

“Ever Blessing, Ever Blest”

(3 Skits for Stewardship)

By

Margaret D. McGee

Lyrics by Margaret D. McGee and Linda Nolan

You are welcome to use this skits in your faith community or other nonprofit setting, and to modify them to better suit your community. These skits may not be used in any commercial or for-profit setting, and may not be modified for such use.

As a courtesy, please acknowledge that these skits came from InTheCourtyard.com. I'd love to hear back how they work for you — at margaret@inthecourtyard.com.

Cast:

EDYTHE, vestry member and Budget Committee chair
HOWARD, Budget committee member
BETSY, Budget committee member
TED, Budget committee member
CAROL, Budget committee member
ANGEL

Set:

All three skits take place in a church meeting room. Minimum set contains one table with 6 chairs.

Props:

Papers on the table, plunger for a toilet.

Music:

Accompaniment for hymns.

First Skit
Possibilities, Possibilities

(EDYTHE, a new member of St. Paul's vestry, enters, humming the melody of "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," # 376 in The Episcopal Hymnal 1982. Unless noted otherwise, all hymn numbers refer to that hymnal. Piano scores also available at www.hymnsite.com and other online sites for hymn music.)

(EDYTHE starts setting up for the first meeting of the Budget Committee. Members of the committee enter, take chairs. One chair is left empty.)

(HOWARD and BETSY enter.)

EDYTHE

(Stops humming.)

Hi Howard, come on in.

Betsy, I'm glad you could make it.

(TED enters from the men's bathroom, carrying a plunger.)

Ted, welcome.

TED

We have got to get that fixed. I nearly fell in.

EDYTHE

(CAROL enters.)

Here's Carol. Is that everybody?

HOWARD

Isn't Maude coming?

EDYTHE

Oh, she's in California again, visiting her kids. She said to meet without her. She'll go along with whatever we say.

BETSY

Maude's a sweetie. And so generous.

CAROL

Thank goodness. After St. Peter's window fell out in the middle of confession last month—
(Committee members react—they were there.)

HOWARD

Maude just stepped right up and paid to replace it.

TED

Good old Maude.

EDYTHE

Okay, I call the first meeting of the Budget Committee to order. As you can see from the agenda, we're starting in 'blue skies.' Let's get in the frame of mind of limitless possibilities. Later, we can set priorities and make choices. Right now, put yourself in a world where anything the church wants to do will fit into the budget.

CAROL

What world is that?

BETSY

Use your imagination, Carol. It's like pretend.

EDYTHE

Sort of like pretend. So—what do we support here at St. Paul's in this world of limitless possibility? We asked for input from the congregation. What have you heard back? Something positive.

(Brief silence.)

HOWARD

Eleanor told me how much she liked the new cushions on the pews.

CAROL

And someone said to me, "Why are we wasting money on pew cushions?"

TED

Which is why we put the cushions on every other pew.

EDYTHE

Okay, good. Now let's talk about the future. What about programs?

BETSY

Outreach. People want to do more for the community. This year's budget should definitely tithing to Outreach.

HOWARD

Right on!

TED

We can't do that until we fix the plumbing.

EDYTHE

Blue skies, folks! Keep it positive!

HOWARD

(To the tune of "Christ for the World we Sing," #537)

CHRIST FOR THE WORLD WE SING!

BETSY and HOWARD

AND TEN PERCENT WE BRING

(Others on the committee join in.)

*WITH LOVING ZEAL;
FOR COLD HEARTS TO BE WARMED,
FOR SHELTER FROM THE STORM,
THE WORLD TO BE TRANSFORMED,
AND CHRIST TO HEAL.*

TED

Of course we all want that, but—

EDYTHE

Good! What else? Keep it positive!

CAROL

Consistency and growth in the children and youth program, which means a paid position.

HOWARD

With our demographics? How does that make sense?

CAROL

A part-time youth facilitator will change our demographics!

BETSY

It's true that young people are the church's future.

CAROL

Young people are the church today—right now—as much as we are. It's our job to make St. Paul's a good home for them, just like it is for us. And that will take serious investment.

TED

Listen, people! Before we get too far out into fantasy land, I must inform you—

(To the tune of "Morning has broken," #8)

MORNING HAS BROKEN, LIKE THE MEN'S TOILET!

HOWARD

THE PLUMBER HAS SPOKEN, HE SAYS IT'S TOAST.

BETSY and CAROL

PRAISE FOR THE WORK CREW, THEY'VE TRIED TO FIX IT!

HOWARD and TED

BUT WE NEED TO REPLACE IT, BEFORE IT GIVES UP THE GHOST.

BETSY

Oh, we could spend every penny we take in on nothing but property and salaries! What about Outreach?

CAROL

What about the youth program?

TED

I'm telling you people, if we don't fix that toilet, it's gonna blow!

EDYTHE

(Gets up, tearing hair.)

Stop! I'm going to see if there are any cookies left over from Men's Bible Study. You just think 'blue skies.' Okay?

(EDYTHE walks away, muttering to herself.)

These people just don't get it!

(ANGEL enters. EDYTHE and ANGEL collide.)

Yikes! What are you doing here?

ANGEL

Don't you remember? I'm your guardian angel.

EDYTHE

Thank God! Have you come to take me away?

ANGEL

Sorry, not my job.

EDYTHE

This whole church needs a guardian angel.

ANGEL

Okay, I'm game for that.

EDYTHE

Really?

ANGEL

Sure—sounds like fun.

EDYTHE

Fun? Come and meet the Budget Committee.

(EDYTHE returns to the table with ANGEL. ANGEL sits in the empty chair. EDYTHE sits, all the committee members look at EDYTHE.)

HOWARD

Find any cookies?

EDYTHE

Umm ... I didn't get that far. *(Aside to ANGEL.)* They can't see or hear you, can they?

ANGEL

Edythe, have faith.

EDYTHE

Folks, we're so far apart. How do we come together?

ANGEL

My friend Paul once wrote, “For all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” That’s as true now as it ever was.

(Brief silence.)

CAROL

You know, if we’re going to have kids around here, then we can do more than tell them about Jesus. We can show them, in the way we treat each other and the world. That’s outreach.

BETSY

And with more kids spending more time here in the Fellowship Hall, we really do need toilets that work.

(General agreement.)

TED

We all have our favorite point on the compass. That doesn’t mean we pull in different directions.

ANGEL

I love a compass. It’s a cross with the whole world in it.

ALL CAST

(Singing together.)

IN CHRIST THERE IS NO EAST OR WEST... (#529, v. 1, 2, 4)

**In Christ there is no East or West,
in him no South or North,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.**

**In him shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find,
his service is the golden cord
close-binding all mankind.**

**In Christ now meet both East and West,
in him meet South and North,
all Christly souls are one in him,
throughout the whole wide earth.**

EDYTHE

Meeting adjourned—until next time!

Second Skit

But How Will We Pay For All That?

(TED is seated at the table when EDYTHE enters and sets up for the committee meeting.)

TED

Did you hear about Maude?

EDYTHE

Yep. I did.

(BETSY and CAROL enter.)

CAROL

Did you hear about Maude?

BETSY

We're in trouble now.

(HOWARD enters.)

HOWARD

Trouble? What trouble?

TED

Maude Gruber has resigned from the St. Paul's.

HOWARD

What? Why?

BETSY

What will we do without her? She was the rock we could rely on.

CAROL

Every time an unexpected expense came up, there was Maude, check in hand.

CAROL (Continued)

(To the tune of "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," #680)

O MAUDE, OUR HELP IN AGES PAST!

(Others on the committee join in.)

OUR HOPE OF BIG LUMP SUMS.

SHE WROTE THAT CHECK FOR NEW STAINED GLASS!

HOW COME SHE LEFT? HOW COME?

EDYTHE

Oh, for heavens sake! She's moving to Fresno to be closer to her kids! St. Elmo's of Fresno is thrilled.

(General agreement—yes, they would be.)

TED

Who's going to step up and take her place? That's what I want to know. We need to find some serious givers in this community.

CAROL

No, we need to tighten our belts. I can replace that toilet myself!

ALL OTHERS

No!

BETSY

What we need is to finally get serious about building our endowment. Then we wouldn't be so dependent on year-to-year giving. We should encourage members to leave money to the church in their wills.

HOWARD

So then, we're relying on people dying?

TED

Big gifts is the answer. That's what we need.

TED (Continued)

(To the tune of "Simple Gifts," #554)

A BIG GIFT WOULD MAKE IT SIMPLE

A BIG GIFT WOULD GIVE US GLEE,

A BIG GIFT WOULD GET US

WHERE WE NEED TO BE...

CAROL

(Starting over at the beginning of the verse, creating the effect of "dueling verses." To the tune of "Simple Gift," #554.)

WE HAVE GOT TO KEEP IT SIMPLE

WE HAVE GOT TO BE THRIFTY (sung "thrifteeee")

THERE'S A LOTTA PEOPLE WORRIED

WE MIGHT SPEND TOO MUCH MONEY...

BETSY

No, no, you two just don't get it. Can't you see?

(To the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic.")

MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLORY OF ENDOWMENTS BY THE SCORE!

BETSY AND HOWARD

WE'LL BE TRAMPLING TO THE BANK VAULT WITH DEPOSITS TO BE STORED!

(ANGEL enters.)

EDYTHE

Stop! Stop! Excuse me. Just give me a minute here.

(EDYTHE leaves the table and goes to meet ANGEL.)

Thank goodness! What kept you?

ANGEL

Crisis in the Women's Spiritual Growth Group. Everything's under control now.

EDYTHE

Not in the Budget Committee, it isn't. Come on.

(ANGEL and EDYTHE sit at the table with the committee.)

Now could we please start work on the budget?

CAROL

Like we'll have any money to spend. Is there any hope?

ANGEL

Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts.

(Brief silence.)

CAROL

I'll really miss Maude, and not just because she always saved the day. When I had that trouble last year—you remember—she came over one night, and we watched a movie together. For a couple of hours, I forgot my troubles. It was such a little thing, and I'll never forget it.

TED

Maude was part of that group who put the shower together for my niece, when she came to stay with us. You were in on that too, Betsy, weren't you? And Carol. You didn't even know her, and she needed everything. It meant so much to us all.

BETSY

Oh, well, you know, that's just what we do.

ANGEL

Faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

TED

Let's throw a going-away party for Maude!

HOWARD

And we won't make her pay for a thing!

(General agreement.)

CAROL

I hate to think that I won't see Maude around here anymore.

BETSY

Well, she's only going to California. She'll visit.

TED

I'd like to take a trip to Fresno. I hear it's very nice.

ALL CAST

(Singing together.)

(BLESSED BE THE TIE THAT BINDS, #557 in the United Methodist Hymnal.)

**Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds
is like that to that above.**

**Before our Father's throne
we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one
our comforts and our cares.**

**We share each others' woes,
our mutual burdens bear;
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.**

**When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
and hope to meet again.**

EDYTHE

Meeting adjourned!

Third Skit
Ever Blessing, Ever Blest

(ANGEL enters, sits at the table, alone.)

(EDYTHE enters, carrying agenda papers.)

ANGEL

Hi, Edythe! I'm here for the Budget Committee meeting.

EDYTHE

Uh-oh. It's going to be so bad that you had to get here early?

ANGEL

Oh, no. I just find this whole process so interesting.

EDYTHE

Well, God bless you.

ANGEL

All the time! Don't you just love it?

(Committee members enter together & sit at table.)

EDYTHE

Hey, it's the whole committee at once.

TED

We carpooled.

EDYTHE

Okay, let's get to work.

CAROL

Before we start, I have to tell you all something that happened between the services last Sunday.

HOWARD

What happened? I was at choir practice.

CAROL

That's part of what happened. I went to the eight o'clock service and stayed after for my Altar Guild duty. Between the two services, a mom and dad and their two kids, a little girl and a little boy, were out in our courtyard, walking the labyrinth.

BETSY

Was it Melanie Harper? They've been coming at 10, but I thought she had two girls.

CAROL

No, it wasn't Melanie. I've never seen them before. I don't think they go here. While they were walking the labyrinth, the church organ started to play for choir practice, and you could hear it out on the courtyard.

(Organ music plays softly in background.)

It was beautiful. The mother and her little boy walked the labyrinth, and the little girl was sitting on the bench with the father, watching them. The gardens were lovely. And the music just floated out from the church. It was so beautiful.

TED

That's worship.

(General agreement from the committee.)

CAROL

Maybe that family will come here. Maybe they won't. But I know the experience affected those kids. They were old enough to remember it.

BETSY

Thanks for sharing that, Carol. Trying to come up with a budget can be discouraging. I'm glad to know that worship goes on regardless. That family's experience between our services won't be anywhere on the budget, but it still happened. And it cost nothing.

(Organ music slowly fades out.)

EDYTHE

Well ... not exactly nothing. I worked on the installation of the courtyard. It was mostly paid for with donations and fund raisers, but when we went over budget, the vestry kicked in and made up the difference. The money came from these line items.

HOWARD

And the music program. The organ music was free to our guests, which is wonderful, but wasn't free to us. We pay for music and upkeep of the instruments.

BETSY

Don't forget the music director's salary.

TED

It's not enough. We still lag behind professional standards there.

CAROL

Well, all I can say is, the music was beautiful, and that was rehearsal!

EDYTHE

You could say those moments in the courtyard cost nothing, or you could say they cost everything.

HOWARD

The vestry and the rector asked if we could give a bigger boost to music this year, to bring the music director's salary up to grade and expand how we use music in worship. I say, let's do it!

ANGEL

I'll second that!

EDYTHE

All in favor?

ALL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Aye! (or OK, Yes, etc.)

TED

And how about that boost for the youth programs? What if that family does come back? We want to be ready for them.

ANGEL

Second!

EDYTHE

All in favor?

ALL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Aye! (or OK, Yes, etc.)

EDYTHE

Okay, then. Making progress. Now what about Outreach?

BETSY

What you said about how that family walking our labyrinth cost nothing and everything—that made me think of all the volunteer outreach we do. The things apart from the monetary support going to missions and local needs.

HOWARD

You mean like making breakfasts for the homeless shelter.

CAROL

Offering our kitchen for the community soup kitchen.

TED

Getting together with other churches to clean up the beach.

HOWARD

Lunches for Habitat volunteers.

BETSY

Right—those things don't cost much, and most of it comes out of the Outreach budget. But, I bet that getting those things done touches virtually every line in the budget in one way or another. It's just like Sunday morning between services—doing all that costs nothing, and everything.

HOWARD

Think what we could do if ten percent of this budget went to Outreach.

TED

But can we really tithe to Outreach this year? That's such a big step.

CAROL

And with the other decisions we just made, the bottom line got bigger, so a tithe got bigger. How do we know that money will come in?

ANGEL

My friend Jeremiah says that those who trust in the Lord shall be blessed like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. In the year of drought that tree is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

EDYTHE

Maybe we can take our cue from the Stewardship team. They always say that if you don't feel you can tithe this year, then start with a smaller percentage and work your way up. Right now, Outreach takes about 3% of the budget. Can we do 5% this year? With the intention to raise it again next year?

CAROL

I guess so. It's a little scary. Like stepping off into the void.

BETSY

And letting God catch you.

HOWARD

I used to think that faith meant belief in the doctrine of the church. So, I thought faith was like saying the Nicene Creed. Maybe faith is stepping off into the void, and letting God catch you.

TED

I propose five percent to Outreach.

CAROL

I second.

EDYTHE

Committee?

ALL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Aye! (*or OK, Yes, etc.*)

EDYTHE

I keep thinking about that family, just stopping by. When I was a kid back in my hometown, I used to walk downtown on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, stopping at every church to try its doors. If the doors were open, I went inside. I loved those big, beautiful, empty rooms. The Catholic church had statues and candles lit all the time, and roses in the windows. Amazing. One little church had a glass case with relics from Europe, including a few twisted, black nails.

BETSY

You don't mean...

EDYTHE

No, not nails of the cross. I don't remember what they were relics of—something to do with the history of that church, I guess. But I do remember the nails. They got into me. Sitting in a pew of whatever church was open, I'd feel as if I was on an adventure. A little risky. Not sure I was allowed to be there. Mostly I felt alive. Joyful. And leaving, I'd take a sense of holy space away with me. Space that was made and meant for the presence of God.

(Cast all stands and invites audience to join them in singing the final hymn, "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee.")

ALL CAST AND AUDIENCE

(JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE...#376)

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee,
God of glory, Lord of love;
hearts unfold like flowers before thee,
opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;
drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day!

All thy works with joy surround thee,
earth and heaven reflect thy rays,
stars and angels sing around thee,
center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
flowery meadow, flashing sea,
singing bird and flowing fountain
call us to rejoice in thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blessed,
wellspring of the joy of living,
ocean depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother,
all who live in love are thine;
teach us how to love each other,
lift us to the joy divine.

Mortals, join the mighty chorus,
which the morning stars began;
Father-love is reigning o'er us,
brother love binds man to man.
ever singing, march we onward,
victors in the midst of strife,
joyful music leads us sunward
in the triumph song of life.

Bible references:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. *Galatians 3:28*

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. *Romans 5:1-5*

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.
1 Corinthians 13:13

They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. *Jeremiah 17:8*

Hymn references

“In Christ there is no East or West,” words by John Oxenham. Afro-American spiritual.

“Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” words by John Fawcett, music by Johann G. Nageli.

“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee,” words by Henry Van Dyke, music by Ludwig van Beethoven adapted by Edward Hodges.