will sharpen our minds and dedicate our skills to support these offerings which we bring. Amen*

*O God, we know that you are the Creator. You made everything. You own everything, but also we know that you give each of us a partnership for awhile. We appreciate your generosity and we would like also to be generous, for Jesus' sake. Amen*

*We are grateful, O God, that your Spirit is at work within us, nudging and stretching us, and causing us to grow, and to think, and present ourselves here to worship. As we are surrounded by friends we sense again that we could never go it alone. Let our offerings be expressions of our gratitude and may they help to get the Word around. In Jesus name. Amen*

*Spirit of God, we are so often caught up in our getting and spending and forget that it is people and your resourcing of them which can make a difference in our world. So with our offerings, we pray that you will accept us for service in your world. Amen*

*All of a sudden, Lord, we find this hour of worship very personal. We know that you know whether our offering is generous or only another evidence of our selfishness. Forgive us if we do not take seriously our part in supporting your work in our world. Amen*

*Dear Lord, it is a mystery that you have decided to work through persons like us. But we believe that you do and that you have resourced us to be helpers. May every act of generosity in this offering be blessed by your strong guiding Spirit. Amen*

*God, we have not heard your voice shouting from a cloud, nor have we seen your strong hand reaching down to part the waters, but we have heard your gentle voice through your people and your Church. We have seen your power in the hands of others and in our hands. So we rejoice with loud hallelujahs and with these gifts. Amen*

*Forgive us for taking your love so casually, and your Church for granted. We need you and our world needs your Church. May our gifts be supportive of your acts of love, for Jesus sake. Amen*

*As our lips praise you and our spirits seek your power, so our hands provide the support for your church at work today. Thank you for giving us this privilege. Amen"*

*Prior to his retirement, Hilbert J. Berger, a United Methodist pastor, was a noted lecturer on stewardship. Hilbert is the author of such books as Exploring the Faith with New Members, Now Concerning the Offering, and Time to Negotiate. These are excerpts from an article that first appeared in the Journal of Stewardship, a publication of the Ecumenical Stewardship Centre (ESC). For stewardship resources, please visit the ESC website at [www.stewardshipresources.org](http://www.stewardshipresources.org).*

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