



# ILLINOIS Focus



Ron Aguilera, President

## ARE YOU READY FOR 2021?



What a year it has been! The year 2020 is behind us and a new year filled with potential is upon us. Do you look back on 2020 and see 12 months of worthwhile goals accomplished and fulfilling activities completed? Or, was your year one of frustration, busyness, and concern?

One of the key issues to any successful year is stewardship, specifically the management of resources. Stewardship is prioritizing, and those who have chosen to follow God have a decided edge because of guidance from scripture. God's word describes us as stewards or managers, not owners, of everything we have, from our finances to our skills, talents, and time. In that light, we are not just responsible to ourselves for what we do with what we have; we are responsible to the true owner, God.

A good steward bases his priorities on the owner's priorities, and with the new year dawning, now is a good time to examine how you have handled your money, time, and resources over the past 12 months. Here are four questions you can ask yourself as a reminder of God's priorities:

**ONE: WHO IS IN CHARGE?** Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all

who live in it." If you've ever thought of yourself as the owner of your home, just think about how long the dirt underneath it was there before you lived in it. That puts things in perspective. In this world, God is the owner of everything, and He has chosen us to be managers. When we acknowledge this truth, we can release our feelings of ownership or entitlement to the things we have. And we are free to be less selfish and more responsible in how we

to worry. You simply can't outgive God.

**THREE: WHO DO YOU LOVE?** The Apostle Paul said, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). And I have discovered that while we are capable of giving without loving, it is impossible to love without giving. Love is the foundation of all generosity. Unlike legalism, which asks, "How little can I give and be obedient?" Love asks, "How much can I give?" Being good stewards must

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## ISSUE FOCUS STEWARDSHIP

use our time, money, and resources.

**TWO: WHO IS NUMBER ONE?** If God is the owner of all we have, then He deserves the first of everything. Yet many people, even His followers, give Him only the leftovers—what remains after our own needs have been met. In Proverbs 3:9, we are commanded to "Honor the Lord with our wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops." God's will on this subject is clear. I love that a promise follows this. Verse 10, "...then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." In other words, when we give God first priority, we don't have

to be based on the fact we love God. If you are having trouble giving, remind yourself how much God loves you.

**FOUR: WHO DO YOU SERVE?** You might have heard that you can't serve God and the things of this world (Matthew 6:24). Unfortunately, people often don't realize how much they are enslaved to the world until it is too

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**& MORE**



There is a scene from Finding Nemo where a flock of seagulls fly into a very large sail. Only their beaks are sticking through the cloth. Yet, their chant in unison is distinct: "Mine, Mine, Mine" they keep repeating until the scene fades out. Even now, when I walk into a flock on the beach, that scene and those words continue to reverberate in my gray matter: "Mine. Mine. Mine."

As I have had the opportunity to serve in various aspects of the church's overall ministry, I have come to realize that perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of being a follower of Jesus is this simple and not easy truth: all I have is not mine. Simple. Not easy.

This truth really pushes against my Western (and largely United States) values—the values of independence, agency, and self-determinism. Where else would an essay in the mid-nineteenth century entitled "Self-Reliance" find expression? Where else would you find a governing and socially-

“... **‘LESS ‘OURS’ AND MORE ‘HIS,’** AND THOSE IN OUR VARIOUS CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE WILL RUB SHOULDERS WITH A **POWER** NOT OURS.”

valued document entitled, "Declaration of Independence?" Combining these undergirding values can easily lead us unsuspectingly to embrace the "mine" mentality.

And we who take seriously the words of scripture know one of the early descriptors of the emerging congregations recorded in Acts stands in tension to these three American values of independence, agency, and self-determinism: "Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need." (2.43-45)

Perhaps one of the outcomes of almost a year of wading through a pandemic will be a breakthrough—the dawning realization that all is NOT ours. Actually, we own nothing, regardless of what titles and deeds may say. There is a reason Jesus decided on this reality when trying to depict a vision of our relationship between the self and what we "have." It is the imagery of a "servant" or a "steward."

Now, this is very, very difficult to diligently pursue as part of the path of "holiness." The potential ramifications of this can keep us in front of our



## EMPTY LIVES

John Grys  
Illinois Conference Executive Secretary

screens on a perpetual basis. So, let me tease it out a bit. Speaking of screens, the smartphone in your hand is not yours. The 75-inch television on your wall is not yours. The meatless diet is not yours. Nor the vegan dietary path.

On a broader scale, the ministry you lead is not yours, and neither is the church yours. Period. As an ordained minister of the gospel, I am very aware that all that comes with ordination is not mine—and neither are the gifts bestowed nor, and this is particularly painful for some, is the affirmation of those gifts. It is not "my gift." It is not "my talent." It is not "my life."

Returning to the passage from Acts—is it possible that the impact of the followers of a Crucified and Risen Jesus upon others who experienced the "awe" was directly correlated to their ability to say, "Not mine?" In other words, for those today to experience the transforming power of those of us who claim Jesus as our first loyalty, is it possible their experience of such power is directly related to how much of our life is "ours" and how much is "His"? Less "ours" and more "His," and those in our various circles of influence will rub shoulders with a Power not ours.

So, in this year of 2021, my prayer is that we may experience the divesting of all that is "ours" so that our hands can be open to receive what is "His."

Your  
**TITHE**  
and YouDoug Reeves,  
Illinois Conference Treasurer

**M**y parents taught me, as a child of 4 or 5 years old, the stewardship concepts related to money. I remember receiving 10 pennies and learning that two pennies were for Jesus. One penny for tithe, which belonged to Jesus, and one penny for offerings. These two pennies were given because I loved Jesus. My parents wanted me to understand that money I get does not all belong to me. Jesus wanted me to share with Him and others because of the love He placed in my heart. Years later, I have not forgotten the lesson learned as a child.



The question that naturally arises is what happens to the tithe that is given to the local church? Does the local church keep the tithe? Does the local church need free will offerings to operate the local church?

The local church receives the tithe given in a tithe envelope or through some form of online giving. At the end of the month, the local church prepares a check and a report to the Illinois Conference. The local church does not keep the tithe or non-local offerings.

The Illinois Conference ascertains that checks and reports have been received from all the churches that make up the sisterhood of churches. Once a month, the Conference provides a report to the Lake Union for tithe received from the churches. The percentage of tithe that is passed on to the union is about 38%. The

Lake Union retains its portion for the cost of providing programs and services to the conferences in their territory. The Lake Union pass the remaining amount on to the North American Division for providing programs and services to the union and conferences within their territory. The North American Division passes a portion of the tithe to the General Conference for providing programs and services for the whole worldwide field.

The portion of tithe (62%) that the Illinois Conference retains is spent on pastors' salaries and benefits, conference office staff salaries and benefits, and a portion of teachers' salaries and benefits. Tithe is spent on programs and services that the Conference provides to local churches. Remember, the Conference's ability to provide pastors, teachers, services, and programs are depended on each church member.

Local churches need their members to give local offerings for combined budget, school subsidy, special projects, etc. Offerings received for local purposes stay at the local church level to be used according to the purpose designated. The purpose of a local church is to reach the community surrounding the church and nurture the church members. Remember, it takes local offerings from members to operate a local church facility and programs.

I want to encourage the Illinois Conference members to be faithful in returning their tithes and offerings.

Malachi 3:10 NIV says, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, 'says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

I have tested God and have found that He is faithful and has blessed my family and me. The ultimate blessing is a home with Jesus and communing with Him face to face throughout eternity. Let us be faithful to our calling as Jesus's children.



"I am doing a great work and I cannot come down." These words of Nehemiah reveal his laser focus on the mission at hand (Nehemiah 6:3). Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were constant antagonists towards Nehemiah's plans to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. They made several attempts against Nehemiah to stop the work, create disunity among the people, and instill doubt and discouragement. Why was this wall so important? What motivated Nehemiah to complete the work in record time? The answer lies at the heart of stewardship and the mission of God's work today.

A pedestrian walked by a worksite and asked three workers, "What are you doing?" The first said, "I'm earning a wage." The second worker said, "I am laying some bricks. The third worker said, "I am building a cathedral." What was the "great work" that Nehemiah was doing? Nehemiah wasn't just building a wall; he was building God's kingdom! He wanted to bring a scattered and lost people into God's safety and salvation. He wanted to restore God's temple as symbolic of God's presence in the center of their lives. He wanted to re-focus God's people on their mission to proclaim God's love, mercy, and salvation. Through prayer and obedience to God's will, Nehemiah's leadership brought all of the available resources together to accomplish this seemingly impossible feat. He utilized all of the time, talents, and resources available to accomplish the mission. Stewardship is essentially using all of our God-given resources to fulfill our mission to proclaim Jesus and His soon return.

Today, our church faces similar distractions attempting to derail

# STEWARDSHIP and Mission



Pete Braman  
Illinois Conference  
Ministerial Director

the focus of this mission. Paul reminds us that we are "God's fellow workers; you are God's field; you are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). Any building project requires intentional planning, skilled workers, and collecting the resources needed to complete the work. As we witness the condition of our world deteriorate, there is an even greater need to emphasize our faithfulness to stewardship. Hebrews 10:24 & 25 reminds us to "stir one another up to love and good works" and to "build one another up, all the more as we see the day drawing near approaching."

Ellen White reminds us that "the spirit of liberality is the spirit of heaven. Christ's self-sacrificing love is revealed upon the cross; that man might be saved. He gave all that He

had, and then He gave Himself. The cross of Christ appeals to the benevolence of every follower of the blessed Savior." (Counsels on Stewardship, p. 14)

Without question, this year has challenged us individually and corporately as a church. Our ability to gather together, worship together, and minister together has been a struggle. The temptation is to allow these adverse circumstances to minimize our ability to carry out God's mission. Nehemiah's story is one of many Bible narratives (Joseph, Daniel, Elijah, etc.) where we see God's glory revealed in the most troublesome situations. The key ingredient remains our faithfulness and commitment to God's amazing mission. This commitment involves no less than a complete dedication of our time, talents, and treasures, even more as we see the day of His return drawing nearer.

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late. We are called to serve God and effectively manage the resources given to us. Whenever we discover that our things are managing us, we know we are out of balance. When it comes to our managing stewardship we share this responsibility with God. Fortunately, His part is much larger than ours.

As you review 2020 and prepare for 2021, take time to measure

how you managed your resources. And ask Him to reveal His priorities for your life in the coming year. If you do, next December's retrospective may be an especially rewarding experience.

- Ron Aguilera

## FUNDAMENTOS DE LA MAYORDOMÍA CRISTIANA

Gerzom Gomez, Pastor,  
Melrose Park and Berwyn Hispanic Churches, and  
Ambassadors for Christ and Vanguard Hispanic Companies



Los seres humanos somos criaturas inquisitivas, todo el tiempo estamos buscando significado en la vida. Descubrir nuestros orígenes, nos puede ayudar a entender mejor el propósito de nuestra existencia. Encontrar el significado de nuestra existencia nos daría una mejor actitud ante sus demandas. Creo que sería importante descubrir nuestros orígenes, porque así no nos afanaríamos tanto por las cosas y no nos aferraríamos a las cosas, pensando que tenemos derecho de propiedad sobre ellas. Porque entenderemos que rol jugamos en este juego de la vida.

Diremos que la vida tiene su fundamento en Dios, así lo declara (Genesis 1:1) "En el principio creó Dios los cielos y la tierra" partiendo de la premisa que Dios es el Creador y todo lo que sigue es lo creado, entonces debo entender que la vida tiene sustento y voluntad en el Creador. Debe existir un propósito de parte de Dios al crear la vida. Isaías declara "Porque así dijo Jehová, que creó los cielos; él es Dios, el que formó la tierra, el que la hizo y la compuso; no la creó en vano, para que fuese habitada la creó: Yo soy Jehová, y no hay otro" (Isaías 45:18). Este texto me da un marco interesante de comprensión ante el dilema existencial de la vida. Entonces debemos analizar quien es Dios para poder entender que es lo que pide de mi.

Cuando el hombre fue creado,

Dios le dio un trabajo importante en el cual debía gastar su tiempo de vida. "Y los bendijo Dios, y les dijo: Fructificad y multiplicaos; llenad la tierra, y sojuzgadla, y señoread en los peces del mar, en las aves de los cielos, y en todas las bestias que se mueven sobre la tierra" (Genesis 1:28) este trabajo involucra algunos aspectos de las funciones de Dios, en referencia a lo que el hace en el Universo. Dios administra como fiel mayordomo su vasta creación. Al hombre se le dio la responsabilidad de hacer lo mismo en la tierra recién creada.

Entonces va tomando forma el propósito de vida existencial del ser humano y podemos entender que tenemos una responsabilidad en el cuidado de lo físico, el tiempo, las posesiones y los talentos o habilidades que se nos entregaron por creación. Creo que aquí nos damos cuenta de que no somos dueños, somos mayordomos de algo que se nos prestó. Entender a Dios como Creador me ayuda a entender que el es soberano con lo que hace, o sea no rinde cuentas a nadie porque de el procede todo y lo entrega con voluntad de servicio, esperando una devolución fiel del que recibe tal beneficio.

El salmista David decía: "De Jehová es la tierra y su plenitud; El mundo, y los que en él habitan. Porque él la fundó sobre los mares, Y la afirmó sobre los ríos" (Salmos 24:1, 2)

Dios nos recuerda a través de su creación que todos los seres humanos tenemos límites en nuestra función en el mundo. Es bueno ahora analizar al ser humano. Todos tenemos un principio, "Entonces dijo Dios: Hagamos al hombre a nuestra imagen, conforme a nuestra semejanza; y señoree en los peces del mar, en las aves de los cielos, en las bestias, en toda la tierra, y en todo animal que se arrastra sobre la tierra. Y creó Dios al hombre a su imagen, a imagen de Dios lo creó; varón y hembra los creó" (Genesis 1:26, 27) por creación estamos limitados a tiempo y espacio, somos finitos.

Entonces nuestra respuesta ante la demanda de Dios debe ser nuestra fidelidad de lo que el pide que hagamos, porque somos su creación, no los dueños de ella. La comprensión que tengamos de Dios nos ayudara a, comprendernos mejor a nosotros mismos.

Redefinamos la mayordomía cristiana, Dios es el dueño de todo por creación. Al crear al hombre le dio el derecho de administrar los intereses de él, por lo tanto, nunca el hombre podrá declarar propiedad de lo que se le presto. Entonces su responsabilidad es devolverle a Dios, tiempo, tesoro y talento. Esto será en gratitud por lo que el nos confió y que por amor le devolvemos, así como por amor fuimos creados.

**INTRODUCING...**

**Pastor Lamont Taylor** is a product of Christian Education, who currently serves as pastor of the Gurnee and Northbrook Seventh-day Adventist Churches. Lamont served as a lay pastor since 2014 and at Gurnee for 17 months before joining the Illinois Conference full time. Lamont is also a certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor, Co-Occurring Disorder Professional, and a Medicated Assisted Addictions Treatment Professional.



Lamont has been married to his beautiful wife Marina for 18 years and counting. They have five children together, ( Lamont Jr, studying at Southern University, Levonn & Lamar at Wisconsin Academy, Landon, and Leilanie at Gurnee Christian Academy.)

Lamont has recently enrolled in Andrew's University to further his Pastoral Ministries Education.

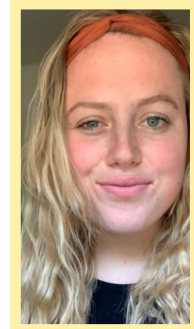
**Pastor Nolberto de Jesus Barrueta Alvarado** serves as the part-time pastor of the Hispanic mission groups in Effingham and Champaign. He was born in Barinitas, Barinas State, Venezuela, and accepted the Lord Jesus when he was 15 years old. Married to Ibeth Briceño since August 13, 2006, they have two girls, Sara and Nolybeth.



He graduated in 2005 with a Bachelor in Theology degree and then served for 12 years as a pastor in Venezuela. He was ordained during that time and obtained a Master's degree in Pastoral Theology in 2014.

He loves serving the Lord Jesus and this precious church, which he is working with and preparing for the return of Jesus. At the same time, he proclaims the message of salvation to those who do not know Jesus yet.

**Sarah Moller** joined the Illinois Conference office staff team as a business intern in the Treasury Department. She recently moved here to Illinois with her dog Bear, a six-year-old German Shepard/ Mountain Dog mix.



Sarah grew up on a farm with her two brothers and a sister in Texas. She was homeschooled through middle and high school and then attended Southwestern Adventist University, where she graduated in December of 2019 with her Bachelors in Business with an emphasis in accounting. In University, she was involved with the basketball and the gymnastics teams. Sarah also had the pleasure of helping out with the local pathfinder club. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, camping, reading, and practicing photography.



Arkadiusz Bojko  
Trust Services & Stewardship Director

**REMEMBER**

The Israelites were about to cross over Jordan to the Promised Land. After forty long years in the desert's harsh conditions, the beautiful land of plenty was opening before them. In their imagination, they could see the houses, fields yielding beautiful crops, orchards with trees heavy with fruit, herds of sheep and cattle grazing on the hills and the meadows in the valleys. A pastoral vision of life, peace, and prosperity. A perspective of life so different from the years they spent in tents, sojourning from place to place, owning only what was absolutely necessary. On the other side of the river, life would be completely different from anything they knew.

In this very time, God considered it necessary to remind them of something that we too tend to forget in times of peace and prosperity.

*When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;... then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Deuteronomy 8:10-14,17-18*

We probably do not meditate daily on the idea that having a roof over our heads, our own bed, running water, food in the fridge, and a car to go to work are great blessings. Yet, if we have those things, we are better off than most people living on planet Earth. Additionally, these comfortable conditions of life open before us numerous opportunities to make our life even better. The things we have access to daily, are a beautiful dream for many others which will never come true during their lifetime.

How does this relate to the idea of Christian stewardship?

First, let us recognize our blessings. It is our nature to complain and always crave more, but pause for a moment and look around. Even the most modest among us live in better conditions than people in previous generations.

Second, recognize that God is the source of all blessings. "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God." Interestingly, we tend to cry to God in times of distress but forget about Him in times of peace and prosperity. God appeals, *Remember Me! I am the source of your skills and intelligence. Yes, you work hard, but you wouldn't be able to do so if you didn't receive strength, health, and life from Me.*

Third, let us think about why we are here? What is the goal of our life? We are going through the motions of sustaining our daily life, but is that all? The paradox of life is that, too often, people who have "got it all" are "not happy at all." Why? Because deep in our hearts, there is a desire to live for something bigger than us, to live for God and others. God embedded this desire at creation.

Thus, Christian stewardship is not only about returning God's tithe. God's stewards are gratefully content with what they have. They recognize God as the provider and owner of everything and give Him glory for every blessing they have received. It is not their goal in life to accumulate as much as possible, but to use their means as much as possible to glorify God and to bring God's Kingdom closer to those whom He loves so much.

*Seeking the good of others is the way in which true happiness can be found. Man does not work against his own interest by loving God and his fellow men. The more unselfish his spirit, the happier he is, because he is fulfilling God's purpose for him. E.G. White, Counsels on Stewardship, p. 24-25*



## FOCUS ON YOUTH



Stewardship. Often, we may get caught up on what this word actually means, but in simple terms, it just means to care for something important. Join Pr. David Kokiong, Youth Pastor at Hinsdale Fil-Am Church, as he helps us figure out how to be better stewards of our time... especially when it comes to gaming.

Have you ever lost track of time, scrolling through post after post on your social feed? Have you ever planned to play just one more round, one more mission, one more achievement? Have you ever looked up and thought: "I spent way longer on that than I wanted to?" I Corinthians 9:27 NLT says: "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

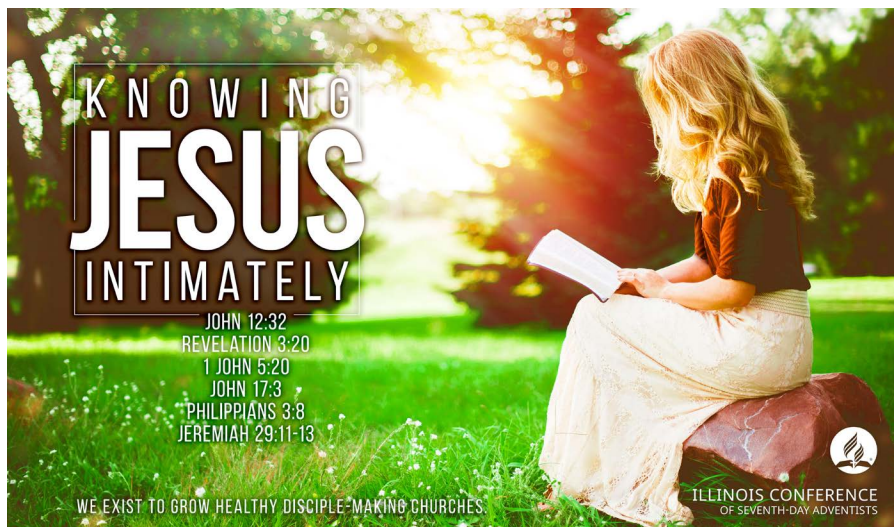
Stewardship of our time and our focus is just as important as stewardship of money. Why not plan a specific duration you want to spend on social media or gaming, and set an alarm 5 minutes before that duration so you have time for "one more thing?" When your alarm hits, and you end on time, you won't feel like you wasted more time than you planned.

### OFFERING & SUNSET CALENDAR

Here is a handy reference tool for sunset and offerings for the first quarter 2021. For the full calendar, please visit:

[www.ilcsda.org/stewardship](http://www.ilcsda.org/stewardship)

DATE	CHICAGO	ROCKFORD	MOLINE	OFFERING
January 2	4:32	4:37	4:45	Local Church Budget
January 9	4:39	4:45	4:52	Illinois Action (Evangelism)
January 16	4:47	4:52	4:59	Local Church Budget
January 23	4:57	5:00	5:08	Religious Liberty
January 30	5:04	5:09	5:17	Local Church Budget
February 6	5:13	5:18	5:26	Local Church Budget
February 13	5:23	5:27	5:34	Adventist Television Ministries Evangelism (NAD)
February 20	5:31	5:36	5:43	Local Church Budget
February 27	5:39	5:45	5:51	Illinois Action (Building Project)
March 6	5:48	5:53	6:00	Local Church Budget
March 13	5:56	6:02	6:07	Adventist World Radio (GC)
March 20	7:04	7:10	7:15	Local Church Budget
March 27	7:11	7:18	7:23	Illinois Action (Student Scholarship)



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