

## Living Simply

There is a saying attributed to a group of Christians known as “Mennonites” that is startling in its implications. It is, “Live simply so that others may simply live.” If taken seriously by a large number of us it could change the way our economy and even our government at all levels function. Many of us would stop worrying about the latest move by the Federal Reserve Banking system as it affects the dwindling interest on our savings. We would not obsess over the latest clothing styles just to keep us with some designer’s idea of what we should wear. We might even give up hope of ever saving enough to live as well in retirement as we did when we were employed. Instead, we would pay more attention to knowing and helping to meet the needs of our neighbors now.

Of course, for many of us that might mean a bigger change in our life styles than we are comfortable with at first. Yes, it means taking the focus off of ourselves long enough to recognize and give thanks that we have enough to help someone else. All those stories I heard about adding water to the stew when an unexpected guest arrives might become more than stories from the past.

Well, that’s an unsettling thought, isn’t it? Yes, it is for some of us. Knowing that any person in need is also a sister or brother in the family of God may cause those with the means to help some discomfort. It means accepting that everyone is equally loved and valued by God whether in need or having excess. If we haven’t thought of it before, living simply so that others may simply live is a way to “love our neighbors.” (See [Luke 10:29-37](#))

Of course, we can undercut the whole discussion by simply raising the question “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus was asked that question and his answer, given as a parable, described the neighbor as anyone who needed help and whoever provided that help. Who are our neighbors today? They are people so poor that they have to take payday loans at high interest as well as those who have to hire investment managers to oversee their wealth. They are people whom we rely on for their skills, such as plumbers, electricians, police and fire fighters. They also include people who are educated, often at great cost, who aren’t even asking how they could use their education to help others.

We live, particularly here in Silicon Valley, with values that focus on wanting more of what we already have or a newer and bigger version of whatever conveniences we already own. We are increasingly dividing into two groups: 1) those who have far more than we need, sometimes grotesquely so (i.e. as in yachts, private jets and large amounts of rare metals, jewelry, etc.); 2) those who have far less than they need just to be safe, warm and have enough food and healthcare.



Is there any possibility of bridging this divide? Yes. We can begin this ministry by working through our faith groups (Temples, Synagogues, Churches, Mosques, etc.). However, it does not end there. We need to discover additional ways to bridge the divide in the United States. Every level of government has or will engage in endless studies, surveys of what voters will support and even pass some limited forms of assistance to those in need. Those efforts can help.

Meanwhile, there are steps that many, but not all, of us can take. Those of us living in poverty that we didn't choose (i.e. some religious group members voluntarily take vows of poverty) should be welcome in our houses of worship and everywhere else we meet them. They are, in fact, members of God's worldwide family and our neighbors however we encounter them. Each person with a need may be the very person that we are called, individually and collectively, to assist.

Those of us living well above subsistence levels with several huge television sets, cars, computers, homes, closets of clothing, etc. are called to rethink our priorities. Specifically, we can ask ourselves whether we really need that new car, living room furniture or computer. Or, if something expensive is broken and cannot be repaired we should ask how much we should spend. If we need to replace a kitchen appliance does that mean that we are justified in remodeling the entire kitchen or even the whole house?

Live simply so that others may simply live! How does it happen? It's not part of our genetic code as far as I know. So, "living simply" is a conscious choice that we need to make every day. It needs to be grounded in prayer. I mean that in a literal sense. We need to prayerfully ask and then learn to accept God's standard of giving to those in need. How much we can and are called to give will vary according to how much we spend on ourselves before we consider people in need. Without daily prayer for the grace to be generous, it is far less likely that we will joyfully help those in need.

Live simply so that others can simply live!

Rev. Larry LaPierre