

Stewards of God's Grace: February 2022

Learning to love, learning to give

Do you remember giving and receiving Valentines in school? Whether you created your own, cut them out, tore them along the perforated lines or—easiest of all—had a package of pre-cut and separate Valentines, the process of giving and receiving Valentine cards was a big deal. In my home money was in short supply so we usually opted for the inexpensive 'cut your own' variety. I needed a lot because my parents made sure I



I gave one to everyone in my class. This meant giving a Valentine to the girl who wouldn't talk to me or the boy who tripped me at recess so there were some tough choices to make in deciding who got what. It was a struggle not to give the child who was mean to me a Valentine with the tear in it. Yet I learned that Valentine's Day was a chance to mend relationships, make someone smile and realize class friendships were stronger than I thought. I discovered anew the joy of loving and giving!

We are taught how to love and how to give in many ways and through different people—our parents and grandparents, our teachers and neighbours, our friends and colleagues, and our clergy and faith community. From our earliest age we are coached by our parents to share our toys, give away what we no longer need, be thoughtful about birthday presents, etc. If we are blessed to be part of a faith community we are also taught to give to the church and its mission, to help those in need locally and globally, to seek opportunities to make a difference and to put our love into action. This might mean giving food to the food bank or sending money to help in a disaster but it always involves using our resources to help others. We come to know that giving blesses the giver as well as those who receive!

That doesn't seem to be what the majority of Canada's population knows or believes. According to the recent Fraser Research Bulletin "*Generosity in Canada*", Canada Revenue data shows that just 19% of Canadian tax filers donated to charity in 2019. That's less than one in five people! Even more significantly the total percentage of Canadian tax filers donating to charity has fallen from 25.5% in 2009 to 19% in 2019—a drop of 6.5% in the last 20 years. In 2019 Saskatchewan tax filers who supported charities donated an average of \$2,012.00—but only 19% of people gave anything at all. This decrease in generosity to charities affects not only churches but all the organizations that make a huge difference in our communities—food banks, health research and support organizations, conservation and environmental groups, domestic violence shelters, children's camps, the Legion, and so on. What will happen in our communities if our churches and charities aren't able to operate?

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35). God in Jesus shows us that love is more than words on a Valentine—it is made manifest in action every day. For people to truly see that we are Jesus' disciples we need to be not only loving but generous. When we unabashedly give our money away for the love of God and neighbour then they might understand that we see the world a little differently than they do. To be generous in Canada today is to be truly counter-cultural! What does your giving say about your love and generosity?

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