

POWER OF GIVING: *FOR THE SAKE OF THE CHURCH*

Gift giving is an ancient tradition. One could almost say it goes back to the beginning of time. Cain and Abel brought a gift from the field and flock and offered it to God. Jacob, wishing to establish a new relationship with his brother Esau, met Esau with a large flock of sheep and goats. When the wise men from the east came to see baby Jesus, they opened their treasure chests, offering him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

We still practice gift giving today. Would anyone gather for Christmas without a gift for a spouse or child or grandchild? Would anyone go to a birthday party and not take a gift? No matter how small or large, the significance is in the "giving of a gift." It is amazing, even when invited to a party or dinner, we all feel obligated to give the host/hostess a gift.

Why "gift giving?" Probably the most important reason is the establishment of a relationship. The passing of a gift from one person to another says something to the receiver of the gift as well as the giver of the gift. In some cases a gift is a substitute for words. It is a subtle way of building a bond and relationship between individuals.

In many ways a gift is simply an act of kindness or an expression of caring. Too often the choice of a gift is not exactly what the receiver wants or needs. However, the giving and receiving of a gift marks a concern of care. Even the simple act of offering a glass of water or cup of coffee or tea signals the human instinct of caring.

Think about the many times one receives a thank you card, award, or gift of appreciation, none of which is a significant gift that will make a difference in the life-style of the recipient. But what it does say, not only to the individual recipient but also to friends and the public, is "job well done."

St. Paul, in Second Corinthians (chapter 9), makes a big point of "gift giving." Interestingly, he points out the virtue of a "voluntary gift" that comes freely from the heart and will of the giver, not because of guilt or extortion. . . "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (vs.7. . . the Greek text uses the word "hilarious giver"). Perhaps we can simply restate it with an expression of today. . . "the joy of giving."

Gift giving makes a difference. It may be a learned art or a practice that needs cultivation. Whichever, it makes no difference because in the end it says much about the heart and mind of an individual. If we have received much in life, we have much to give.

For the Sake of the Church endowment effort is a worthy program to practice the art of giving. Today's gift(s) will reduce the cost of Lutheran students attending a Concordia as they prepare to serve their church and society in the future. *For the Sake Of the Church* endowment effort offers an opportunity to be in touch, care about students and how they will serve in the future, and demonstrate that Lutheran higher education is appreciated!