

Pledge Card Instructions

Your pledge card is enclosed. The Vestry and Clergy encourage you to prayerfully consider your pledge before you complete this card. God will guide you in this and all decisions, if asked.

The pledge card offers two options for designating the use of your pledge dollars:

1. Unrestricted – for use by the Advent (90%), the Diocese of Alabama and the budget of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church (“the national church”).
2. Restricted – for use by the Advent (90%) and the Diocese of Alabama (10%) only.

If one of the two boxes is not checked, the pledge will be considered unrestricted.

The second option is provided as a pastoral accommodation for those parishioners who, as a matter of conscience, do not wish to support the budget of the General Convention. While allowing this pastoral accommodation, the Diocese of Alabama has asked the Vestry to convey that the Diocese’s theology of stewardship is one of “first fruits” giving, reflecting the generous love of God. Additional information on the Diocese’s stewardship theology may be found on the reverse side of this sheet.

How does this restriction work in practice? First, it is important to know that the Advent does not send contributions directly to the national church. The Advent pays a covenant or pledge to the Diocese, and the Diocese, in turn, pays a portion of its revenue to the national church.

The Advent’s financial office keeps careful track of the restricted pledges it receives, and the total amount of these pledges is reported to the Diocese. When the Advent pays its covenant to the Diocese, two checks are sent – one identified as unrestricted and the other as restricted.

The Diocese deposits the restricted check to its Perkins Fund, which is separate and distinct from its regular operating funds. When the Diocese applies the designated percentage giving for the General Convention to its operating revenue, contributions to the Perkins Fund are not included and, therefore, are not assessed. That amount of money, which otherwise would be sent to the national church, stays with the Diocese and is used by the Diocese.

Our Theology of Stewardship and Giving In the Diocese of Alabama

Our theology of stewardship in the Diocese of Alabama is centered in our Christian vision of the generous love of God. The Bible tells us from beginning to the end of God's constant giving for the life of the world, culminating in Christ's self-offering on the cross for our healing and reconciliation.

We believe that God is a God of abundance without limit. All that we are and all that we have in this life is God's extraordinary gift and blessing.

In response, all Christians are called to give generously as God gives. "All things come of thee; and of thine own have we given thee." The full measure of Christian stewardship is that of Christ's self-giving: all that we are and have given in grateful thanksgiving and in God's service.

Personal Giving

The *Biblical tithe* has long been the minimum standard for giving by the people of God. The tithe means 10% of all that we earn each year given in thanksgiving to God and for the mission of the Church. We are called to give not to a budget, but in pure gratitude to God and in dedication to God's mission. Such giving is always to be *first fruits giving*; the first thing we do with our money, off the top each week or month or year, generously and freely given.

Many of us who tithe have arrived there by the discipline of giving 1% more each year. Many of us find ourselves giving far beyond this. I personally have found tithing to be the most important and liberating spiritual discipline in my Christian life, after worship and prayer. For some it is a goal, which takes time, but it is a journey, which we are always invited to begin now.

Parochial Giving

Such percentage giving does not just apply to individual Christians. It needs to guide the giving of our churches as well. Each of our parishes in the Diocese of Alabama is asked to *give beyond ourselves* as generously as individuals are asked to give. The first gift beyond our parish ministry as Episcopalians is to our shared ministry and mission as a diocese. From these funds we support our bishops and staff, our diocesan program and mission, and the work of the church throughout our country and world. The Alabama Plan has taught for many years that as we encourage our members to tithe, parishes need to give even more sacrificially beyond themselves to diocesan mission and other outreach.

The shared mission of our diocese depends almost entirely on the faithful, voluntary giving of a *percentage of all the pledged, plate and undesignated income of each parish each year to a diocesan covenant*. Our covenants are not to be a fixed dollar amount, but a *first fruits percentage* of the gifts of God's people. After the parish's giving beyond itself to the shared ministry of the diocese, it is hoped that a significant additional percentage will be committed to other outreach and mission beyond the parish's internal ministry. Our diocesan Standing Resolutions provide that the Bishop and Council are to give information and guidance to our parishes in determining the covenant amount each is asked to contribute each year.

Our Diocesan Council and the 2000 Convention set the following guidelines for diocesan covenants:

10% of all undesignated income from parishes with budgets of \$150,000 or less and 15% of all undesignated income for parishes with budgets over 150,000. Undesignated income means, by our Standing Resolutions, the total of pledge payments, plate offerings, and other undesignated income per year.

The 2003 Convention passed the following resolution to encourage us all to be better stewards of our diocesan covenants:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Convention call upon all rectors and vestries of the Diocese to embrace anew the stewardship theology of first fruits giving, moving purposefully to meet the common percentage benchmarks that we have agreed upon; and

BE IF FURTHER RESOLVED that this convention encourage the Diocesan Council to reach out to vestries that are not currently meeting or working toward these goals.

Stewardship giving is good news. As individual Christians and as parishes it is how we offer our abundant thanksgiving to God for all his gifts. It is how we share generously and unselfishly in God's mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in building up the Church, and in serving the world in Christ's name. At all levels, we are invited to the faithful offering of *first fruits giving*, a faithful percentage of all that we are and have given beyond ourselves with joyful and thankful hearts.

Let us encourage one another to embrace and live these stewardship beliefs as individuals and as parishes through our covenants, that we may be faithful to the mission of Jesus Christ.

To God be the glory.

Henry N. Parsley, Jr.
Bishop of Alabama