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RLN exists to explore issues at the intersections of faith and life. In doing so we solicit and publish a range of opinions, not all of which reflect the official positions of the Diocese.

We acknowledge that we meet and work in Treaty 1 Land, the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota people and the homeland of the Metis Nation. We are grateful for their stewardship of this land and their hospitality which allows us to live, work, and serve God the Creator here.

RLN welcomes story ideas, news items, and other input. If you want to be involved in this media ministry, please [email the editor](#).

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# Too Much Stuff

Photo: Jessica Ruscello

You may have seen a new show on Netflix called *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*. The premise is pretty simple. Marie Kondo, who is the founder of the KonMari Method of tidying, helps a series of families in different life situations through de-cluttering their homes.

I've watched a few episodes. One couple in the series had two toddlers and just couldn't get a handle on the cleaning. As a result, their chaotic home life was putting a strain on their marriage. In another episode, a recent widow went on the emotional journey of going through her deceased husband's things with the goal of moving forward.

I appreciate Marie Kondo's method of tidying, because she advises to approach items with gratitude. She teaches the families in the series to choose items that "spark joy" for them, and to thank the items they let go for serving a purpose. Her central idea is that you live with only a few belongings that are well loved and cherished – not a bad way to live your life, all things considered.

## The Environmental Cost

I think we could all stand to evaluate our belongings and live with a little bit less. Our culture revolves around having stuff: the best, the newest, the most. We've just come through a season where we are pressured to buy the perfect gift, and marketers sell us single-use items that are meant to be enjoyed for one day before being thrown away:

"An electronic drum-machine t-shirt; a Darth

Vader talking piggy bank; an ear-shaped iPhone case; an individual beer can chiller; an electronic wine breather; a sonic screwdriver remote control; bacon toothpaste; a dancing dog: no one is expected to use them, or even look at them, after Christmas Day. They are designed to elicit thanks, perhaps a snigger or two, and then be thrown away," says George Monbiot in his article ["On the 12th day of Christmas... your gift will just be junk"](#) in *The Guardian*.

Consumerism is destroying the planet. In 2015, a group of scientists from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology published a study called the ["Environmental Impact Assessment of Household Consumption"](#) in the *Journal of Industrial Ecology*.

The study looked at environmental impacts from a consumer perspective in 43 countries, and found that consumers are responsible for



Photo: Darren Cullen



60 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions and 80 percent of the world's water use.

Think about the Christmas gifts you bought last year. Where were the items produced, and how far did they have to travel to get to the store from where you bought them? Did the items come encased in plastic or some other packing material? All of these factors contribute to how much of an impact an item has on the environment.

As of 2018, it's estimated that eight million tons of plastic end up in the world's oceans every year. There are currently five giant garbage patches in the North Atlantic, the South Atlantic, the North Pacific, the South Pacific, and the Indian Oceans; the biggest is the North Pacific garbage patch, weighing 80,000 tons. These garbage patches are a direct result of single-use plastic items.

"We all like to put the blame on someone else, the government, or businesses," says Diana Ivanova, one of the Household Consumption study's authors, quoted in [Science Daily](#). "But between 60–80 percent of the impacts on the planet come from household consumption. If we change our consumption habits, this would have a drastic effect on our environmental footprint as well."

### Consumer Privilege

Another side to the discussion about consumer habits that we might not want to think about is privilege. For many people, living with less is not a choice; it's a debilitating reality. If you can live comfortably and afford small luxuries without worrying where your next meal will come from, you have consumer privilege. And, like all privileges, this one comes with its own set of stigmas and biases.

I remember reading a story about one person's struggle with poverty. I probably couldn't find it anymore, but it stuck with me. This person had a hard time making ends meet, paying for housing, and buying groceries. But, one day she bought a bunch of candles from a bath store because they were on sale. She burned those candles as often as possible because

they became a symbol for her: a symbol of normalcy and being steady on her feet. They were a symbol of the life she wanted and was working towards.

But she found that the candles came with a lot of backlash. There were people in her life who could not believe that she had bought something so "frivolous" when she was struggling financially.

There are a number of myths attributed to people on welfare – they're lazy, they're cheating the system, they're not working – that are simply not true. But, because of these myths, we end up with societal stigmas and biases that cause us to look down on those with low incomes, or even blame them for their own poverty.

"If we think of the poor as lazy and dishonest, then it seems less likely that poverty will happen to us, the hard-working, the responsible," says Judith McCormack in her article ["Why myths about poor endure."](#) "Defining the poor as lazy or irresponsible creates popular villains for the rest of us to condemn. It panders to a human weakness to feel superior to someone, and provides a handy target for complaints about tax dollars."

In this issue on *Living with Less*, I wanted to offer more than handy tips for cleaning up our houses. As consumer habits climb, and the divide between rich and poor widens, I think it's important to examine our motivations behind paring down our possessions, as well as our biases around incomes. To that end, this month's issue features articles by Lynda Trono, Susan Graham Walker, Gary Russell, and Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer to challenge us on our positions around giving. Let's challenge ourselves to truly live with less this year – but for the right reasons.



Kyla Neufeld is the editor of *Rupert's Land News*.

# The Promise of Enough

GEOFFREY WOODCROFT



I begin this *Rupert's Land News* column giving thanks for this month's theme: *Living with Less*. I have spent a few hours reflecting, and then giggling to myself, about how wrong I get this theme. As I conceptually play out the phrase, I have this *incredible* vision of myself as a well-adjusted, contented, and appropriately pious monk. I would have a trim physique, be wise beyond my years, and never angry or upset.

Living beyond one's means, living in excess, living with little or no regard for neighbours and those who follow us: these are the pieces that make our theme important to me. For our purposes, the word "less" is definitely comparative, and begs the question "Less than what?" It would be easy to answer, "Less than what I presently have, or get to spend." But, I am afraid, that is an easy out. Do I have feelings of entitlement and privilege when I consider the money in my bank account, the things in my house, and the conversations I have with friends about music, outdoor life, and home furnishings? Do I have use phrases like "I deserve..." to justify my lifestyle?

God continually gifts *enough* to our world, and we know it. We can see God's generosity in all of nature, and especially in the atmosphere of relationships. Wherever we witness mutuality, we see generosity overflow. Sharing, mutuality, and generosity are basic principles of

our Judeo-Christian culture, continually referenced in scripture, and more importantly, in our common prayers and celebrated at every Anglican ceremony. God's economy is our spiritual DNA, and it always has been that way; perhaps we have forgotten that for a few generations, but nonetheless this who the Body of Christ is.

We are the Body of Christ, we are one, and we are who we are by our relationship in Christ. We are disciples of Jesus, and as such entirely pledge ourselves to God's ministry and mission. We understand that we live so as not to burden those whom we serve, but to make it possible for all in our environment to grow and flourish. After all, we frequently promise to "do all in our power to support and nurture" new disciples, and to "seek and serve Christ in all people loving our neighbour as ourselves." Certainly, we do not make these promises lightly, nor honour them foolishly. Rather, we make these promises because God is calling us to ensure that others have more. I do not think that God is calling us to have less. The very same promises we make for others are made by the Body for you and I, and that implies that God is already abundantly blessing us.

In the Body of Christ, living with less means investing ourselves 100 percent in the care of God's creation. We do so knowing that we have been called and cared-for that way from the womb. As Henri Nouwen says in *Here and Now*, "Ministry is, first of all, receiving God's blessing from those to whom we minister. What is this blessing? It is a glimpse of the face of God."



Geoffrey Woodcroft,  
Bishop of Rupert's Land



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# Give Me neither Poverty nor Riches, Give Me Equity

LYNDA TRONO



For over 30 years, I have been engaged in a personal, political, and perhaps even holy war against consumerism. I'm probably not winning, but I'm still fighting it. I live communally with five other women, I share a car, I darn my socks, I buy my clothes second hand. I consider it a life-giving spiritual discipline – refusing to define myself by what I own, being attentive to ethical spending choices, and trying to buy local. I am inspired by scripture such as this:

“Keep falsehood and lies far from me;  
give me neither poverty nor riches,  
but give me only my daily bread.

Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you  
and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’

Or I may become poor and steal,  
and so dishonour the name of my God.”

– *Proverbs 30:8–9*

If I do have more than my daily bread, I have what is called [discretionary income](#).

“Discretionary income is what is left after after you’ve spent for necessities like rent, health care, transportation and clothing. Discretionary income can be spent on eating out, investing, travel, and any other non-essential items or expenditures. It’s your fun money to spend with limited guilt on things you don’t actually need, knowing that your other expenses are taken care of.”

I work at West Broadway Community Ministry, a drop-in and soup kitchen founded and supported by Anglican and United Churches in Winnipeg. We serve some of Winnipeg’s most vulnerable citizens. I talked to some of our guests about their thoughts on consumer choices and discretionary income.

**Corinna** is an Ojibwe Medewin Elder and a grandmother who was led to West Broadway in a dream. She leads a weekly sharing circle and offers informal counsel to those who are struggling.

Corinna gets \$669 per month from Employment and Income Assistance and \$300 from Canadian Pension Plan Disability Benefits. She spends \$666 to rent a one-bedroom apartment for herself and her 18-year-old daughter. \$180

goes for Hydro, TV, Internet, and phone. That leaves her with \$123 to spend for food and everything else.

“I budget my money. Rent comes first and then bills. If I don’t have enough, I go to the food bank. I depend on the food bank. And the \$100 a month I get for volunteering here.” (The provincial government offers \$100 to people on disability who volunteer eight

or more shifts per month.)

Corinna admits to a tobacco addiction.

“I might spend \$50 a month on cigarettes. When I don’t have cigarettes I get crabby,” she smiles. She describes how she makes a cigarette last by taking a few puffs, then putting it out, then coming back later for a few more.

“I talked to my doctor and right now I’ve got Champax so I can try to quit.”

I ask what she would do if she had discretionary income.

“I would buy food and clothes.”

I push a little bit because I think food and clothes are necessities.

“Well, I would love to go and eat out in a restaurant. I haven’t been to a restaurant in two years,” she says.



**Ben\*** is a single father and musician who comes to West Broadway to use our laundry facilities. He is on EIA disability and receives \$900 per month for all his expenses. His fixed expenses include a two-bedroom apartment for himself and his 11-year-old son.

The three places Ben relies on to survive are the Good Food Club (a West Broadway buyers' group that purchases healthy food for less money), Agape Table (where you can get a substantial breakfast for \$1), and West Broadway. Ben always does laundry here, occasionally has lunch, and sometimes graces us with his music.

Ben scrimps on necessities so that he can have money leftover for "extras" when he needs them. Extras include things like toiletries, pet food, garden tools, dishes, a bicycle for his son, and bedding. He does all his shopping for extras at second-hand stores.

Ben doesn't drink or smoke. He laughs. "The only smoke I get is when I breathe in the

marijuana fumes from the apartment downstairs."

If Ben had discretionary money he would buy something for his son – at a second-hand store.

**Janelle\*** is a 30-year-old woman who describes herself as unemployed yet still hard working. She is trying to find a place to live so she can get her daughter back. She has worked before at Salisbury House, Boston Pizza, and a weight loss clinic.

Janelle is on EIA receiving \$170 per month for food. Because she is homeless, she doesn't get anything for rent. When she gets money, she spends it on allergy medication, toiletries, hair dye and salad – things that she can't get through programs like West Broadway Community Ministry.

Janelle works hard selling rummaged goods for her other needs. She estimates that "substances" cost her \$100 to \$200 per month.



"Homelessness is not for sissies," she says with a look of indignation. She describes a young man who has come from a well-off home and joined the ranks of the homeless in the West Broadway area.

"I have no respect for people with no work ethic who approach homelessness as an easy breezy vacation. Homelessness is not for lazy people. We're not just bums who do nothing. It takes a lot of effort with your personal entrepreneurial business to earn money for food."

When I ask about how she would spend discretionary money, her eyes get big and she talks about sitting inside somewhere like a restaurant. She laughs and says, "It would be like being like a real citizen!"

Our guests at West Broadway have been given poverty and I have been given riches. They have less than their daily bread and I have more. So I get to make choices and feel good about myself every time I give, and they continue to scrimp and save and get no where. This is not what God intends for the world. If I take the above proverb seriously, I am praying for an equitable economic system where all will get their daily bread. I am working with others for that world to become a reality. And I'm thinking it would be nice if everyone had a little discretionary income for bread and roses too.

\*Actual names have not been used.

## West Broadway Community Ministry's Top 10 Needed Items


**You can also donate toiletries and feminine hygiene products.**

**RICHARD ROSIN**  
FUNERAL DIRECTOR LTD

## What If I Got Hit By A Bus?

(or not able to communicate with my family?)

Presented by Margaret Meush  
and sponsored by the  
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and Richard Rosin



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Lynda Trono is a diaconal minister in the United Church of Canada. She moved from Ontario to Winnipeg in 1995 to work as Conference Minister for Education, Justice and Communication with the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario. She is the proud grandma of 3-month-old Arjeen.



# The Wealth of a Blue Plastic Token Holder

SUSAN GRAHAM WALKER

When I was invited to add stewardship ministry to the roles I had while on staff in the Diocese of Toronto, I realized I didn't really know what that meant. Was it about parish fundraising to meet the budget? Was it about living as a faithful disciple? At that point, I thought it was more about the former.

On the wise advice of a leader in the field, I set an intention to adopt a personal practice that could teach me about stewardship and giving. It began as a small step. I resolved to give away all the change in my purse each day to the first person who asked for it.

Soon after I began this daily practice, I had a specific experience that has grounded, shaped, and driven my thinking and actions about giving, generosity, and gratitude ever since.

One warm spring day, a colleague and I were eating lunch in a park near work. As we were talking, we were approached by a very tall African man with a dilapidated bundle buggy filled with his possessions.

He asked, "Do you have any spare change?"

I said yes and dumped the change into my hand. "This is yours, I just need the TTC [Toronto Transit Commission] tokens."

I put the coins into his outstretched hand, and he said, "Bless you."

My practice done for that day, I continued my lunch and conversation with my friend. A few minutes later, my friend noticed that the man with the bundle buggy was heading in our direction again. "I guess he thinks you have more to give," she said. "We'll see."

He approached and this time he asked, "Would you please put out your hand?" I did. Into it he carefully placed a small, blue plastic TTC token holder. "You need this more than I do."



I looked at this gift in my hand, a bit surprised. I hope I said "Thank you." He went on his way.

And that is the real beginning of my giving journey. This man's generosity has been the single most important experience that shaped my giving practice to this day. I give thanks to God for him every

time I give. (A true regret is that I didn't speak more to him, especially to discover his name.)

I experienced generosity that day – thoughtful generosity and joyful giving. Important lessons in my faith journey.

From that day, I have been working to match his generosity, to give away from my wealth and possessions the same proportion that he gave me from his: one blue plastic token in the middle of his bundle buggy. I give more freely and easily now, but I am only slightly closer to matching his generosity. My bundle buggy is very large, and it contains many things: comfortable housing, a summer cottage, furniture, clothes, savings for retirement... I have a long way to go. Nevertheless, I try to give with the same ease with which he shared one of his few possessions with me.

I remain grateful to my nameless mentor for his lesson in spontaneous generosity. His example is a gift from God that endures and a reminder that I always have more to give.



Susan Graham Walker leads the Congregational Giving and Stewardship area for the United Church of Canada and is "loaned" part-time to the Anglican Church of Canada. Her Anglican projects include [Giving Our Thanks & Praise](#), the [I Intend](#) discipleship project and the [Inspire! Invite! Thank!](#) Facebook group.

# Living Abundantly with Less

GARY RUSSELL



You might think *Living with Less* lines up well with *Stewardship* – if you reduce your consumption, you can give more money to the Church. But that flows from a hopelessly narrow concept of stewardship, one that completely misses the mark.

Stewardship is an expansive concept, and its larger meaning is living our faith to the full. It's a whole lifestyle – a broad commitment to changing the way we live in the world according to the vision of Christ. That lifestyle is one of being faithful stewards, commissioned by God to nurture the garden bequeathed to us and to honour all its inhabitants with our loving care. It takes all our gifts – our time, talents, and treasures – packaged in a lifestyle of generous living, to fully reflect God's grace. Give more and take less, because a simple life frees you to serve. That's an all-consuming mandate, not just a week in the Fall when we fill out a donation card.

We need to rescue a crippled stewardship that's been narrowed down, in the minds of many, to that dreaded financial pitch one Sunday. But it's not only, or even primarily, about our treasure. It's about all the things we

are grateful to give – the time we devote to caring for our neighbours, the skills and abilities we contribute to God's children, the passion we put into our work. In that spirit, we turn stewardship into an opportunity to make our faith so meaningful and rewarding that we're eager to serve. When we make people excited to be part of that mission, they will step forward. Then the money aspect can be viewed in its true context.

## Stepping Back from Scarcity Culture

If our grandparents had known we'd be producing 30 times more commodities than they could produce, they'd say we're living in a time of extravagant abundance. If they also knew we all think we're living in a time of nagging scarcity, they'd think we've lost our minds. Perhaps we have.

What lies behind this scarcity mindset that seems so absurd yet colours everything we do in our economy?

Some would say it's the product of our consumer culture, fed by a marketing industry that has mastered all the psychological techniques to suck us into obsessive behaviours that render us perpetually dissatisfied. A scarcity mindset is



Photo: Barde Reuver



Photo: Michele D'Anna

deliberately and carefully cultivated so that, no matter how much we have, it's not enough.

But I think it runs deeper. It's rooted in the most basic moral choices we have made within our society. What are we doing with our lives? Why do we work? What is the purpose of consumption in our lives? As abstract as these questions are, they actually determine how we conduct our lives.

Here's the anti-economics of it. Do we work to meet our *needs* or to indulge our *wants*? You may think there's a fine line between them, and it's an impossible question to define. But that belies a clear relationship that more is simple and distinct than anyone can understand.

Take two facts. One: our economy produces more stuff today than it did a generation ago. Two: there's a marketing industry out there that pushes us relentlessly to want more stuff every day, because we can never have enough. As a result, we live in a culture of scarcity where shortages are the norm and losers go without.

That's *wants*. Now let's add another fact regarding *needs*. Though our economy produces more stuff today than it did a generation ago, our needs haven't changed much. For example, how much more food do you need than your grandmother did? From a needs perspective, we live in a culture of abundance

where surplus is the norm and nobody need go without unless goods are deliberately denied them.

So which is it: scarcity or abundance, shortage or surplus? Here's what I would suggest. Abundance is the natural order of things, unless we're subject to psychological marketing scams that trick us into believing that too much is not enough – and unless they make us so addicted to frivolous wants that we don't even know what our needs are, and how modest they really are, or how much surplus stuff we're drowning in.

## On a Mission

What do we make of our needs? We follow our calling instead of our insatiable appetites. What is God calling you to do? What do you need in your life in order to follow that mission? Surely you don't really need all that unnecessary stuff that clutters your living space. Of course we need to consume up to a point in order to live without distress. But, beyond that, we should heed the call to serve. That's where stewardship comes from. And there's another side to it: casting off what you don't need for the use of others who *are* in need. Now carry it a step further – it's not limited to giving mere money. Give the three T's: your Time, Talents, and Treasures.

Note that Treasure is last on the list, but only because it should not be considered until after you have considered what *of yourself* you're ready to give, before you know which *of your holdings* you might part with.

That's real Stewardship. That's Generous Living writ large. And that's living with less because you're on a mission.

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Dr. Gary Russell is with St. Margaret's Anglican and Epiphany Indigenous parishes in Winnipeg. He taught Economics for many years in Canadian and Chinese universities, though he now calls himself an anti-economist. He was recently installed as a Lay Canon in the Diocese. He has currently been assigned to coordinate its Generous Living and Stewardship programme.

# Parish News Round Up

## Save the Date: Canon Andrew White, former Vicar of Baghdad, will be visiting the Diocese of Rupert's Land in late March

Canon White is a respected academic and author, a medical professional, an Anglican priest and an internationally-renowned global peace-maker. He was the Vicar of St. George's in Baghdad from 1994 to 2014. You can find more information about him [at his website](#).

Planning for this visit is underway and sponsored by St. Margaret's Anglican. More information will follow as plans evolve.

- **March 23, 2019:** Fundraising dinner in the evening (location to be determined)
- **March 24, 2019:** Preaching at St. Margaret's
- **March 25, 2019:** Public address at St. Margaret's

## Joint Worship Service

St. Saviour's Anglican Church and St. Andrew's Sudanese Anglican Mission invites you to join us for worship on Sunday evenings from 7:00–8:00 p.m. at St. Saviour's. This worship service is a unique collaboration of two distinct cultures, which incorporates South Sudanese music and liturgical traditions. Please come and join us.

## 2019 Canadian Conference on Ecclesiology and Ethnography

The Network for Ecclesiology and Ethnography has issued a call for papers for its second conference, which will take place in June 2019.

### From the submission call:

"This conference seeks to draw together academics, students, and practitioners who are, or are interested in, working with theological approaches to qualitative research, or qualitative research in conversation with theology, concerning the Church and/or churchly practice (ministry – youth, emerging adult, etc, new forms of church, liturgics, congregational music, congregational studies, lived theology, lived religion, and more). It is a wide-ranging conference allowing for a diversity of projects and papers broadly connected to ecclesiology and ethnography.

Our aim is to be a generative space that encourages research, engaged with the Church and a quality place for, scholars, graduate students (postgraduates), upper level undergraduates, professors and instructors, and ministerial practitioners to present research and work in progress. Discussions and research will be generously shared among participants and questions and responses to papers are for the benefit of learning and moving forward work presented."

Submission are due March 1, 2019. You can find [full submission details here](#).



This page of the Parish News Round Up is sponsored by Richard Rosin. For more information, see his ad on page 8.



## Gifts of Grace

St. Saviour’s mission, Gifts of Grace, entered its sixth year in 2018. The mission provides a hot supper meal on Thursdays and breakfast on Saturday mornings to Winnipeg’s homeless.

To support these meals, St. Saviour’s has two meal-making groups for sandwiches and casseroles, who work side-by-side in the parish hall on the second and fourth Wednesdays of every month. In 2018, the casserole makers, led by Bonnie Scott, made 160 casseroles and cookies; the sandwich makers, led by Kathy Allan and Bob Buchanan, made 21,414 sandwiches!

They were also joined by many volunteer groups: the 303 Pathfinders and Guides; Grade 4 and 5 students from Sherwood Park School; the Social Justice committee (called Generation Now) from St. Alphonsus School; students from the Harold Hatcher Before and After Program; the 119 Girl Guides; and 13 youth from Elmwood Community Resource Centre.

Gifts of Grace looks forward to continuing this good work in 2019.

## Evensong

The Evensong schedule for February is:

- February 3:** All the King’s Men (St. John’s College), 7:00 p.m.
- February 10:** St. Luke’s Anglican, 4:00 p.m.
- February 17:** St. George’s, Crescentwood, 4:00 p.m.
- February 24:** All Saints’ Anglican, 4:00 p.m.

## Cycle of Prayer

The February Anglican Cycle of Prayer is out now. You can [download it here](#).

## Upcoming Issues

- In **March**, we’ll look for the lonely people sitting in our pews in this issue on **Being Alone**.
- In **April**, we’ll find out all the ways **Rupert’s Land** is encouraging parishes to step outside the box in this issue on **Creative Disruptions**.
- In **May’s** issue, we’ll meet **God in the Garden**.

## Donate to Rupert’s Land News

If you would like to support the work of *Rupert’s Land News*, [please consider making a donation](#) (be sure to indicate RLN).

Donations of \$20 or more will receive a tax deductible receipt. We appreciate your continued support and encouragement of this ministry.

- Your donations would go towards:
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  - putting together the Weekly newsletter
  - maintaining the website and social media
  - attending and covering diocesan events
  - and covering the costs of layout and design by Cityfolk Creative

# Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience: Re-learning How to Give

KIRSTEN PINTO GFROERER



*Last month, Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer put together a primer on [Reading the Great Spiritual Writers of the Past](#). She will be continuing her exploration of the monastic traditions in via media this month and next.*

During the season of Advent in 2018, I overheard a wise woman complain that there were too many volunteers at the food bank; you could hardly move around and there was not enough for everyone to do. She sighed and wished that people didn't insist on coming to volunteer at Christmas, but instead gave time during the rest of the year. Around the same time, I sat with the executive director of an amazing inner-city resource, and, without prompting, she too spoke of the immense challenge and resource drain that the need for people to give at Christmas caused her organization, other organizations, and those they serve. With frustration and weariness in her voice, she told me that these families don't need a myriad of turkey dinners or a pile of plastic toys for Christmas morning. What they need is constant relational supports and resources throughout the year.

Christmas giving is spent and then it is gone. The feast is over, and resources – both human and financial – dwindle to a trickle. Millions of dollars go to Christmas charities that give toys and food for one day, but far less is available through the rest of the year to provide mundane healing, support, and restoration for the day-to-day lives of the poorest of the poor.

When our need to give at Christmas becomes hurtful to those whom we had hoped to help, perhaps we need to rethink our ways of giving. Can we use this poignant problem, in which most of us participate, to push us to

consider what the Christian tradition teaches us about giving and our relationship with those in need?

The soul of giving in the Christian tradition has been sustained by the monastic tradition, in the three evangelical principles of monastic life: chastity, poverty, and obedience. Very few of us are ready to go as far as to enter into the monastery, give over all of our worldly goods, and live extremely simply. Even fewer of us are ready to vow to give ourselves to the contemplation and worship of Christ in such a way that precludes sexual activity and intimate marital relationships. Finally, we have a solid cultural resistance to obedience; we resist having anyone in a position of superiority direct our steps and send us to where we do not want to go (except if they offer us lots of money to do so). The extremity of the monastic life may not suit our modern sensibilities, but how might the principles of this way of living before God check our tendency to egoism in giving and help us to change?

A vow of chastity is a profound reminder that the love of God is the highest calling and that the purpose of our life is worship. Those who enter religious life witness to us that it is worth relinquishing our deepest human desires to enter into worship. They witness to the truth that our deepest longings are met ultimately by the God of all creation. If we are able to understand our life purpose as worship, even in the smallest way, we begin to realize that when we



Photo: Dean Shareski

"Depression Breadline," a bronze sculpture made in 1999, stands at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, DC.

give, both of our resources and of our personhood, we are giving what is already God's, not from what is our own.

Understanding ourselves as *stewards* of God's good gifts and not as *owners* changes our lives. Regular giving becomes not an activity of the will, but an offering of love to God. For the majority of us who are not ready to make a vow to chastity, the daily practice of prayer, and the weekly practice of taking our bodies into the church for common worship, operate as habits that can slowly build love over a lifetime to change the way we see the world and open our beings to give from God.

The vow of poverty witnesses to our need to trust God and understand that each one of us is loved in common. Those who give over all their worldly goods own nothing. They are completely dependent, and they witness to the truth that we are all dependent – on each other, on the earth, and, ultimately, on God. In our dependence, we are equal in the sight of

God. God wants the fullness of life for each of us. Just so, those who have more must share it with those who do not; it isn't a choice, but rather our response to the gift of our life. This is a humbling way to live. It means relinquishing the power of giving if and when we want to, and it means relinquishing the pride that we feel in our own generosity.

What we receive in return is the opportunity to live in the common love that God has for us all. If we are not called to give up all our worldly goods, how do we practice this way of being? Bruce Handford, one of the most significant teachers of stewardship in this diocese in the last 20 years, taught me a simple act that has helped me to tangibly grasp this truth. He said that I needed to tithe first, before spending anything, because it would teach me the order of reality. What we have is God's, and it is for God's glory and the good of all. We need to physically practice this truth on a regular basis.

Finally, the vow of obedience witnesses to



the joy of an orderly life that recognizes the gift of authority. I relinquish my need for control and I receive my life instead of trying to *make* my life. When a monk or a nun takes a vow of obedience he or she pledges obedience not only to a superior, but to a rule of life. The rule provides a rhythm of ordered life in which he or she can flourish. We may not be ready for a rigorous rule, but what about the simple rule of the Church year?

We as humans are wired to give more abundantly and easily on feast days because feasting breeds generosity. Perhaps our over-giving at Christmas indicates that we as the Church need to attend to the call of all of our feasts and fasts, not just the one. We can honour the feast

of Easter and Pentecost and allow these feasts to help us to give. We can rekindle, or at least remember, the traditions of the Ember days of Advent, Lent, Pentecost, and Autumn near Holy Cross. These days are meant to seasonally remind us of the gifts of creation, our need for moderation, and our responsibility to the poor. These days seem particularly suited to pressing us into the truths we need to remember in order to give freely. The rule and rhythm of the Church year can help us be transformed into disciplined givers who understand their place in the order of things.

We need to give, but not in order to generate a good feeling that assuages guilt and bolsters our egos in time for Christmas. Rather, we need to give because we have been given our life, and we have been invited into a love that is abundant and common to all people. It is a love into which we can entrust our resources and ourselves. In doing so, we can participate and flourish within a goodly order of feasts and fasts at which the rich and the poor are meant to banquet together.



Photo: [Jim Forest](#)

## "Christ of the Soup Kitchen"



Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer is a counsellor and writer currently learning from the medieval theologian and mystic, Julian of Norwich. She is part of St. Margaret's Anglican Parish where she served for a long time as a pastor. To learn more about her work visit [the Anchorhold](#).