I watched my computer screen with great interest as a large orange octopus slithers across the deck of a ship. “Keep watching,” a voice says, “you won’t believe what you are about to see.” “No way!” another voice chimes in as the octopus approaches a very small slit in the side of the ship. The opening is barely large enough for water to run off the deck and back into the sea but once the octopus discovers it, it becomes freedom. The videographer moves to observe from various angles so you can see the amazing feat as the octopus squeezes its large mass through a very small opening. Once it falls freely to the ocean, it disappears quickly, swimming away from the ship and danger.

Not having a skeleton is fine if you are an octopus. But for us, without a skeleton, we couldn’t walk, stand, sit, talk, or eat. Our skeleton is critical for us to live. In the July issue of Stewpot I talked about the spiritual nature of tithing, emphasizing how tithing is all about our trust in God and how our control of where it goes undermines that trust. Now I want to address the practical implications of where you pay your tithe. My main point is that tithe and local church budget provide the necessary structure for ministry. Without them the church is like an octopus, limited in movement and not very healthy, vibrant bride of Christ. I appeal to all of us to support God’s church by returning a faithful tithe and giving liberally to the local church budget.

Conclusion

I see a weakened church because we have developed a form of osteoporosis. Our skeleton is being weakened because funds that should be available are being diverted or withheld. Without a strong skeleton, the church is weak and cannot be the healthy, vibrant bride of Christ. I appeal to all of us to support God’s church by returning a faithful tithe and giving liberally to the local church budget.

References
1 Malachi 1:6&7 (New King James Version).
4 Ellen G. White Letter 136, August 14, 1898.

Brief Bio of Ed Fargusson
Ed Fargusson currently serves as Human Resources Director and Assistant to the President of the Northern California Conference. He has spent 20 years as a pastor and 10 years in church administrative work. He and his wife, Anne, have twin sons who attend Loma Linda University School of Medicine.

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“Give to God what’s right—not what’s left.”

5

Stewardship is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.
practical in our environment.

**The Need of a Foundation**

Every building needs some kind of foundation or it will eventually fall. Jesus made that point in the parable of the houses built on the sand and on the rock. We all recognize that principle. However, it has become popular today to only give to that which shows. The foundation of a building or the skeleton in your body doesn’t get much attention. Many say they want to see where their money goes. We are addicted to the gratification of feedback on what we do. That is great but every pastor will tell you that no one wants to give to the electric bill.

Recently, my pastor talked about the gratefulness of a family from our community. A 34-year-old father died, leaving his wife and two young boys. They don’t have a church and asked to use ours for his service. They needed a pastor too. It was the result of faithful members returning tithe and giving to the local church budget that made the ministry of a building and a pastor a reality for that family.

Independent ministries are able to be so targeted in their focus. Maranatha Volunteers International takes groups to other places to build churches. Canvasback Missions, Inc. provides medical teams to Micronesia. These are important ministries that are close in proximity to where I live and deserving of our support. But they didn’t minister to that family in a time of need.

**Temple Corruption**

Without tithe and local church budget, Maranatha and Canvasback would not have the foundation or skeleton to keep operating. It is not a competition for the dollar but rather we are all part of the body and need one another to keep functioning as a whole.

I hear people talk about not paying tithe because they don’t agree with what the church is doing. How well do you think the temple was run in the days of Malachi? Do you think God was happy with the priests of that day? Read Malachi, the whole book! “To you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’ You offer defiled food on My altar.”' The temple in Malachi’s day was corrupt and yet God instructed His people to keep returning their tithe to that corrupt temple.

“Read carefully the third chapter of Malachi, and see what God says about the tithe. If our churches will take their stand upon the Lord’s word, and be faithful in paying their tithe into His treasury, more laborers will be encouraged to take up ministerial work. More men would give themselves to the ministry were they not told of the depleted treasury. There should be an abundant supply in the Lord’s treasury, and there would be if selfish hearts and hands had not withheld the tithes, or made use of them to support other lines of work.”

How should we address problems in the church? Not by withholding tithe! We should pay our tithe to the church without hesitation. Then we should become active in the church to exercise our influence on its operation. As active church members, board members, and representatives at conference constituencies, we should make it known that we expect our church to follow after God. Then we should leave it in God’s hands.

**Ellen White’s Use of Tithe**

There will always be those who claim to follow Ellen White’s example when they divert tithe. I find most people have never actually read for themselves what Ellen White did with tithe. You can read about it yourself on the White Estate website.

Let me share with you my conclusions after studying for myself:

"A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.” —Martin Luther