

# ***The Power of Caring, the Hour of Sharing***

**Philippians 4:10-20**

If you're like me, nearly every day you receive in the mail solicitations for money from some very good charities and organizations and from some not-so-good charities and organizations. With each stack, I make a relatively casual decision: will I bother to open the envelope or should I toss the whole thing into the Faustian file of eternal damnation, otherwise known as the wastebasket (or, as it were, Fusco's toybox)?

Wendy and I contribute to a number of things; at times, though, I feel a bit remorseful for my rather cavalier attitude in dismissing those we don't respond to, especially the hoards of direct mail solicitors—some who go to the trouble of personalizing my computer-generated third-class mail with folksy intimacy: “Dear Rev,” which just warms my heart. I think to myself, such bosom-buddy friendliness certainly warrants a favorable response from me out of appreciation (I mean, they went to the trouble to write me a letter and call me by my first name, “Rev”).

Alas, this is why Wendy and I have no friends. With hasty indifference, I routinely and recklessly toss these bulk mail relationships into the proverbial bin of false hopes and broken hearts. So many potential life-changing charitable connections that come through the mail go out with the Sawchuck boys every Monday and Thursday.

I realize all of these direct mail solicitations are sent out with at least a modicum of sincerity and need. It is a veritable fact that non-profit organizations the world over are suffering from inadequate

funding—churches, in particular. Nary a one that I know of is rolling in dough, or complaining that people are far too generous, funding them much more than they need or use. In all my years of ministry, I've never heard a Financial Secretary stand up at a church meeting and gripe: "Stop!! Please stop! I can't possibly count all the money you're giving us!" It's never happened. Sure, there are scammers and "nonprofits" that probably shouldn't be referred to as such (e.g., Roger Goodell and the NFL), but ninety-nine percent of charitable organizations don't suffer from "excessive affluence."

Frankly, since there are so many worthy organizations out there, it's not surprising that most are scrambling to keep things going, all the while competing for the same dollars and donors. Most Americans are very generous with the charitable donations, sacrificing what they could spend on their own household in order to support a favorite cause, organization, or faith community which is important to them. Yet, few of us are in a position to support every good cause and charity that comes our way. So we make decisions about what's a priority for us, which causes are worthy of support, and which gifts can be offered with the intent to do as much good as we can on what limited means we can offer.

What prompts this kind of generosity? Duty? Responsibility? Sympathy? Guilt? All those are possible. More likely, we give generously because we *care*. We care about an organization, a cause, the vision and goals of a mission, or we care about the people who benefit from our charity. Generosity may be prompted for a variety of reasons, but the paramount one is because people care about something or someone enough to voluntarily share their personal

resources with them. When we have found a mission or an organization that we believe in—something which instills trust and serves as a channel through which we can support meaningful causes, or which is essential to our own sense of wellbeing, or one that inspires us to be better than we presently are, then a bond is formed and it's easy to give. It's a natural response. We share because we're better for trying to make the world in which we live better.

In addition, most people are generous when it comes as a thank-you for what they've already received. It's a simple exchange: we receive care from someone or something, so we are generous in turn out of gratitude for something good coming our way. I would imagine that for just about every charitable dollar that goes out of our household income, it is directed toward something we care about, but also from which we received some benefit. That's the power of caring—it's reciprocal, it's self-renewing, and it inspires us to live at a level which exceeds what we can be or do for ourselves while expanding our world in partnership with others.

A further motivation that prompts generosity is as an investment for the future. We support educational institutions because we want to see them benefit future generations, perhaps even our grandchildren. We contribute to fundraisers for the American Cancer Society, Alzheimer's Association, or similar charitable causes because it's an investment toward potential cures, while expressing empathetic support for current sufferers. We invest in our church with an eye toward the future, hoping that those who follow us in years to come will benefit from our faithfulness and foresight in the present to maintain the ministry and our Meetinghouse. The

motivations to give may differ, but ultimately it is caring, generated out of sense of responsibility to do what's right. We invest for a good result and it's the right thing to do.

When you and I consider all of these reasons for giving, the power of caring lies at the heart of it. We care about this church and its ministries and how we've been cared for through this church and its ministries. You and I support this church because of what it represents in our lives. This is our spiritual home; this is the community of people with whom we worship and keep company, with whom we interpret and study the teachings of Jesus, and among whom we find many of our friendships, as well as caregivers in our own time of need.

Our sense of *responsibility* is mutual, even though our *responsibilities* may not be. We don't all turn on the lights or use the various rooms in the Meetinghouse, but we all pitch in to make sure everything is available and in good order when we enter this building. We don't all sing in the choir, or play an instrument, but we all reap the benefits of our music programs. We might not have children or grandchildren who are a part of the Youth group or Sunday School, but we invest together to ensure we have the best programs available for those who do participate. We don't all know where the mission dollars go, but we trust in those who allocate them, knowing that our funds are well managed and well spent. Not everyone needs a pastoral visit, or personal counseling, or a ceremony for a milestone moment (some might add, a weekly sermon), but we invest together to fund the budget to make sure there is pastoral leadership.

All of this is a matter of investing together in the church to the degree that we can keep the public witness of Jesus Christ present in this place, because this church has meant so much to us, and it provides for many of our spiritual needs or does things that make each of us proud and, frankly, we would be at a loss without it in our lives.

Every year, we need to remind ourselves that the present and future of this church is never guaranteed, since from the beginning each generation has had to generate enough funds in the annual stewardship campaign to fund the budget that keeps things intact or growing in the following calendar year. Unlike many congregations, we don't have much of an endowment to fall back on. If we stop donating, or cut back in our giving, much of what we have here will go away. We won't be able to afford it. If we invest in this ministry, we will continue to maintain and expand what we do together.

This is really no different than the appeal from the earliest of churches two thousand years ago. If you listened to the Apostle Paul's words of appreciation expressed to the church in Philippi, it's much the same thing. He was supported financially by them and lived within whatever means they provided. Sometimes it was a lean time; other years were full and fruitful. But his gratitude was sincere because he knew their giving was a measure of their partnership with him and what together they were doing in Christ's name. They never suffered from excessive affluence, but it was the power of their caring that generated the remarkable ministry they achieved.

So the question before us all is this: what do each of us care about? Before we bring forth our pledge cards in a few minutes, I'd

like to hear from some of you as to where you experience the power of caring in your life. What is it about this ministry we share that makes a difference in your life—that inspires your support, that makes you want to invest in its present and future? How have you felt cared for or how have you expressed care for another?

What is it about the power of caring that in this hour of sharing makes us all grateful for what God has made happen in this place?

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