

Is your giving up to PAR?

There was a time when one of the first things I did at the beginning of each new year was sign 52 post-dated cheques and insert them into my weekly offertory envelopes. This way I could guarantee that on any given Sunday I was prepared for the passing of the collection plate. What might seem like a rather innocuous exercise was actually quite intentional. Each year I prayerfully reflected on the blessings in my life and made a commitment to give back to God what is God's in the first place. I found this discipline helpful on my spiritual journey, and actually came to look forward to it. Nowadays my weekly giving is made done through Pre-Authorized Remittance (PAR) but the process is no less intentional.

Whenever we hear stewardship spoken of in terms of the gift of our first fruits, PAR becomes the vehicle most often used to make that a reality. By making a monthly gift to the church through our bank account we demonstrate the important role the church plays in our lives and the value we place on ensuring that the ministry needs of the church are met.

Pre-Authorized Remittance is often presented to church members as a benefit to the church: it guarantees a stream of reliable revenue, supports ministry in our absence, helps the stewardship team plan for future expenses and it provides peace of mind to wardens and clergy alike. Rarely does our conversation about PAR focus primarily on the theology of giving, but that's where its use should squarely be focussed on. Pre-Authorized Remittance is good theology.

In Ancient Israel the practice of consecrating first-fruits to the Lord sprang up naturally among agricultural people from the belief that the first and hence best of the harvest should be offered to God in thanksgiving for all the gifts received during the growing season. Today the fruit of our labour most often comes in the form of money (though it can come in terms of time and talent as well) which we use to purchase those things that nurture and sustain us.

The concept of giving our first fruits illustrates giving to God from a grateful heart, and it sets a pattern of giving back to God the first (and the best) of what God has given us. Pre-Authorized Giving is useful as it inclines us to think about the needs of the church and its ministry before other priorities begin to compete for our time and resources. This might seem like a radical departure from the act of making a weekly offering on the collection plate, and yet it helps us realize that if we are to be truly intentional about giving it must become a priority in our life. Pre-Authorized Giving ensures consistency, reliability and commitment.