

HomeWord

Vol. 4, No. 4 A newsletter dedicated to household harmony & family faith

In This Issue

In this issue we offer two articles exploring the value of charity and service to others. Ralph Stewart, a high school student in Milwaukee, writes about his experience on a school-sponsored service trip to Appalachia, West Virginia. Jean Buell shares what she learned from her young children about the spirit of charitable giving.

As you read these fine articles, you might be interested to know that according to reputable research, service activities and works of charity are better indicators of a young person's eventual faith maturity than participation in religious education classes or even regular attendance at Sunday worship. All three activities are important, of course, but charity often gets overlooked.

No matter how much money a family has, what their clothes look like, or where they live, family caring is the basic thing we all have in common. That is why people should be respected and not looked down upon.

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What Kind of Family Would Live There?

by Ralph Stewart

During my junior year, my high school campus minister invited me to go on a mission trip to Appalachia, West Virginia. I decided to go after hearing a lot of good things from my friends about how nice people were and how much fun they had on the previous year's trip.

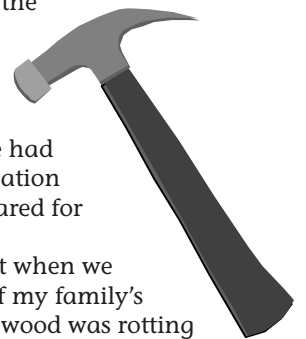
So there I was, signed up for something that I thought I was prepared for. After all, I had been to three prep meetings. Little did I know what the future would hold.

When I arrived in Appalachia, I immediately noticed how our whole group stood out among the other people in town. Our clothes were obviously cleaner and newer. I was feeling superior even though I tried not to. That first night we had another prep meeting to give us the general rules and information about the sites we would visit the next day. I still wasn't prepared for what I was about to see.

My group's site was considered one of the better ones. But when we arrived, I couldn't believe it! Their home was about the size of my family's two-car garage. The house had many hornets' nests, and the wood was rotting away. I thought to myself, "What kind of family would live there?" So we went to work scraping and painting the house.

I took frequent breaks to play with the kids and to talk with the family. Playing with the kids was a blast. They were fun. We ran around, chased one another, went on walks, and played with toys. I enjoyed every minute of it.

Talking with the family was a challenge. I felt intimidated by the adults, and I didn't know how to get the ball rolling. I was thinking that we had nothing in common. But after a few days of talking with them and listening to their interesting stories about their past work and family life, my fears vanished. They made me realize that they were not as different as I had thought.



Only a Quarter

by Jean M. Buell

My friends hate me during the holidays. I usually have my Christmas shopping done by Thanksgiving. Then I relax and enjoy the spirit of the season.

One year I had to run out for a last-minute gift. As I looked for a parking spot, I heard a familiar holiday sound: "Ring-a-ling-a-ling-a . . ."

It was a charity bell ringer. Hearing that sound reminded me of one other reason why I like to get my shopping done early: nothing spoils the spirit of the season like feeling guilty every time I walk into a store!

I couldn't have given anything that night because I only had a quarter and a ten-dollar bill. A quarter was too little to give, and a ten was too much. I didn't know what would happen to that money and I didn't want it to get stolen. I like to give to organized charities because I can write a check, I know where the money goes, and I have a receipt for my tax deduction. Besides, I needed my money to make my own purchase.

Darting toward the store, I shielded my face from the biting Minnesota wind. It was a convenient way to avoid eye contact with the bell ringer. When I approached

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Family Tips for Serving and Giving

In their landmark book *Parenting for Peace and Justice: Ten Years Later*, Kathleen and James B. McGinnis suggest that direct service or works of mercy, and social change or works of justice are the “two feet” needed to walk the path of service. They suggest several principles to encourage family involvement in service and social justices.

Regularly invite children to join in social action. It takes time to explain issues and to discuss questions. Children need the freedom to say no, and the decision should be a family decision.

Expose children to advocates, victims, and situations. This provides motivation and overcomes the major obstacles to involvement—ignorance and fear. Exposure can come through guests in the home, parents themselves, reading, television, movies, the neighborhood, and travel.

Actions should be within children’s capacities. Relate actions to home and family living, and build on prior experiences. Look for opportunities in which children can play a specific role, and respect their limits.

Integrate fun whenever possible. Combine the action with a fun event and join with others, especially other families. Learn about issues in an enjoyable context, such as a good movie, and involve children in doing and making.

Do “with” instead of do “for.” Respect and promote the dignity of others and learn from those you hope to serve. Arrange exchanges and promote self-help efforts.

(“What Kind of Family Would Live There?” continued from page 1)

At the end of the week, we had a cookout at the high school, and all the families were invited to come and play. It was the time for the final good-byes, and it was hard to do. The families were very sad that we were leaving and asked if we were coming back next year. It hurt to tell them that we would probably go someplace else.

Looking back I realized that they helped me more than I helped them. Eventually the paint on their house will chip, and the wood will rot. But the insights they gave me will last a lifetime.

Now when I picture that small house in West Virginia, I ask myself, “What kind of family would live there?” The answer is a family so different from mine and a family just like mine.

Ralph Stewart is now a senior in high school and lives with his family in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

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the entrance, the door magically opened, not by an electric pad, but by the bell ringer.

Without even knowing what he looked like, I thanked him. I was embarrassed. Fortunately I would have change to give him on my way out. Then I would feel better.

After making my purchase, I tucked a donation inside my glove so it would be all ready to put into the bucket. But when I got outside, the bell ringer was gone! Frustrated, I stuffed the money back into my pocket.

The following year, I was buying groceries for our family’s Thanksgiving feast. My cart was filled with ten pounds of potatoes, five pounds of carrots, four gallons of milk, and among other things, a forty-pound five-year-old whose weight was centered on the front axle, and a thirty-pound two-year-old centered on the back. Thank goodness I had already bought the turkey!

As I wrote a check for ten dollars extra, I noted my own thankfulness. My marriage was stable. Our boys were healthy. Our home was warm. Indeed, we were blessed. After all, the most painful part of shopping was pushing that heavy cart, not paying the bill.

“Is a ten okay?” the cashier asked as she held up a green bill.

“Sure,” I said. “I’ll be using it right away, anyway. One more gift and I’m done!” And then, I thought, I can really enjoy the spirit of the season.

I packed my groceries and then loaded bags and boys into the cart. As we wheeled through the exit, I heard a familiar holiday sound: “Ring-a-ling-a-ling-a . . .” It was a bell ringer! I might have been able to ignore him, but I could not have ignored the fact that my boys would see me ignoring him. They would learn from this experience. They would learn from whatever I did.

I knew I had some coins, so I lifted the boys out of the cart and gave them each a quarter. It seemed acceptable for a child to give only a quarter.

“You can put those in the bucket,” I said. Their responses typified their personalities.

“This bucket, Mommy?” my five-year-old said. “Do you mean this bucket right here?”

“Yes, Honey, that one.” Slowly and skillfully, he placed his quarter in the slot.

Seeing his big brother, my two-year-old ran to the bucket, put his nose in the opening, and threw in his quarter. The bell ringer smiled and thanked the boys.

“Do you know why we put a quarter in?” I asked, unsure myself.

“Because we heard the bells ring?” my five-year-old said.

“No, because we are grateful for what we have, and we want to share.”

I wasn’t sure where my words came from. After hearing my answer, I realized how rigid I had been. My boys didn’t care if a quarter was too much or too little.

They were happy just to give. They were supposed to learn from me. Instead, I learned from them! Humbled, I stuffed a donation into the bucket.

Now I give something to every bell ringer, and I have my children do the same, even if it’s only a quarter. Yes, at the very least, it’s worth only twenty-five cents. But far greater than that, it’s worth a valuable lesson in giving freely. That’s the spirit of the season.

