

STEWARDSHIP ADVISORY 2021
SOUTH PACIFIC DIVISION REPORT

Director: Julian Archer (appointed 13 Sept, 2021)

The SPD is a very diverse group of 17 countries which includes very wealthy, urbanised nations and very poor nations, so the impacts of COVID-19 and the resulting law changes were felt in very different ways in each region. Key challenges across most nations included:

- Closing of physical churches for many months which led to some members not returning to worship after the 'lockdowns' ended.
- Difficulties with the physical collection of tithes and offerings.
- Increased anxiety due to loss of loved ones, loss of incomes and the constant reporting of bad news.

However, we praise God that it is in our weakness that He reveals His strength! Throughout the crisis many members are taking the opportunity to more deeply commit their lives to God and to better understand Bible prophecy. Online worship services and evangelism are reaching many new people and regions and have given opportunity for many backslidden members to gently recommence their church attendance.

STEWARDSHIP

God knows the future and He prepared many parts of the SPD with technology and established systems to allow faithful stewardship as soon as the pandemic began. When the governments closed churches we were greatly concerned and forecast that tithes and offerings could fall by 20%, 30% or more. After the initial stress we realised that God had foreseen the COVID-19 situation many years earlier and had set up electronic systems for members to remain faithful with their giving.

In hindsight, we can also see that God allows challenges as a way of reminding us of our need for Him and our need to be *always* leaning on His love and grace.

Currently, the key stewardship outcomes of the pandemic are:

- The development of new resources on *Grateful Living* that focus not just on finances but on whole-of-life giving (due late 2021).
- The strengthening of established online/App giving platforms (eg. eGiving in AU/NZ/PNG) and the establishment of new ones (eg. EziPei, MPAISA & Vodaphone).
- The development of new resources to educate and encourage members to return tithes and offerings using electronic giving systems, and the development of new electronic giving systems in nations that don't yet have it.
- The training of 'digital deacons' to physically visit members to collect tithes and offerings and to assist people with electronic giving.
- From 2019 to 2020 we saw a 64% increase in the total value of tithes and offerings returned/given via eGiving in Australia and New Zealand.
- Offerings were negatively impacted from 2019 to 2020 due to closed churches so we are working on ways to correct this challenge.
- Instead of falling as expected, tithes actually increased from 2019 to 2020.

Again, we praise God for His leading through these challenging times. We are reminded that, "Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme will find perplexities vanish and a plain path before their feet." *Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing, p. 281*