

STATISTICS/FACTS

From the World Health Organization's Fact Files:

- Water scarcity affects one in three people on every continent of the globe. The situation is getting worse, as needs for water rise along with population growth, urbanization and increases in household and industrial uses.
- Almost one fifth of the world's population (about 1.2 billion people) lives in areas where the water is physically scarce. One quarter of the global population also lives in developing countries that face water shortages due to a lack of infrastructure to fetch water from rivers and aquifers.

<http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/water/en/index.html>

- An estimated 2.6 billion people lack access to adequate sanitation, globally. If the current trend continues, by 2015 there will be 2.7 billion people without access to basic sanitation.
- In Africa, 115 people die every hour from diseases linked to poor sanitation, poor hygiene and contaminated water.
- Every US\$1 invested in improved sanitation translates into an average return of US\$9. Those benefits are experienced specifically by poor children and in the disadvantaged communities that need them most.

<http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/sanitation/en/index.html>

- The number of children under five years of age who suffer from undernutrition is estimated to be 178 million, and 40% of those live in Africa and Southeast Asia.
- About 90% of the world's resources for health are spent by less than 20% of the world's population, living mostly in wealthier countries. Poorer regions, such as Africa and Southeast Asia, have the largest share of disease and 37% of the world's population, but spend 2% of global resources on health.

http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/health_statistics/en/index.html

- About two-thirds of child deaths are preventable through access to practical, low-cost interventions, and effective primary care up to five years of age.

http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/child_health2/en/index.html

Additional Statistics from the United Nations' World Food Programme Website:
<http://www.wfp.org/hunger/stats>

GLOBAL HUNGER

- 925 million people do not have enough to eat - more than the populations of the U.S., Canada and the European Union. *(Source: FAO news release, 14 September 2010)*
- 98 percent of the world's hungry live in developing countries. *(Source: FAO news release, 2010)*
- The Asia and Pacific region is home to over half the world's population and nearly two thirds of the world's hungry people. *(Source: FAO news release, 2010)*
- Women make up a little over half of the world's population, but they account for over 60 percent of the world's hungry. *(Source: Strengthening efforts to eradicate hunger..., ECOSOC, 2007)*
- 65 percent of the world's hungry live in only seven countries: India, China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan and Ethiopia. *(Source: FAO news release, 2010)*

CHILD HUNGER

- More than 70 percent of the world's 146 million underweight children under age five live in just 10 countries, with more than 50 percent located in South Asia alone. *(Source: Progress for Children: A Report Card on Nutrition, UNICEF, 2006)*
- 10.9 million children under five die in developing countries each year. Malnutrition and hunger-related diseases cause 60 percent of the deaths. *(Source: The State of the World's Children, UNICEF, 2007)*
- The cost of undernutrition to national economic development is estimated at US\$20-30 billion per annum. *(Source: Progress for Children: A Report Card on Nutrition, UNICEF, 2006)*
- One out of four children - roughly 146 million - in developing countries are underweight. *(Source: The State of the World's Children, UNICEF, 2007)*
- Every year WFP feeds more than 20 million children in school feeding programmes in some 70 countries. In 2008, WFP fed a record 23 million children. *(Source: WFP)*

School Feeding Unit)

MALNUTRITION

- It is estimated that 684,000 child deaths worldwide could be prevented by increasing access to vitamin A and zinc. *(Source: WFP Annual Report 2007)*
- Undernutrition contributes to 53 percent of the 9.7 million deaths of children under five each year in developing countries. *(Source: Under five deaths by cause, UNICEF, 2006)*
- Lack of Vitamin A kills a million infants a year. *(Source: Vitamin and Mineral Deficiency, A Global Progress Report, UNICEF)*
- Iron deficiency is the most prevalent form of malnutrition worldwide, affecting an estimated 2 billion people. Eradicating iron deficiency can improve national productivity levels by as much as 20 percent. *(Source: World Health Organization, WHO Global Database on Anaemia)*
- Iron deficiency is impairing the mental development of 40-60 percent children in developing countries. *(Source: Vitamin and Mineral Deficiency, A Global Progress Report, p2, UNICEF)*
- Vitamin A deficiency affects approximately 25 percent of the developing world's pre-schoolers. It is associated with blindness, susceptibility to disease and higher mortality rates. It leads to the death of approximately 1-3 million children each year. *(Source: UN Standing Committee on Nutrition. World Nutrition Situation 5th report. 2005)*
- Iodine deficiency is the greatest single cause of intellectual disabilities and brain damage. Worldwide, 1.9 billion people are at risk of iodine deficiency, which can easily be prevented by adding iodine to salt. *(Source: UN Standing Committee on Nutrition. World Nutrition Situation 5th report. 2005)*

FOOD & HIV/AIDS

- In the countries most heavily affected, HIV has reduced life expectancy by more than 20 years, slowed economic growth, and deepened household poverty. *(Source: 2008 UNAIDS Global Report on the AIDS Epidemic)*
- In sub-Saharan Africa alone, the epidemic has orphaned nearly 12 million children aged under 18 years. *(Source: 2008 UNAIDS Global Report on the AIDS)*

Epidemic).

- WFP and UNAIDS project that it will cost on average US\$0.70 cents per day to nutritionally support an AIDS patient and his/her family. (*Source: Cost of Nutritional Support for HIV/AIDS Projects, WFP, July 2008*)

Assistance for orphans and vulnerable children is estimated at US\$0.31 per day. (*Source: Cost of Nutritional Support for HIV/AIDS Projects, WFP, July 2008*)

QUOTES

If I see the gift as mine alone to give, I might give hesitantly, even grudgingly, considering my options, then giving from a sense of ought. If I see the gift as God's who allows me to use it for a time, then the gift can flow more freely, as I join with others to be a channel for God's love and mercy.

—Roberta Porter from her poem, *Grace in Giving*

He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own.

—Confucius

It is every man's obligation to put back into the world at least the equivalent of what he takes out of it.

—Albert Einstein

Be kind and merciful. Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier.

—Mother Teresa

An individual can march for peace or vote for peace and can have, perhaps, some small influence on global concerns. But the same individual is a giant in the eyes of a child at home. If peace is to be built, it must start with the individual. It is built brick by brick.

—Dorothy Day

Keep giving Jesus to your people, not by words, but by your example, by your being in love with Jesus, by radiating holiness and spreading his fragrance of love everywhere you go. Just keep the joy of Jesus as your strength. Be happy and at peace.

—Mother Teresa

And the work of God is rarely dull, but it's not always necessarily what we think. Transformation is hard stuff. Seeking to bring about the kingdom of God -- caring for the poor, feeding the hungry, visiting prisoners, caring for the sick, renouncing demons in God's name -- you don't do that in a 15-minute lunch break.

—Enuma Okoro

We are not called to help people. We are called to follow Jesus, in whose service we learn who we are and how we are to help and be helped.

—Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon

The question should not be 'What would Jesus do?' but rather, more dangerously, 'What would Jesus have me do?' The onus is not on Jesus but on us, for Jesus did not come to ask semidivine human beings to do impossible things. He came to ask human beings to live up to their full humanity; he wants us to live in the full implication of our human gifts, and that is far more demanding.

—Peter J. Gomes

Our present ecological crisis, the biggest single practical threat to our human existence in the middle to long term, has, religious people would say, a great deal to do with our failure to think of the world as existing in relation to the mystery of God, not just as a huge warehouse of stuff to be used for our convenience.

—Archbishop Rowan Williams

Christ has no body now, but yours. No hands, no feet on earth, but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion into the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which Christ blesses the world.

—Teresa of Avila

Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

—Jeremiah 24:7

I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the gospel, period. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned with the whole person. When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say, 'Now is that political or social?' He said, 'I feed you.' Because the good news to a hungry person is bread.

—Desmond Tutu

Each one according to [their] means should take care to be at one with everyone else, for the more one is united to [their] neighbor, the more [they are] united with God.

—Dorotheus of Gaza

Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

—George Bernard Shaw

Christianity is being concerned about your fellow [human], not building a million-dollar church while people are starving right around the corner. Christ was a revolutionary person, out there where it was happening. That's what God is all about, and that's where I get my strength.

—Fannie Lou Hammer

To work in the world lovingly means that we are defining what we will be for, rather than reacting to what we are against.

—Christina Baldwin

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

—Matthew 5:23-24

My voice would like to have the strength of the voice of the humble and lowly. It is a voice that denounces injustice and proclaims hope in God and humanity. For this hope is the hope of all human beings who yearn to live in communion with all persons as their brother and sisters and as children of God.

—Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, from his Nobel Lecture

Teach me, God, to pray
in works as much as in words
to make my actions thoughtful messages
to make my actions more beautiful than words.

—Wayne Lee Jones

The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference.

—Elie Wiesel

Live like Jesus did, and the world will listen.

—Mahatma Gandhi

Mary represents the 'rebel consciousness' that is essential to Jesus' gospel. Wherever the gospel is preached, we must remember that its good news will make you crazy. Jesus will put you at odds with the economic and political systems of our world. This gospel will force you to act, interrupting the world as it is in ways that make even pious people indignant.

—Emmanuel Katongole (Uganda)

The theology of wealth says, "I give so that I can get." Christian simplicity says, "I get so that I can give." The difference is profound.

—Richard J. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*

In giving you are throwing a bridge across the chasm of your solitude.

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Wisdom of the Sands*, translated
from French by Stuart Gilbert

Bread for myself is a material question. Bread for my neighbor is a spiritual one.

—Nicholas Berdyaev

The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who
have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have little.

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

The sage never tries to store things up. The more he does for others, the more he has.
The more he gives to others, the greater his abundance.

—Lao Tzu

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Frank Ramirez

Frank Ramirez is the pastor of the Everett (PA) Church of the Brethren. He has been a pastor for over thirty years, is the author of many books and with his wife Jennie shares three adult children and three grandchildren.

LITURGY WITH COMMUNION

Call to Worship (To the tune AR HYD Y NOS)

Come, my family, come with caring, giving as one.
One great hour spent in sharing, new world begun.
Share we now this sweet communion,
Foretaste of divine reunion,
Give, receiving; live, believing; praising the Son.

Storm and thunder, human blunder, war, plague, disease,
Torn asunder. Ah, what wonder, God's healing breeze
In the Spirit tugs the heartstrings,
Seek no merit: give what love brings,
Joy revealing, springs the healing, our God to please!

Opening Prayer

Spirit of God, descend to us today. Move in our midst, that we may sense from afar, as well as close at hand, Your joy at our efforts, and Your greater joy when those whose suffering is relieved turn to You in thanksgiving! Let our Alleluias, let our Hosannas, rise from the far corners of the earth, blending and echoing, to be met by Your most holy expressions of joy in our efforts. Let Your light shine here in this place. Let Your will be done, not only for us, but in the lives of Your family, of our family, all humanity, all creation. This we pray in Your name. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Jesus, Savior, Redeemer, Sustainer, we have sown sparingly. We have kept churlishly. We have watched suspiciously. We have fumed wrathfully. The world is suffering, and we make excuses – that we cannot account for every cent so it must be wasted – that we cannot insure the good we expect and we must not be disappointed – that every motive is false and none can be trusted. Should we be surprised that in a world of suffering, where You are so little known, that our harvest is so disappointing? Should we be shocked that we reap sparingly? Renew us! Save us! Revive us again! Fill us with hope that we should dare once more to sow, to reap, and to become cheerful givers, trusting that You will guide and guard all we give and all we do! Amen.

Words of Assurance: (based on 2 Corinthians 9:11-12)

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God! This ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

Litany (based on Lamentations 3:19-24)

All: The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.

One: So speak those suffering the afflictions of war, of disease, of natural disasters, and human failings. What shall sustain them? What gives hope? Hear the voice of one whose nation was destroyed in the ravages of war:

All: But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: God's steadfast love never ceases, these mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

One: Great is God's faithfulness, in fire, storm, and rain, in flood, fear, and famine. Let us be the hands, the heart, the hope of Jesus. Let the salvation of the world begin.

All: The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in God."

Invitation to Communion & Communion Prayer

Around the year 112 AD Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, reported to the Emperor Trajan about what he had learned about the Christians, whom he suspected of partaking in bizarre and seditious practices. Some of his information came from former Christians who renounced their faith. However, he also tortured two slave women, both of them deacons of the church. He discovered they posed no obvious threat to the empire. What he did learn was they met before dawn (since many of them as slaves had to work seven days a week) to sing a hymn to Christ as to a god, to swear an oath not to steal, lie, or commit adultery, and to share a meal of ordinary food, which was probably the Love Feast communion.

There are no more Roman emperors, but we still meet to sing a hymn in praise of Christ, pledging to keep God's law, and to share in one way or another the simple elements of communion. As we give our special offering today in solidarity with giving and receiving children of God around the world, so we break the bread and drink the cup in solidarity with the family of God--those who worship freely, as well as those who even today risk torture and death, meeting in secret as did our ancestors in the faith.

Let us pray:

In the same way that this broken bread was first scattered over the hills and then gathered to become one loaf, so, too, gather Your church from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom. For Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ, forever.

(From the first century church manual known as the Didache, or The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles, author's translation)

Invitation to the Offering & Dedicatory Prayer

It was the middle of the Civil War, January 1, 1863, and the place was the Lynville Creek, Virginia, meetinghouse of the German Baptist Brethren. The Elder John Kline, who would be murdered a year and a half later because of his adamant stand against slavery, preached to his congregation about the importance of giving for the relief of those who considered the Brethren their enemies because they refused to fight for the so-called Great Cause. Kline called his people to become cheerful givers with words that should speak to us now:

Let our offerings this day be from the heart; and probably the best proof we can have that they come from the heart is a willingness and cheerful readiness to give of our substance to the needy poor. We must divide out, Brethren, to those who have, on account of the war pressure, been unable to provide for themselves. Think of the barefooted, half-clad and half-fed children in our land! I do not undervalue what you have already done. I know you have done much; but we should not feel that the burden of duty has all rolled from our shoulders as long as there is one needy brother or sister or child in our land. Brethren, I speak from the heart when I say that the church has never before enjoyed such an opportunity to grow rich, as the present offers. I mean rich in good works; rich in treasures laid up in heaven; rich in her title to an eternal inheritance in heaven, which our Lord calls "*the true riches.*"

(The Diary of John Kline, p 460, public domain)

God, unchanging in crisis and calm, accept these gifts from the heart. May they bless our sisters and brothers close at hand, and around the globe. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Charge (based on 2 Corinthians 9:10)

Supply seed to the sower and bread for food. Multiply the seed of the world for sowing and increase the harvest of God's righteousness.

Benediction

Let the mirth of God's laughter renew your Spirits.

Go forward as a giver and receiver of joy!

Hymn Suggestions:

God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending (*Chalice Hymnal* #606)

(Robert L. Edwards/ Hyfrydol)

God, Make Us Your Family

(Tim Whipple)

For We Are Strangers No More

(Kenneth I Morse/ Dianne Huffman Morningstar)

Revive Us Again!

(William P. MacKay/ attributed to John J. Husband)

LITURGY WITHOUT COMMUNION

Call to Worship

Come – prepared to work in God’s vineyard while it is still day,
Come – with joyful heart to God’s work with singing,
Come – enter into God’s field with praise.

The Source of all Joy desires your presence not only in the eternal realm to come, but in this present realm where there is suffering, want, and pain. Let us take heart, for we are not alone in this endeavor, but with sister congregations and communions we come to this Week of Compassion, that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Let us delight in each other as God delights in us!

Come – now is the time to give thanks and praise in joy!

Opening Prayer

God of gifts, God of giving, You have called us together as one. You are not willing that even one should perish, but that all might have abundant life, now and forever. May our witness in worship and in worshipful living be strengthened because we choose to share together in Your name. We come together as one economy, one household of faith, in the ministry of praise and prayer. May we come to a saving knowledge of Your grace through Your Spirit. May our fellowship of giving grow until all are one in worship and service. Let this be according to Your grand design, in whose mighty name we pray!
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

What will it profit us if we give bountifully and do not receive abundance in return?
What will it matter if we give of ourselves and do not give with joy? We pray that, as we reach around the world in your name, we might reach inside ourselves to find that your seeds of generosity, planted bountifully, are ripe for your harvest of joy. We are coming to this time with uncertainty. The problems are so great, and we are what we are. What are we few among so many? Cleanse our hearts of doubt that we might bring forth thirty-fold, sixty-fold, a hundred-fold in your name. Forgive us our timidity, our cynicism, our doubt, that we might grow as partners in ministry, in mission, with You, our Creator, and with the suffering of the world. Amen.

Words of Assurance (based on 2 Corinthians 9:11-12)

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

Litany (based on Psalm 112:1-9)

All: Praise God!

One: We are happy in our praise. We delight in God’s plan for the world.

All: Our legacy, passed down from our spiritual ancestors, is blessed. We are rich beyond measure in God’s goodness.

One: May the divine light shine in the darkness through our lives. May grace, mercy, and righteousness abound. May God's justice reign.

All: Nothing will deter us. We will not be moved. Our hearts are firm, secure in our savior.

One: We will distribute freely. We have given and will give to the poor of the earth, who are God's people.

All: May this legacy of love endure forever. May God be gloried as we take joy in giving.

Invitation to Offering

Did you ever promise yourself that you'd do something "if it's the last thing I ever do?" When David the King dedicated the work of the Temple with his own offering for the yet unbuilt structure his son Solomon would complete, it really was pretty much the last thing he ever did. He died shortly thereafter.

His offering prayer, recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:10-18, acknowledged our solidarity with the poor, recalling our roots as aliens and outsiders so we will always take the side of those who are marginalized and suffering. David praised God as the source of all good things, and after reminding all who prayed with him that we are just passing through this world, he concluded with an expression of joy! That joy is what makes our time of offering so wonderful. David saw clearly the larger picture – who we are, and how we are connected, and how God's joy is increased by our joy in giving and the joy of those suffering in receiving. Come, let us bring our offerings forward and together joyfully dedicate them with these words of David.

Dedicatory Prayer (based on 1 Chronicles 29:11-18)

One: Blessed are you, O Creator, the God of our family of faith, forever and ever. The greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty are Yours; all that is in the heavens and on the earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Redeemer, and You are exalted above all.

All: Riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all. In Your hand are power and might; and it is in our hand to make great and to give strength to all.

One: And now, our God, we give thanks to You and praise Your glorious name. For who are we that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from You, and of Your own have we given You.

All: For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.

One: Our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building You a house for Your holy name comes from Your hand and is all Your own.

All: I know, my God, that You search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen Your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to You.

One: O God of our ancestors, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward You. Receive these, our humble gifts, and magnify them for Your work in the world. Amen.

Charge (based on 2 Corinthians 9:8)

The task before us is not too great. God is able to provide us with every blessing in abundance, so that, by recognizing that what we have is enough, we may share abundantly in every good work.

Benediction

Go forth joyfully!

May the peace of the Giver of all good things be given unto you!

Open your hearts to receiving the abundance of blessing,

your lives to perceiving the needs of God's people,

your hands to giving with joy and thanksgiving,

your spirits to living a life of plenty that is shared with all, all in the name of Christ!

Amen.

Hymn Suggestions:

We Give Thee But Thine Own (*Chalice Hymnal* #382)

(William W. How/ Cantica Laudis)

Brothers and Sisters of Mine Are the Hungry

(Kenneth I. Morse/Wilbur E. Brumbaugh)

God, Whose Farm Is All Creation

(John Arlott/attributed to C.F. Witt)

SERMON STARTERS

Pam Auble

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Gratitude is good medicine. Seriously. Gratitude initiates the body's creation of oxytocin, a hormone clinically shown to enhance trust, empathy and generosity. Oxytocin also decreases one's sense of fear and stress. In other words, being thankful increases one's overall sense of well-being. Paul reminds us that God loves a cheerful **giver**. Now modern science tells us that giving creates a cheerful **receiver**. Apparently, this was no news to Paul, who wrote long ago about the benefits of sharing for the receiver who, of course, is blessed by needs being met. She is also filled with joy in recognizing God's presence in her life. Furthermore, she may be transformed into a giver herself.

Sharing, Paul tells us, "supplies the needs" and one is blessed. Rather, it is shelter, food, clothing or a kind word--what is shared with us and meets our needs--that blesses us. Regardless of the specific need, knowing someone is aware of our need and chooses to help is an affirmation of our worth.

Sharing, Paul goes on to say, "overflows with many thanksgivings to God". As one's needs are met, he comes to acknowledge God's activity in his life and joy abounds. Although God has always been in his midst, a growling stomach can drown out the music sent by God in the songbirds and a war-torn world can make one blind to a night sky of God's stars. When blessed with what one needs, it seems that he can acknowledge the flood of God's blessings and he is saturated with joy.

Sharing has transformative power. When blessed by another's generosity, the recipient is inspired to seek opportunities to spread his joy and share when he is able. One example is found in the young Nacilien Josue, a 10-year-old from Haiti who benefited from a unique ministry of Week of Compassion after the earthquake of 2010. Nacilien was served by a trauma therapy designed for children and after a time he was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up. Nacilien said he wanted to become the captain of a ship so he could bring medical supplies to sick people. Like Nacilien, a recipient of help can potentially become a provider of blessings for others. He is transformed and will look for every opportunity to give to another in need.

There are those who offer help, those who receive help and then there are those who witness it all. As observers, they, too, are blessed, transformed and brought joy by witnessing the act of sharing. We witness others who give as an expression of their love

for God's people and we are moved to share too. We see joy resulting from someone sharing and we are inspired to follow suit. We experience, secondhand, the awakening to faith gifted to another by blessed sharing and we feel a tug from God. We are called to share, to bless, to transform and to bring joy.

If we are the ones to give, the ones to receive or the ones watching it all transpire, we find the act of sharing has a multiplying effect. Week of Compassion overflows with many thanks to God, enough to fill not just this one week, but rather, enough to fill a life with opportunities to share.

Bonnie Carenen

Rev. Bonnie K. Carenen works with Church World Service Indonesia as an advisor on disaster relief and development issues and is a lifelong member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Sharing blesses, transforms, and brings joy to others; but who are these others? In an exchange relationship such as "sharing," which assumes "us" and "them," how do Christians avoid paternalistic, patronizing, even exploitative giving? In critical situations of need, after a disaster or in responding to profound poverty, how can Christians promote justice that blesses, transforms, and brings joy *to others*, without reinforcing dependency and creating contempt? With whom are we actually sharing, and who is involved? Who are these "others"?

Traditionally "charity" acknowledges a more powerful, economically-advantaged giver and a victimized or oppressed receiver; the one who *has* can provide and the one who *needs* may accept. Ideally, sharing is mutual, reciprocal, optional, and dynamic. Paul writes to the Corinthian Church asking them to honor and reciprocate the generosity of the Macedonian Church (8:1-5), which shared with communities in hardship during their own hardship, and extended the Church's ministry. Paul describes the seed and the sower to illustrate how and why Christians should be compassionate. The cheerful giver supplies "bread for food" and God "increase[s] the harvest of your righteousness" (9:6, 10).

Paul expands the dualistic relationship of giver and receiver, of "us" and "them", into a broader context and genuine community. By sharing the story of the Macedonian Church, Paul invites the Corinthians to "witness" the Macedonian's joyful generosity, reflecting on the power of the giving—not the gift. As neither the givers nor the receivers, they witness how a blessing can transform and bring joy to others, and experience it themselves.

In the same way, we often witness (not only firsthand, but through stories and media) and are inspired to participate in God's ongoing love project. We do not give under compulsion (v.7). As witnesses, transformed by the stories shared with us, we draw

from the blessing and joy of what we have received, in order to share the giving with others.

The power of witnessing becomes the power of testimony. When Paul encourages the Corinthians to share generously, he calls this a “testing” of the ministry (v.13). He invites the Church to accept the privilege and responsibility of sharing forth in giving. He wants the faithful to testify with their whole lives: drawing on their minds (“each of you must give as you have made up your minds” (v.7)), their work (“share abundantly *in every good work*” (v.8)), and their hearts (“great generosity will produce thanksgiving to God” (v.12)). Moreover, the testimony, the act of participating in this sharing, will produce thanksgiving in “others” and cultivate obedience to the gospel in “us”.

This is a profound transformation of the typical exchange of “charity.” This is not “us” and “them,” givers and receivers; it is a mutual, reciprocal, optional, and dynamic participation in the community of God. Even those who receive the giving participate in the sharing, as they “long for and pray for you” (v.14). But Paul goes further, asserting that giving and receiving, witnessing and testifying, through gospel-inspired generosity, incorporates Godself into what would otherwise be merely a human(e) transaction. Sharing blesses, transforms, and brings joy to others, who are united in the “us” of God’s communion: givers, receivers, witnesses, God’s world, and Godself participating in this “indescribable gift” (v.15)!

Jeffrey Copp

Jeffrey O. Copp is currently the pastor of the Agape Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He is a graduate of Wabash College, and has earned post-graduate degrees from both Bethany & Lancaster Theological Seminaries. He has served congregations in both Northern Indiana and Southeastern Pennsylvania. Pastor Copp is married and he and his wife of 40 years, Connie, have 4 children and 2 grandchildren.

Convincing people to give some of their money away is always a big challenge. Most people have plans for their money and it’s rarely their first choice to give it away to someone else. IRS statistics often show that the more money people make, the smaller the percentage of it they are willing to give away. So the person who is trying to talk others into parting with some of their money is usually facing a rather tall order. That person knows ahead of time to expect resistance.

They must be prepared to make a very good case, if they’re going to have success. In his second letter to the Corinthians the apostle Paul gives evidence of that awareness himself. He is very careful in verse 7 to let the Corinthians know that he has no intention of forcing anything upon them, and that he respects their individual freedom and conscience. “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion...” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Paul doesn't want them to feel pressured. That's obviously not going to give a result that they, or he, will feel good about. He wants them to give, but he wants them to give because they want to give. He lets them know that by emphasizing the fact that "God loves a cheerful giver" (vs. 7). This is meant to clarify that God wants them to feel good about what they're doing when they give. Their feelings count too, as well as the needs of those whom their sharing will assist. They share in that way in a mutual bond, a bond that God wants the givers to feel good about, as well as those being assisted.

There is still, of course, the anxiety that people often feel when parting with their treasure, as Jesus termed it (Matthew 6:19-21), even if they know it is the right thing to do. Images of "buried treasure" certainly testify to that. Why go to the trouble to dig a hole in the ground and bury our treasure? We do that because of our anxiety that somebody might try to take some of our treasure away from us. That's the fear—fear that we will be left vulnerable, exposed, or worse, if we don't preserve our treasure for ourselves.

The apostle, of course, was very aware that these human fears don't go away automatically because of Christian conversion, and he pointed the Corinthians back to their faith in God as the antidote for the fears. "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work," (2 Corinthians 9:8). Faith is inevitably what makes giving and sharing possible. When we trust that God is the Keeper of our treasures, we don't worry so much about burying them anymore. We are quite confident to give and to share. We know that Sharing Brings Joy to us, to others, and to God.

Charleyne Gates

Charleyne Gates is a member of First Christian Church in Eugene, Oregon. She has been a church organist/pianist for various denominations for over 20 years, and has learned that although worship styles differ, we all try to serve God and our neighbors. When not practicing music, she writes, and is now working on her second novel.

Sweep It Out . . . Sweep It In!

2 Corinthians 9:7b "God loves a cheerful giver."

That's nice of God, but how do you get to "cheerful" when the economy hasn't fully recovered, not everyone who wants a job has one, and prices climb higher every time you go to a grocery store? What's cheerful about the fact that your tires are getting bald (and maybe you are, too), the washing machine is having a snit fit, and your dentist mentioned the words "root canal"? Every dollar that passes through your wallet has to be stretched eighteen different ways before you can even think about making another donation—and this is supposed to make you cheerful?

The Apostle Paul may have been prone to exaggeration. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 8: 2 he writes: “The troubles they (the church in Macedonia) have been through have tried them hard, yet in all this they have been so exuberantly happy that from the depths of their poverty they have shown themselves lavishly open-handed.” (New English Bible)

Not just *plain* happy, but *exuberantly* happy? Come on, Paul! What was that secret Macedonian Code that opened up such exuberant happiness?

It might have been their *attitude*. The Macedonians decided they were exuberantly happy, even though being Christian at that time and place was dangerous, and out of their happiness, they gave lavishly. Lavish generosity is a natural outcome of exuberant happiness: when you’re that happy, you give with an open hand, and the giving makes you even happier.

It might have been their *actions*. I doubt if church rummage sales or holiday bazaars were “in” at the time. Probably the Macedonians simply worked harder and dug deeper under the mattress.

But in the 21st century, most of us don’t keep money under the mattress. We keep it in financial institutions—and in our homes, in closets, drawers, basements, and attics. And, of course, in the Great American Garage, where we often pack enough stuff to support a third-world village. Any hapless vehicle trying to park inside the garage has to butter its sides just to squeeze in.

The Culture of Stuff! We may not worship a Golden Calf any more, but we sure do love our Stuff. How do we connect our Stuff to Paul’s idea of exuberant happiness?

It’s like this: Nature abhors a vacuum—and seeks to fill it. When Stuff is hoarded, it stagnates. Energy gets blocked. When Stuff goes back in circulation, a vacuum is created. New energy gets activated.

So sweep out your old Stuff! Fix it up, use it up, or pass it on. Keep what you really need or are sentimental about and give the rest away. Or have a garage sale. (That’s what garages are for.) Give the money where it’s needed—for example, Week of Compassion.

Sweep out the old with exuberant happiness for, as Paul says, “Sow bountifully, and you will reap bountifully.” Sweep in the new!

Frank Ramirez

Frank Ramirez is the pastor of the Everett (PA) Church of the Brethren. He has been a pastor for over thirty years, is the author of many books and with his wife Jennie, shares three adult children and three grandchildren.

The people of the ancient city of Corinth loved to go the theater like everyone else to laugh at comedies. There were many stock characters in Greek comedy – the crafty slave, the star-struck lover, the braggart soldier, the wise woman. One of these stock characters, a figure of fun, was the greedy man, sometimes called the pledge dodger. And nobody wanted to be the pledge dodger. This was the person who promised to contribute in a big way, then slunk off and did not fulfill any obligations. It is said that the names of such pledge dodgers were published in the public square.

When drought and famine struck, the Christians of Jerusalem struggled. Paul had organized a great offering among the churches of Greece and Macedonia. Most of the Greeks and the Macedonians were poor – but they gave abundantly. The apostle now reminds the Corinthians, an oasis of wealth and ostentation – that it is up to them to fulfill their obligation. The people of Corinth were rich – but in this letter Paul awkwardly reminds them that if they don't fulfill their pledge to support the starving, people will laugh at them as pledge dodgers.

Paul compared offerings to agriculture. The ancients knew agriculture was more than just hard work. Writers such as Hesiod and Virgil wrote poems describing the right time to plant and harvest a particular crop, which animals and tools to use, and how to direct the workers. Most of all, they knew that all of this would be in vain without divine approval and help! Paul alludes to this wisdom when he writes: "The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:6)". If we sow bountifully there's no knowing what will happen –but if we sow sparingly, or not at all, we can be certain of failure.

But there is more than simply knowing what to do and how to go about doing it. The quality of giving matters. Eight centuries before Christ the poet Hesiod wrote: "As long as you give willingly, even if the gift is really big, you will rejoice in the gift and be glad to the depth of your soul (*Works and Days*, 367-368, author's translation)." Paul goes a step further and tells us that this satisfaction matters not just to us and to those who receive! He writes: "...for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7)."

Each of us must make up our own mind if we wish our participation in this Week of Compassion Offering to be cheerful, joyful, and bountiful. But we can be certain of this: sow sparingly, reap sparingly. God has kept faith with us. We do not, any more than the Corinthians, want to look like pledge breakers! Let us give joyfully. Let all receive joyfully! May our offerings bring God joy!

Derek White

Rev. Derek White was a 14-year veteran youth pastor before receiving a call to First Congregational Church in Kennebunkport, ME, where he is currently the pastor. He earned his undergraduate degree from North Park University and his M.Div from Chicago Theological Seminary. He is presently pursuing a Doctorate of Ministry from

Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. He serves as a trustee on the board for First Radio Parish Church in Portland, ME.

For years Anna collected teacups from all over the world. Her china cabinet contained over 100 fine porcelain teacups. Her most treasured teacup proudly displayed the Presidential Seal on the bottom. Legend had it that it was part of the collection Andrew Jackson kept in the White House. When a visitor came by and noticed her collection, she would take the special teacup out of the cabinet and tell the story of Andrew Jackson drinking tea in the White House, possibly from this very cup.

One day Anna heard a knock on her back door. A little girl from next door was selling cookies in her Girl Scout uniform. Anna invited the little girl into her kitchen. Anna's new neighbor saw the cabinet with all the teacups and asked Anna if she liked to play tea when she was a little girl. Anna smiled and said, "Oh yes dearie, I loved playing tea when I was a little girl. I was a Girl Scout, too." The little girl with freckles on her face and knobby knees smiled with a mouth half full of teeth. Anna asked, "Did the tooth fairy come recently?" The little girl quickly closed her mouth, turned her head, and began to cry. "What did I say that upset you so much?" asked Anna. The little girl answered, "I was in a car accident and I lost my teeth when the air bag deployed." Anna's heart began to sink. "Are you going to get new teeth?" she asked. The little girl answered, "My mom was at fault for the accident; we can't afford new teeth for me."

Anna felt God tugging on her heart. She went to her china cabinet and took out her prized tea set. She said, "This is my favorite and most beautiful teacup." Again the little girl smiled as she said, "Oh yes, that is beautiful!" Anna said, "It belonged to President Andrew Jackson in the White House." The little girl's eyes lit up. Anna said, "I bet if we sell this you could afford some new teeth." The little girl was shocked. She asked Anna, "Why would you sell your most beautiful and prized teacup for me?" Anna answered, "Only those who visit get to see this beautiful teacup, but with your new teeth I know something more beautiful will be shared with the world--your smile." Sharing brings joy to us, to others, to God.

Kory Wilcoxson

Rev. Kory Wilcoxson is Senior Pastor of Crestwood Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Lexington, KY.

During a recent meal at a local restaurant, as the waiter refilled my water glass and served me my favorite dish, he asked, "Is there anything you need?" I looked around me, at this huge plate of food, at the basket of warm bread on the table, at the full glass of clear, clean water, at my good friend sitting across from me, at my nice clothes, at my car parked outside the window that takes me from my loving family to my great job and back each day. "Is there anything else you need?" No, no thanks, I've got all I need.

Did you ever think that when you were at this stage in your life you would have all the blessings that surround you? Your parents, your children, your grandchildren, your home, your job, your cars, your friends, your hobbies, your church. Who could have imagined? I'm sure there are times when you dream about having more – bigger house, nicer car, more zeroes in the paycheck. That's only human, and we all do that from time to time. But when we stop and look at our lives, do we have all we need?

Paul reminds the Corinthians not to forget the source of their blessings when he says, "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." When we look at how God has provided us the seeds and increased our store and enlarged our harvest, we realize there's nothing we can say to adequately express our feelings for all we have. "Thank you" seems so small in comparison. But we don't have to express our gratitude using only our words. We can also use our lives.

One way we can say "thank you" is by acknowledging that, unlike us, not everybody in this world has all they need. There is an imbalance of resources in the world that should unsettle us to the point of action. People living on less than \$2 a day, lives and homes destroyed by war, whole nations rocked by natural disasters. So many have so much less than they need.

Whose job is it to restore the balance, to harmonize the disparity in the world? Paul says, "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." In other words, we are made rich in every way so that we can be generous on every occasion. And I think it's fair to say that, as we enjoy our climate-controlled sanctuary, our padded pews, our Herculean-sized meal portions, we have been made rich. There's a circular flow to giving, a natural rhythm to the taking in and sending out that is a part of being in relationship with God and expressing our joy through cheerful giving.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

Kathy Fuller Guisewite

Kathy Guisewite is a licensed minister in the Church of the Brethren and is a trained Spiritual Director. Most recently, Kathy was approved as a Pastoral Care Specialist through the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. Kathy is also one who loves exploring life and spiritual matters through various artistic ventures.

Have a stack of mail. Say, "Oh, this is the electric bill. Here you can have this one." Pass it to one of the children. Next, "Oh, this is an advertisement for a sale on tires. You can have this." Pass it to another child. "Okay, this is the phone bill. So, you can have this." Pass it to a different child. Then open a flyer and announce, "This is about a lecture they want me to come to... on the importance of eating lettuce. You can have this." Pass to a different child. "And this is the car insurance bill... so I think you can have this one." Pass to a different child.

"Okay, so everybody got something. How do you feel?"

Most likely, they will voice that they don't want this mail, that it isn't fun, and that they don't have money to pay the bills. Then ask them what kind of mail they would like to get. Maybe they will say things like: fun mail, cards with money in them, mail that tells them about something fun going on.

Have a stack of cards to the side and say, "Oh, hey, look... here's some more mail. Let's see... this one is to..." List children's names on the envelopes as you know those who attend regularly and have some that say "to a very special person" for children who are visiting or new. "I wonder what might be inside this. How do you feel even before you open this?" (Hopefully, some will say: happy, excited). "Well, let's open these up and see what's inside."

Inside each child will find some small delight... a note that calls out something special about them or some little joke that makes them laugh. Also enclosed could be a shiny penny or a lollipop. Engage the children in a conversation about what made the difference between the first piece of mail they received and the second. Here are some key ideas you can offer if they don't surface naturally from the children:

~The first set of mail was about things you had to do or pay or participate in that were of no interest to them.

~The first set was about requirements and burdens.

~The second was a card without any requirements.

~The second was a gift... that was given to simply bring you joy. "Wasn't that nice? Tell me about the difference in how you felt with the first and with the second. Do you think you could help to bring joy to others now that you remember how it feels to be given something just for the joy of giving?"

“I hope you will keep the card and the little gift inside, but I have one more thing to give you. This is an envelope with a stamp on it. It is all ready for you to address and fill with a card to someone who could use some joy. I’d also like you to remember that our church will honor Week of Compassion soon, and that is a time when we can give as a church to people who could use some joy. Talk with your parents about this and see how you might decide to share as a family.”

Prayer: God, thank You for all gifts that are given to help and to delight. Help us to remember that as much as we love to get gifts, it’s really important to share the joys that we have with others. It’s like a circle that we can help keep spinning. Help us to think of just the right person to send a card to this week. Amen.

YOUTH ACTIVITY

Most youth have ties to music in some form or another. Invite the youth to work (either individually, as teams, or as a large group) on listing as many songs or song lyrics that address the topic of joy or sharing joy. It could prove beneficial to address the fact that you are not asking for the word ‘joy’ to be present in the song, only the concept of ‘sharing joy.’ Have some discussion around what that might look like.

Some suggestions to get them started could include:

“Shower the People You Love with Love” – James Taylor

“Happy Birthday to You!”

“Jingle Bells”

Magic Penny Song

Various camp songs

Current pop songs as appropriate

To further elaborate on this idea, the youth can then take the generated list of songs/lyrics and put them together in a sort of story or poem to be shared in worship or simply added to the bulletin.