

North Heartland Matters
Giving: Why We Ask for It
October 22, 2017

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

Worship Song – From the Day

Communion

Good morning everyone.

One of the traditions of the church since its earliest days has been to formally remember the salvation that has been given to us in Christ. Jesus himself asked us to do that from time-to-time in what Christians have called “communion” or “The Lord’s Supper.”

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

*In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 1
Corinthians 11:23-25 (NIV)*

So, in the next few minutes, that’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross. We’re going to remember how God, in His mercy and grace, brought us from death to life and from darkness to light by giving us his Son.

Now, whenever we do this, there are always some who think “well, Rick, I’d really like to participate but I just don’t feel worthy of receiving communion today. I haven’t felt close to God. I’ve been pretty sinful lately.

And I always say “that’s OK. I understand how you feel. But you should come and receive it anyway because Jesus said ‘I have not come to call the righteous. I have not come for the people who feel

close to God or who think they are worthy.”

Jesus came, as the song said, to save those who were blind, sinful and swallowed by pride; in other words *people who know they are not righteous*; people who know they have fallen short of the perfection for which God intended them.

And communion is meant to remind us of that; to remind us that our standing with God is not the result of anything we do or don't do. It's about what Jesus did. It's totally *grace*.

As Paul wrote to one of his protégés, Titus.

He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us ...

... through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he declared us

*righteous and gave us confidence
that we will inherit eternal life.
Titus 3:5-7 (NLT)*

So, during the next few minutes, I invite you to get up from your seat and go to one of the communion tables, take a piece of bread, dip it in the juice, eat it and then go back to your seat.

And be confident and thankful that the salvation of your body and soul is not about how good you are but about how good *Jesus* is.

Communion

Worship Song – Jesus Paid It All

Video – Behind the Scenes Feature – “Endless Praise”

Would you pray with me?

Lord, I love the enthusiasm and the intention of that song: that we who know Jesus and follow Him would be the kind of

people who will give to you all we've got because you truly are worthy of all glory. You are worthy of endless praise.

But the truth about us, Lord, is that we so often fall short of that intention.

- So often, we forget your worth.
- So often, we don't see your glory even as it is displayed right in front of us.
- So often, we don't give all we've got because we're distracted or discouraged or we simply don't trust you enough.

And we're grateful that Jesus died to free us from condemnation for those sins, but we want to be more than just forgiven. We want to be what you've called us to be.

So, I pray you would continually ...

- Remind us of your worth

- Enlighten us to your glory
- And increase our faith.

I ask all of these things in the name of Jesus our King. Amen.

Today we are concluding our series *North Heartland Matters*. And this morning we're going to talk about an issue that tends to cause a lot of angst for pastors as well as church members and attenders: the issue of *giving ... giving* in general and *giving to the church* in particular.

And with that, some of you are already feeling that angst I'm talking about. Some of you are thinking, "You've got to be kidding me. I finally get my friend to come to church with me and this is the day Rick decides to talk about tithing."

Some of you *are* that friend and you're looking at the person who invited you and you're thinking, "Of all days to invite me. What did I do to deserve this?"

So, let me explain why I've included this topic in this brief series.

A couple of months ago, I mentioned that one of the things our pastors are doing behind the scenes is to get a better sense of what's going on with those in our congregation who are younger – specifically, those who are referred to as “millennials.” So, we decided to run several small groups that are specifically targeted to that age demographic.

In the group that Jetta and I are part of, the topic of discussion at our very first meeting was how millennials in our culture feel about “organized religion” including, of course, the church. And one of the things that came out (as you might expect if you know anything about that generation) was their distrust of institutions in general, including, of course, the church.

As we talked about that, the question I had (as the

senior pastor of this church) was “what do churches need to do to overcome at least some of that distrust?”

And there were many good answers including the need for vulnerability and transparency on the part of leaders. In other words, “don’t be afraid to admit that you’re still a work in progress, too, just like the rest of us.”

But the answer that jumped out at me – and led directly to this morning’s message – was “explain the *why*. Don’t just *tell us* what to do. Explain *why* we should do it. And one of those areas where we need to understand the *why* has to do with the church and money and giving.”

And so I decided that night that I was going to talk about it in this series ... which means ... if you’re not happy about today’s message, blame the millennials.

But seriously ... I don’t think the *why* question as

it relates to the church and money and giving is confined to millennials. I think lots of people – especially those who do not have a longstanding church background ... which is about half of all the people who are a part of our services every Sunday – did you know that over 50% of the folks sitting in this auditorium were not regularly involved in a church in the five years before they started showing up here?

Interesting tidbit ... but the point is lots of people have that same why question: why should we give to the church? Why does the church ask people to give?

And that's what I want to talk to you about today.

Of course, at this point some of you are thinking “well, then, this ought to be a really short message because the answer is pretty obvious isn't it? *The church needs money to operate* ... which is why you guys are always asking for it. So let's pray and we'll all get out of here early.”

To which I would say ... while it certainly is true that the church needs money, thinking of it like that (I hope you will see) is a little too simplistic. In addition, there are other reasons we ask people to give that are worth knowing about.

How We Ask

And I'll get to all of that in just a bit but first I want to say something about *how* we ask people to give here at North Heartland because I want you to understand our mindset and our philosophy on this issue. It's hard to communicate all of this whenever we pass the basket or receive the offering at the door, so I just want to spell it out for you.

We are very conscious of and intentional about how we ask for people to contribute to North Heartland.

1. First of all, when we ask people to give,

we intentionally limit the audience so as not to offend newcomers.

Literally, that's what we do almost every time we receive an offering.

- “If you're a guest, please don't feel obligated to contribute unless you just want to.”
- “If this is your church, this time is for you to give back to God and express your gratitude.
- “If this is your church, we appreciate your support of our ministry in this way.”

We're always trying to make it clear to people who are here for the first time or those who are still investigating what it means to be a Christian that we are not asking for their money.

That would be like asking a guest to pay or do the

dishes when they come to your home for dinner. It would be bad form. It would be offensive. So we limit the audience when we ask people to give.

2. Second, when we ask people to give, we realize that many people are carrying “baggage” that hinders them.

And what baggage always does concerning any issue is to cloud that issue. It keeps you from thinking clearly about it. More importantly, it creates a barrier that is hard to overcome even if you want to.

For instance ...

- Some people are carrying the baggage of *bad history* with church. They’ve been guilted into giving – you won’t believe some of the horror stories I’ve heard – and they’ve had enough of it. So they tune out whenever the issue comes up.
- Some people are carrying the baggage of

guilt – not that they were guilted by anyone but they literally feel guilty because they aren't giving what they think they should be giving. And any mention of the issue makes them feel bad (whether they should or not).

- Some people have the baggage of a *resistant spouse*. They want to give but their husband or wife is opposed to it. That's a real barrier and one that ought to be respected.

I've said it many times through the years: *do not bring stress into your marriage over this issue* especially if your spouse is not a Christ-follower. If you want to give and your spouse does not, pray for God to change his or her heart. Never “just do it” without an agreement in advance.

- Finally, some people have the baggage of *financial stress*. They want to give but they

can't do it because, for instance, they're carrying so much debt – some of it foolishly incurred and some of it – like medical bills – that just comes from “life happening.” Or they've lost a job or lost an income.

Point being ... when we ask people to give, we get it: *a lot of people have baggage that hinders them* and it's not easy to just start writing checks or setting up recurring online donations to NHCC.

And for that reason, we are not demanding in our attitude and our approach. We don't pressure people.

The rule on this matter come from the Apostle Paul who writes:

*Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully ... 2
Corinthians 9:7 (NLT)*

... not the person who grudgingly pays for services rendered.

3. Third, we also know that giving is where the most intense spiritual battles often occur.

And this is the third thing you need to know about *how* we go about asking people to give.

For a lot of people, it's not an issue of baggage. It's an issue of the heart and what the heart loves and worships regardless of what the mouth says.

We saw this illustrated in last week's message when we read the story of the rich guy who came to Jesus and said he had, for his entire life, completely obeyed the Law of Moses – the Ten Commandments and all of the other Jewish regulations. He wanted to know if there was anything else he could do to demonstrate his worthiness to receive eternal life.

Remember what Jesus told him?

“Go sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor. And you will have treasure in Heaven.”

Matthew 19:21 (NLT)

But he couldn't do it. Instead, the Bible tells us, he went away sad.

“I'll do everything you say, Lord, right up to here. But this part is off limits” ... which not only revealed his lack of perfection and need for a savior but, also, that money is an intensely spiritual issue.

Which is the point Jesus made to his disciples:

“I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Matthew 19:23 (NLT)

Money – and giving in particular – is a spiritual battleground. Maybe that's why Jesus said more

about it than any other issue except for the Kingdom of Heaven – and often linked the two together as He did in this case.

So, when we ask people to give, we realize it's about much more than just “paying the bills at the church.” We're entering into a spiritual battle.

Ok, one more thing you need to know about how we ask people to give – our mindset on this matter.

4. We do it without apology.

In spite of the fact that ...

- We intentionally limit the audience to not offend our guests.
- And we realize there's baggage about this issue.
- And we know that money is a spiritual battleground for many people.

In spite of all that, we do not hesitate for a second to invite people to consider giving consistently and liberally to North Heartland.

I said at the beginning that talking about this issue tends to produce a lot of angst not only among church members and attenders but also pastors.

Not this one.

I don't feel bad about it at all. In fact, I look forward to these kinds of messages precisely because it *is* a spiritual battleground and there *is* baggage. And part of the reason why exist as a church is to help people win those battles and lose that baggage.

But on a more personal note, of all the experiences I've had in my life as a Christian – and this goes way back to my teenage years and the years that I worked as a software engineer, i.e., long before I became a pastor – no other “spiritual activity” has come close to providing a tangible

sense of God's presence and activity in my life like giving has. And I want others to experience the same thing.

I hope that helps you understand a bit of the heart and attitude and philosophy with which we approach this issue.

Reasons Why

And now, I will tell you why you should consider giving to the church whether it's this church or some church somewhere that you love. (And by the way, if you are a Christian you owe it to yourself and to the Lord to be part of a church you love. You really do).

And I'm going to do this using a style of preaching and teaching that I don't particularly like but, in this case, I don't think there is a better way to do it. Plus, I think this will help communicate to you the sheer weight of the case to be made.

I'm going to give you *a list of seven reasons* why we ask people – *our* people, not guests or those who are still investigating Christianity – to give to the church consistently and liberally.

And let's start with the most obvious of the seven. And I'm going to spend a bit of time on this first one because I've discovered that most people – even if they are sincere committed Christians – typically don't give this much thought.

1. We ask people to give because it funds our mission.

And if you've been here in the past two weeks, you know that we've talked about our mission as a church: specifically why it matters that we're here and doing what we do.

In the first week we saw that, as great as it is that there are wonderful Christian organizations who do such good things in our community and in our city, what *we* do matters as much – and maybe even more – because doing good, ultimately, has

its roots in Jesus and what He taught.

And it's the church – you and me together – that's been commissioned by Jesus to teach people to obey everything He taught. What we do here (and what thousands of other Jesus-following churches do) is indispensable to a compassionate culture.

Furthermore, as we saw last week, our church – all of us together (along with all other Jesus-following churches) is called to share with our world the good news of what God has done to solve the greatest problem of humanity which isn't that we don't know how to live and therefore need to learn and obey the way of Jesus.

Our greatest problem is that we come into this world “spiritually stillborn.” “Dead in trespasses and sins” is how the Apostle Paul described it.

And our task is to proclaim to our community (and, in fact, the world) ...

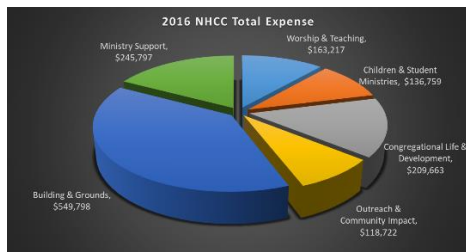
- That Jesus' death and resurrection is God's solution
- That because of Him, God raises us to new life spiritually right now and one day will do the same with our bodies.
- And that we can receive this solution by faith: simply by believing in Jesus and calling on Him to save us.

Now, for us to do those things here at North Heartland – to proclaim the Gospel (the Good News) and to help people discover and obey the way of Jesus:

- On the scale that we do it
- In the way that we do it
- With the people who lead and equip us to do it
- In this place where we do it

... isn't cheap. I won't go into great detail on this but ...

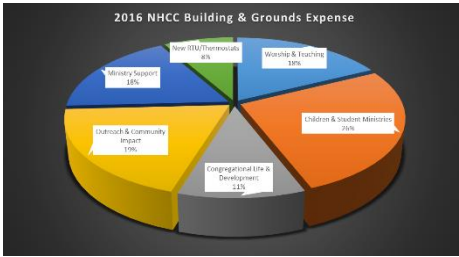
Here's a little pie chart we created that shows what it cost last year, in 2016.



You can see how it all broke down into various areas of ministry and functionality. Those figures include program cost and employee cost. (And, if you're wondering, we had the equivalent of 11 full-time persons).

In this next chart ...

... you see how the almost \$550K we spent on building and grounds was used in support of various areas of ministry plus maintenance.



Together, it all added up to about \$1.4M. And when this year ends, our expenses will be close to the same level.

However, in 2018, the cost is going to increase.

For one thing, in order to better serve the next generation, we're going to increase our staffing so we can provide better and more accessible childcare so that parents with young children can participate. One of the things we've learned in our small groups this fall is that's a huge barrier.

Now, just to be completely transparent – about 6% of our expenses in 2016 – \$77K – went to pay the salary of the highest-compensated employee –

the senior pastor ... *me*.

To put that into context for you, 30 years ago when I left Bell Labs to go into the vocational ministry, I was making about \$48K a year. In 2017 dollars, that would be about \$101K.ⁱ

Now, I hesitated to tell you that because I don't want you to hear what I'm not saying – this is not a complaint – *I'm not even keeping up with inflation*.

And not just me.

- 10 years ago Ladell left his career and a good salary at Hallmark to work for us.
- 15 years ago Shannon gave up a career in the University system to work for us.
- Mica could be making twice what we pay her in the corporate world.
- And I could go down the line through our entire staff.

Point being, no one is getting rich off of working

here.

And that's OK with all of us because *we love working here*. We love what we do. We love you guys (well, most of you). It's not about the money for us – which is ironic given that that's one of the criticisms often leveled at the church: “It's all about the money.”

But it's not.

However, that said, reality is ...

- We don't have an endowment. There's no rich uncle who left us a fortune to help us make ends meet.
- We don't sell a product. Unlike Rick Warren, I haven't yet written my bestselling book that would allow me to pay for the whole thing myself.

The only way we have to pay for this is what we

receive from people who give ... which is why we ask for it. We ask people to give because it funds our mission.

And we think our mission –

- On the scale that we do it
- In the way that we do it
- With the people who lead and equip us to do it
- In this place where we do it

... is worth it.

But that's just the most obvious reason why we ask people – *our* people, not guests or people who are still investigating Christianity – to give. There are *six more reasons!*

And, in the interest of time, I'm going to run through these quickly. If you want to know more

about any of them, send me an email or talk to me after the service and I'll point you to a message in which I've gone into greater detail on the issue.

2. The second reason we ask people to give because giving is an act of worship.

Now, let me ask you a question: what kinds of activities can we do on a regular basis that constitute an act of worship? I mean, if God truly is “worthy of all glory” like the song said, how do we actually go about expressing that?

The answer most Christians of our day would give is “singing.” When we sing to or about God, we're worshipping. We're giving God glory.

But did you know that, in the Bible, worship is more often associated with giving than it is singing?

For example ...

- When the Magi came to the place where Jesus was, they didn't bow low and then break into song. They bowed low and presented him with expensive treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh.
- And Proverbs 3:9 doesn't say to honor the Lord by singing praise songs or even going to church.

It says ...

*Honor the Lord by giving him the
first part of all your income.
Proverbs 3:9 (TLB)*

Now, I'm not saying singing and showing up church aren't acts of worship. They are.

I'm just saying that we invite people to give because giving is an act of worship – and maybe even greater than signing because it costs us something.

3. Another reason we ask people to give is because giving is an investment in their eternity.

I've actually devoted entire messages to this principle over the years because it shows up again and again scripture.

Here's just one example.

Paul wrote:

Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give happily to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them.

But why?

Not because they "ought" to give but because:

By doing this they will be storing up real treasure for themselves in

heaven—it is the only safe investment for eternity. 1 Timothy 6:18-19 (TLB)

That means that you never really *sacrifice anything* when you give. If you're a Christian, giving to the Lord's work is an investment in your eternity. That's why we invite people to do it.

4. The fourth reason we invite people to give because giving is the antidote to greed and selfishness.

Jesus said “Watch out and guard yourself from all types of greed, because one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Luke 12:15 (NET)

Every time you give, you weaken the grip of greed on your life, because giving is the opposite of greed.

By the way, over the years I've noticed something about wealthy Christians – people who are serious about their faith and also really good at making

money. They worry that maybe, just maybe, *their wealth means that they are greedy and they wonder if they should feel guilty about it.*

- They never have to worry about the cost of taking an expensive vacation. But is it OK to do that?
- They can remodel their house or buy a bigger one without going into debt. Is that OK?
- They can buy expensive toys for themselves and others on the spot. What about that?

One of the things I suggest is that they *give to God* an equal amount to what they *spend on themselves.*

- If you can write a check for a \$10K vacation, give \$10K to the Lord.
- If you spend \$2,000 on your Christmas

presents and activities, give that much to others who are less fortunate (which is something Jetta and I started doing several years ago).

Giving is the antidote to greed and selfishness. And that's one reason why we ask people to give.

#5. We invite people to give because it helps them know the heart of God.

God is consistently revealed by the scripture as an astonishing “giver.” It's visible through His creation, the Bible says, and it's visible in His provision for His creatures.

But the greatest example of God's giving nature is that, instead of allowing us to die in our sin, He chose to redeem us through an act of giving ...

As the Apostle Paul writes:

God has brought us back to life together with Christ Jesus and has

given us a position in heaven with him. He did this through Christ Jesus out of his generosity to us ...

Ephesians 2:6-7a (GW)

“God so loved the world that He *gave* his only Son,” John says, expecting nothing in return.

And one of the ways we better understand the giving and generous heart of God is by doing that ourselves – giving ... which is why we invite people to do it.

6. Another reason we ask people to give is because giving declares our trust in God instead of money.

If everything that comes to me is spent on me, then everything about my finances is up to me.

And that’s a dangerous way to live, which is why the Apostle Paul wrote:

Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so

unreliable. 1 Timothy 6:17a (NLT)

Even if you're the best money manager and the hardest worker, something bad could still wipe it all out!

However, by *not* spending everything that comes to us on us – by giving a portion to the Lord – we are expressing our trust in a tangible way that *He* is our Provider. And not just of what we *need* but also of what we give.

Again, Paul writes...

You will be enriched in every way so that you may be generous on every occasion.

2 Corinthians 9:11 (NET)

And oh my, could I tell you story after story of how this has worked out in my life over the past four decades!

We have given hundreds of thousands of dollars

to the Lord's work over the years – more than I would have ever believed had you told me when I was 25 years old.

And I hesitate to say that because I don't want you to think I think highly of myself in this. We just decided early in our marriage that we were going to give at least 10% of our income off the top and live on the rest. That's how it turned out to be hundreds of thousands of dollars over four decades.

Oh, there have been a few times when we felt like God told us to carve off a big chunk (like for one of our building campaigns), but for the most part, this hasn't required anything super sacrificial on our part.

And through it all, we have always had more than enough. We keep shoveling it out and God keeps shoveling it back in! We have been and are being enriched in every way so that we can be generous in every way.

And, as I said earlier, *I so want* for others to have that same experience.

But not as much as someone else wants it for us ... which leads to the final reason we invite people to give.

7. We invite people to give because *God* challenges us to put Him to the test.

Through the prophet Malachi, God told the people of Israel to ...

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!”

Malachi 3:10 (NLT)

By the way, that’s the only place in the entire

Bible where God issues that kind of challenge. In fact, in other places He warns us *not* to test Him. But not in this issue of giving.

“Test me – test my promise,” he says.

And that’s why we invite people to give.

Amazing isn’t it? Isn’t it just like God to prescribe a practice that not only funds the mission but also, at the same time, produces all of those positive benefits for us?

Giving & Generosity

Now, having said all of that, I need to clarify one thing that sometimes gets lost in all of this.

I’ve been saying that we ask people to “give” – and we do. But what we really want is for people to be *generous*. And there’s a big difference.

We talked about this last year in our *Shine* series; how most of us are good at “random acts of giving.” A random act of giving is when ...

- We hear of a need in the neighborhood and we donate a few dollars
- We pony up \$29.95 when there’s a special offering to help our Impact Partners
- We sign up for Amazon Smile so that Amazon gives on our behalf whenever we buy
- We hear about the NHCC Christmas Offering and we give something to help those in need at the holidays.
- Or the offering basket passes by during the service and we feel grateful (or guilty) and we drop in a twenty.

And that's all really good and really helpful.

But it's *random* which means it's not consistent and not dependable.

And the church – NHCC or any other church – can't exist for very long on that kind of financial support. It isn't *meant* to exist on that kind of support ... which is why what *we really want* is for people to go beyond random acts of giving and to embrace true generosity.

And here's what generosity is.

Generosity is the premeditated, calculated, designated emancipation of personal financial assets to the people and causes God loves.

Remember that definition? I stole it from Andy Stanley. 😊

Say it with me, will you? <repeat>

- It's *premeditated* ... Generous people have given thought to their giving and they have a plan. It's not random.
- It's *calculated* ... Generous people already know how much they're going to give.
- It's *designated* ... Generous people have already decided in advance where it's going to go. They're not swayed by emotion or guilt that they might feel in the moment.
- And generous people understand that in order not to be possessed by their possessions and money, they have to set those things free. That's what *emancipation* means. Generous people set their financial assets free and *they* are free.

Next Steps

So, let's wrap this up by talking very briefly about how this might play out going forward.

First, if you're not a Christian or this isn't your church ... I'm not sure what to tell you other than I hope answering this why question is helpful to you in some way. If you're not a Christian you might even give this a try to see if God shows up in some way.

To those who are carrying baggage on this issue ... I think the best you can do at this point is probably "random acts of giving."

Just do the best you can at this time and let's hope and pray that God helps you lose that baggage at some point:

- That you'll get out of debt
- You'll come to an agreement with your spouse
- You'll get past your history with the church
- You'll get over feeling guilty

To the rest of us for whom giving is, at some level, a spiritual battle ... I want to challenge you to take a step forward into true generosity ...

... to think about your giving:

- How much you will give – a fixed amount or a percentage of income
- How often you will give it – every week, every paycheck, every month
- Where you will give it – to a church you love, hopefully this one

I want to challenge you to implement a plan that makes that happen.

And to make it easy to do that here at NHCC, we have developed a way to automate your contributions. You can go to our website or our church app and look under the giving tab. There

you can set up a recurring donation of whatever amount and frequency you decide.

Finally, no matter what place you're at on this issue, I want to let you know that, in connection with our new budget year, January 1st ...

We're going to launch a 90-day money-back guarantee generosity challenge beginning January 1st.

I'll give you more details as the time approaches, but basically here's how it will work.

- If you've never given on a consistent basis and you sign up to give a regular amount on a regular basis, we will give you back your money if, after 90 days, you feel like God has failed the test.
- If you're already giving on a consistent basis and you increase your giving, we will make you the same deal on the amount by which you increase your giving. For example, you

increase your giving by \$100/month, we'll give you back your \$300 at the end of 90 days if you feel like God has not opened the windows of Heaven for you.

So, there's something to look forward to! Again, more details on how to sign up for the deal as the time approaches.

But you don't have to wait until then because on this next song, we're going to receive our offering. And if you're a guest with us ... and if this is your church ...

Here we go.

Feature – Motion of Mercy / Offering

CLOSING COMMENTS – Rick

1. Prayer
2. Baptism in two weeks

Endnotes

ⁱ <http://www.in2013dollars.com/1987-dollars-in-2016?amount=48000>