

2:44 project (a provisional idea)

The Bible has a lot to say about how we handle money — more than sex, more than prayer — in many ways, our possessions and finances are at the heart of our worship and discipleship. As a leader here, I recognize that I've shortchanged (pun intended) our community when I don't mention the subject matter or challenge us to give generously. Some of this is a reaction to churches I've seen discuss money only terms of asking for more from the congregation. I've wanted to see the act of giving generously done in community with an invitation to all. After some reading of Scripture and discussion, here are some convictions I'd like to bring to life in our community:

- Giving generously is central to our discipleship.
- Giving should be voluntary, joyful, and needs-based.
- Giving is an act that breaks the power of greed, fear, insecurity, and selfishness. It is a radical act of protest to the economies of the world. It is also a radical act of trust in God's provision.
- Everyone should have the opportunity to give. The amount is not important, nor is age, ability, or circumstance.
- People have the right to share their needs (or not) with the community, but as a discipling community of faith, we don't have the right to deny people the opportunity to give.

As a church community, we do rely on tithes and donations to the general fund to stay operational. And we do have a fund earmarked for benevolence, usually 1% of our annual income, to help the occasional need. However, there isn't much room for radical generosity and seeing the community respond to one another's needs in a compassionate and timely way. But we see the newly founded church in Acts had way of way sharing and meeting these needs.

Acts 2:44-47 — “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

There is a connection here between community, meeting one another's needs, praising God, and growing! And we have a similar opportunity in this initiative I'm tentatively naming the 2:44 Project.

Here's what the 2:44 project proposal is — a way of sharing opportunities to give generously together to meet the needs of the community.

How would this work? This is a draft proposal, so here's a sketch of what it might look like:

- If there is a need, we will let people know that there is a 2:44 project meeting after our gathering. People who want to hear more can join the meeting. The people who don't, can skip the meeting.
- At the meeting, the need will be shared. The person(s) in need will always be invited to share their need personally, but their presence is not necessary and they can choose to remain anonymous.
- The people who want to meet the need will be given a slip of paper where they will write down their name and an amount to meet the need. Other than the finance team, givers will also remain anonymous.
- The finance team will tally up amounts offered to be given and determine whether the need is met or exceeded. If it is exceeded, they will calculate the adjusted sum to meet the need and reduce everyone's contribution proportionately.
- If the need is not met, this will also be communicated and people will have a second opportunity to give more or not. We aren't promising to meet every need, we are simply endeavoring to give everyone the opportunity to give.

Who is able to submit a need to the community? This will probably get complicated, but here are some rules to thumb from the finance team

- The person should be connected to the community, known by several people, and in discipleship
- Ideally, the person would have some "skin in the game", whether they contribute their own finances to the need, or volunteer to serve for a fair agreed-upon length of time
- There should be true transparency regarding the need and some level of accountability.
- The pastor and/or finance team (or some other committee) will vet the need before it is brought up before a 2:44 Project meeting.

What do you think of this idea? What would make it better? What are some things we need to address? Think about it, read it again, pray, and let me know (david@opentablecommunity.org). This is an opportunity for feedback and revision. Thanks in advance!