

# THE GIFT

A CHRISTIAN PUBLICATION BY ST. JOHN LUTHERAN

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JANUARY 2009

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## A RESOLUTION

Many of you have noticed a new addition to the weekly bulletin. Along with the order of service, the prayer list, and the announcements about upcoming events, is a new section reporting our weekly giving. It lists the various amounts received in the offering plate the previous week, provides a total, and for the sake of comparison, also includes a line showing the average weekly expenses for 2007. For the Sunday of December 28<sup>th</sup>, our weekly offering was reported as \$1268.00; our average weekly expenses in 2007 were \$1964.91. Even a theologian can figure out that there is a problem with that sort of accounting.

This new bulletin item was created as a result of the action of the council at our last meeting, and I must say that I am ambivalent about its presence. The reason the bulletin item has been established is that weekly offerings have not been covering expenses for quite some time. It is the hope of the council that by making the congregation aware of our regular shortfalls, that giving will be increased. The idea is that members of the congregation will see that the congregation is not meeting expenses and will feel a greater sense of responsibility to make up the difference. That may or may not be effective, and while I will be delighted if it is effective,

I am also a little bit troubled by the theology behind this sort of giving. This is need-based giving. The congregation has certain needs, and you, as members of the congregation, are being asked to fulfill an obligation to the congregation by meeting those needs. It is very rational, but I doubt that most members want to think of giving their offering as paying a bill. This is giving based upon scarcity.

Rather than thinking about giving based on the need of the congregation, I encourage you to think about giving based upon thankfulness. Giving based upon thankfulness is based not upon what the congregation needs to receive, but upon your response to what you have already been given. This is sort of like not returning your neighbors plate of cookies empty. This is the giving that is based upon our responsible stewardship. This is the giving based upon God's abundance. This is the sort of giving that comes from a generous spirit - and is a joy to do.

And here is the rub: when giving is a joy, when giving is a response to Christ's blessings, when we give out of our abundance rather than in order to meet the congregations needs - our giving is almost always significantly greater. And so I am ambivalent about encouraging need based giving. I don't want to encourage need based giving but rather I want to encourage thankful

giving. But I know the reality of the human heart. I know that sometimes the cry of need is easier to respond to than the need to be thankful. If that is the case with you – if need based giving is more attractive to you – then think of the needs of all of God’s creation, and give based upon those needs – not just the needs of the congregation of St. John’s – because those are the needs we as Christians are called to address.

“The Lutheran” magazine is suggesting that respect is a worthwhile

resolution for 2009. Respect is an important resolution, and I affirm our world’s need for it – though I don’t want to limit respect to just 2009. In this new year, I want to propose a resolution of my own. A resolution starting in 2009, to be thankful, and to be generous.

Long Live The King!

Pastor Andersen

## **REFLECTIONS ON STEWARDSHIP**

An oxymoron is the use of two terms which are contradictory in nature. "Jumbo shrimp" is an oxymoron. "Ferocious lamb" is another. "Dumb scholar" is yet another.

One of the saddest and most contradictory is the oxymoron, "Stingy Christian." Because we have been redeemed through our faith in Christ, Christians should be the most generous of all people. We have been abundantly blessed of God, who has given us all things richly to enjoy (Rom. 8:32).

James 1:17 expresses this truth clearly: "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

Think about some of God's good gifts:

God gives the seed (Gen. 1:11).

God gives the rain (Job 5:10).

God gives health (Jer. 30:17).

God gives life (Acts 17:25).

God gives strength (Isa. 40:29).

God gives riches (1 Chron. 29:12).

God gives grace (2 Cor. 12:9).

God gives eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

And God gives us money and the ability to get wealth. Solomon said that money is one of God's gifts to people. The purpose for which He gives us money is stated clearly in Ecclesiastes 5:19 — for our enjoyment.

Some of us make that the primary reason for money. We major in pleasure and the things money can do for us. But there is another major purpose God gives us money, something that also can bring great pleasure: To give it back to Him.

That's why of all the oxymorons in existence, "Stingy Christian" is the most contradictory. We who have been given the most from God should be the most generous people in the world.

As the tombstone in an old cemetery read, "What I spent, I had; what I saved, I lost; what I gave, I have."

## **HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS**

- ◆ Thank you to the following people for providing poinsettias during the Advent and Christmas seasons:

Helen Muto  
Ernie and Minnie Lieb  
Joan Beyer  
Steve Eden Family  
Jody Carroll Family  
George and Marilee Hejna  
Marlin and Sharon Eden  
Ken and June Eden  
The Johnsons  
St. John Church

- ◆ Lots of fun was had by all those who went Christmas caroling on Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup>! There was a total of 18 carolers, young and old, who visited several individuals in the surrounding area: Raymond and Florence Steffes, Elizabeth Nursing Home, Elizabeth Assisted Living, Irvin and LaVonne Lieb, Stockton Nursing Home, and Gene and Delma Bartch. Thanks to all who joined in on the fun!
- ◆ Kudos to the Sunday School Teachers and kids for an outstanding Christmas program performance on Sunday, December 28<sup>th</sup>! Thank you for the creative yet meaningful way of reciting the Christmas story and reminding us of the true meaning of Christmas!
- ◆ This year, 41 needy children's names were eagerly taken from the Jane Adams giving tree. Information was also provided on other individuals living in the child's home, so that those who wished to remember them with a gift could also do so. On Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, the gifts were delivered to the Family Counseling Center in Freeport, IL, where the following comments were heard: "what a giving church you are," "this is amazing," "what beautifully wrapped gifts," "we can't thank you enough for what you've done." Many thanks to all who helped make a brighter Christmas for these children and their families!

Charlotte Blackbourn, Chairperson

## **EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE**

*Thank You* for the Christmas goodies and well wishes! Orville Klopff

*Thank You* to everyone who remembered me in prayer and with cards, calls, or visits after I had my accident. Marion Guenzler

*Thank You* to everyone for their cards, gifts, thoughts and prayers since Ella's birth and hospitalization. She is doing quite well now, considering how tiny she was at birth. With love from the Hoffman family – Matt, Joy, and Ella

*Thank you* to the congregation for the Christmas gift certificates to Golden Corral and Applebee's. I'm sure the food will be delicious! Kathy Guenzler

*Thank you* to the Sunday School for the beautiful sun catcher. It is hanging in my dining room window so I can see it all day long. Kathy Guenzler

## **HEAR YE, HEAR YE...**

- Anyone who did not receive the 2009 offering envelopes and would like some, please see Vicki Wurster!
- Anyone who does not receive a copy of *The Lutheran* magazine and would like to do so, or if you wish not to receive the publication any further, please see Jeff Randecker!
- Anyone who would like the monthly newsletter emailed to them, or if you know of a friend or family member who may enjoy getting the monthly email, please see Jen Johnson!

## **PRAYER CONCERNS AND UPDATES**

*Joe Dvorak Sr.* continues to be in need of regular blood and iron transfusions due to his body's difficulty to manufacture red blood cells or maintain proper iron levels.

*Allison Hillen* has been hospitalized several times since November due to gastrointestinal infections that require intravenous antibiotics due to her suppressed immune system from her multi-organ transplant last year.

*Jack Reel's* burns have healed very well, with exception of the scalp area, for which he is currently seeking medical treatment. His right lung continues to strengthen and he is no longer bed-ridden! Jack is able to walk without a walker and drives alone for short distances. He and his wife are using the nice quilts given to them by the St. John quilters and are enjoying the extra warmth they provide!

We continue to ask God's blessings upon the following individuals: Vernetta Kappes, Meredith Townsend, Allen Wurster, Joe Dvorak Sr., Bob and Linda Randecker, Bob Bauer, Allison Hillen, Cindy Paisley, Delma Bartch, Kevin Meiners, Warren Parker, Dan Koester, and the men and women serving in the armed forces.

**ST. JOHN WELCOMES  
BLAKE ZINK AND  
MARYANN EDEN, NEWLY  
BAPTIZED MEMBERS, TO  
THE FAMILY OF GOD!**

## **A THOUGHT TO PONDER**

(A St. John's member received this email and wished to share it)

A churchgoer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons."

This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this "clincher," "I've been married for 30 years now. In that time, my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this. They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"

When you are DOWN to nothing, God is UP to something! Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible! Thank God for our physical and our spiritual nourishment!

## **JANUARY VOLUNTEERS**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Lector</i>	<i>Acolyte</i>	<i>Greeters</i>
January 4 <sup>th</sup>	Calvin Klopff	Matthew Carroll	Clyde and LaVonne Eden
January 11 <sup>th</sup>	Laura Albrecht		Ken and June Eden
January 18 <sup>th</sup>	Daylon Scheele	Paige Paisley	Daylon and Shirley Scheele
January 25 <sup>th</sup>	Sandy Andersen		George and Marilee Hejna

Ushers: Ken and June Eden, Carl and Sam Albrecht

Treasurer's Assistant: Rene Albrecht

Sunday School Teachers: Jen Johnson, Daylon Scheele, JoAnn Eden

## **NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS**

Need a New Year's resolution? How about "I resolve to help compile and copy the newsletter?" If you have some extra time to spare, please let Jen Johnson know. Thanks!

# **HAVE A GREAT MONTH!**

