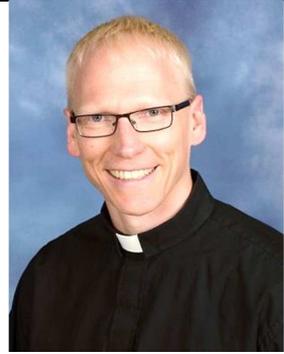


Living Generously

I'm a frugal person. To say it positively, I am fiscally conservative. You might even call me cheap. I would rather eat at home than spend money at a restaurant. (Plus, my wife is a good cook.) I would rather buy something used than new. I'd rather buy nothing at all! Shopping is not fun for me. I toil over my purchases. Do I really need this? Is it really worth the cost? What's the best deal?



If it weren't for the grace of God, I would be downright miserly. But for years God has been working on my heart to be more generous. Instead of turning away a child with a catalog at the door, lately I'm more apt than ever to support the fundraiser with a purchase (though not the most expensive one). Instead of letting the offering plate pass by, as I did for years before I was a pastor, we use Simply Giving and put it in our household budget. Instead of recycling the appeal letter from my college, we now plan ahead for gifts to the organizations that matter to us.

I don't want to live my life with a closed hand. I don't want "cheap" to be one of the words used in my eulogy. I want to model generous living for my children, so they can know the joy of giving. Social science research has found that money makes us most happy when we give it away. Have you seen those "Live Generously" shirts, with a cross and a heart? I have two (they were free), and I like the reminder. I feel a kinship with the people wearing them. Life is best when we live generously.

My wife inspires me with her generosity. Case in point. A roofing crew was working on the house next door. She saw them break for lunch but not for supper. It was getting dark. She imagined they had to commute home. So she prepared a basket of fruit, granola bars, cheese sticks and more and took it over to the crew. I wouldn't have thought to do that. Did they need it? We don't know. But she joyfully lived with generosity.

A few weeks ago a church member came up to me with a check for \$1000. She and her husband already give regularly to the church, but she

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had gotten a bonus at work. She wanted to give the church a portion. She said, "I can't imagine my life without St. John's." We didn't ask for her gift, but she knew we'd use it for God's work. She delighted in giving to God who has given so much to her. Her generous gift is inspiring.

During our VBS week, our children generously supported a project called "The Shoe That Grows." It's an organization that developed, makes, and distributes adjustable shoes for children in need. One pair of shoes is \$15. Our kids gave over \$1200 to purchase 84 pairs of shoes! When we were celebrating the news during the Saturday worship service, a church member came up and gave enough to make it an even 100 pairs of shoes! Another generous gift that inspires me.

Living generously is not just about money. Time is even more valuable than money. There's no way to get more time – we all have just 24

hours a day. A family contacted me during a particularly busy week for me and offered to watch our kids so I could go see my wife's theater production. On another occasion, someone brought me lunch when I didn't get a break on a full day. This is generous living, and such gifts not only bless other people, but also they inspire us all.



Because our congregation is growing, and our finances are healthy, my colleagues have asked me what "stewardship program" we use. "How do you encourage increased offerings?" I tell them that we don't do much around "programs," and we don't use pledge cards. What do we do? We inspire each other. We have a culture of generosity. We do great ministry together. We seek to be the best church we can be. We do God's work. We celebrate what God is doing among us. So far, the Holy Spirit has worked on our hearts (mine included) and inspired us to grow in generosity. By God's grace, we've grown our ministry and our impact. That is something for which I give thanks.

In Christ,

Pastor Matthew Lock

"Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.'"
-Acts 20:35