

From Your Bishop: CHILDHOOD LESSONS ON GENEROSITY

As I review the year-end local church reports of my first year as your interim bishop, I give thanks for every member and pastor who has generously supported the church during the COVID -19 pandemic. At our Annual Conference session last July, I shared that we have too many churches that cannot balance their budget, pay salaries, and apportionments. In response, you have been generous. In less than six months, many of our churches have stepped up their giving to strengthen our mission and ministry together.



The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, mentions generosity as a trait of Christian discipleship. I think it is also a measure of the witness of a local church. That is, a church that gives beyond its own needs to support the work of Christ around the world teaches its members how to be generous. Is your church teaching generosity in response to God's abundant blessings? How did you learn about money and giving to others?

My understanding of money started when I was five or six and my grandmother opened her little black silk coin purse and gave me five cents to buy candy at the local market. It was always a major decision whether to buy something good but did not last very long or buy something that might not be as good and lasts longer. For example, should I buy Malted Milk Balls or Kit candies? Of course, if I could afford a Slow Poke with caramel on a stick, I could have both! In any case, here are some lessons from my childhood.

"Love is something if you give it away, give it away, give it away. Love is something if you give it away; it comes back giving more." This simple children's song reminds us that generosity multiplies our blessings and restores our sense of abundance. It is interesting that the song does not place any conditions on who or what we give to because the blessings are always more than the one to receive the gift.

"You are blessed to be a blessing." When we live in gratitude for what we have received through the grace of God, we understand that we have a responsibility to pass our blessings along to others. In short, we did not get what we have by our own merits but by the graciousness of God. As God has blessed us, we are to bless others.

"When the praises go up, the blessings come down!" One of the biggest challenges in life is to see abundance where others see a deficit. Christians begin each day in praise of God for the joy that lies ahead. When we see someone living a life of joy while carrying a heavy burden, their courage inspires us. Jesus often talked about those with "eyes to see and ears to hear" can recognize God's new kingdom amid the kingdoms of this world.

From Your Bishop: Childhood Lessons on Generosity (*Continued*)

"Don't give a dollar to the church—until you give your heart to Jesus Christ!" When I first heard this challenge, I realized there is a relationship between what we give to and who we love. Of course, it is possible to give your way into loving, but when you love your way into giving, you experience a joy that no one can take away from you. On a deeper level, there is a relationship between knowing we are loved and giving. Once you comprehend what God has done for you in Jesus Christ—you feel loved in the depth of your soul—everything you have belongs to God.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Mt. 6:21) Jesus makes the connection between generosity and loving. If our security is found in our ability to store up treasure for ourselves, we find our heart shrinks. When we place our heart—and eternal security—on the things of God, our little treasury is nothing. Be careful about what you value and where you find your sense of meaning.

My grandmother let me make decisions about money early in life. Little did I know that those decisions were more important than what candy I would buy. Generosity is far more than how we spend our money. It is a way of praising God and sharing our blessings with others.

Those churches that face a challenge paying apportionments, please join me in thanking those churches that contribute to make up the shortfall. Our connection works when everyone does their part to strengthen our witness and service. Thank you for being generous in the work of Jesus and his Church!