



Family Values

Virtue Realities

Generosity

Bruce Strade, Director of Congregational Research, Lutheran Community Services Northwest

“Charity begins at home,” so the saying goes. Unfortunately for some people it may also end there. For these people, the idea of giving is foreign to their way of thinking. For others generosity is limited to leftovers. Such sharing involves more surplus than sacrifice. They recognize that the accumulation of things is actually the American way of life. We live in a nation that encourages consumerism and consumption, with built-in obsolescence disguised as progress. When a new, improved model appears, we want to be the first on the block to have one. We then give the old one away, frequently grateful to have someone take it off our hands.

Generosity flows out of an awareness that everything we have is already a gift. The Psalmist says it succinctly: *“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”* (Psalm 24:1) Whether it is the air we breathe, the food we eat, the natural beauty that surrounds us, the friends that care about us, whatever it is, all are entrusted to us by a generous, loving Creator. It is that same creative force that became flesh, dwelt among us and from whose *“fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”* (John 1:16) God gave us the gift of his Son who in turn sacrificed His life on the cross so that we in turn may have life. He now comes to us through the Spirit bearing gifts, one of which is generosity. (Gal. 5:22) The abundant grace is such that it only exists when it is given away.

Sharing resources with those in need is a prominent theme throughout Scriptures. The children of Israel were instructed: *“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyards, you shall leave them for the poor and the alien.”* (Leviticus 10:9,10) Isaiah reminds Israel, *“If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.”* (Isaiah 58:10). Jesus refers back to this section of Isaiah when he says to those who will inherit the kingdom: *“... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you*

visited me.” (Matt. 25:35,36) Because generosity was so much a part of who they were, they did not remember when these acts of charity took place.

Heartfelt generosity is not interested in recognition. Jesus reminds us: *“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do . . . , so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.”* (Matt. 6:2). Jesus also praises the widow who *“out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on,”* in comparison to the rich who gave out of abundance. (Luke 21:1-4). Remember the parable of the rich man who hoarded his goods in large warehouses, only to be called home that night. Jesus concludes: *“So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God.”* (Luke 12:16-21) Jesus assures us that *“the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”* (Luke 6:38) The following question, even though troubling, gets to the essence of generosity: *“How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?”* (1John 3:17)

The following are ways to practice generosity:

1. **Pray for generosity.** Be prepared to help those in need.
2. **Recognize all you have as a gift.** Remind yourself daily that what you have is what you have been given, including time, talents and things.
3. **Share your gifts.** Remember Paul’s example to Timothy: *“if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.”* (1Tim. 6:8). Give without hope of reward.
4. **Inventory your “stuff.”** Think twice before you accumulate more things. Redefine your priorities.
5. **Model charity to your children.** Help them become rich toward God rather than self-indulgent.

Affirmation: Today I will be generous!

Family Values is provided as a service to our partner congregations by



Portland Office
605 S.E. 39th Avenue, Portland, OR 97214
503-231-7480 • www.lcsnw.org