

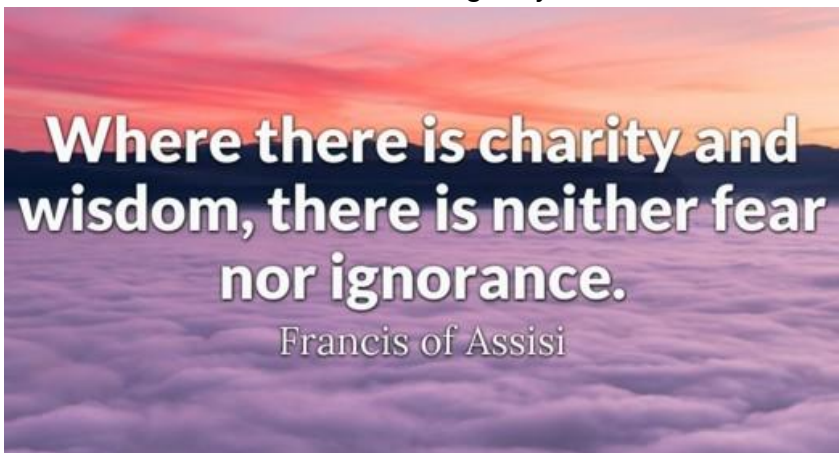
CHARITY- How Does It Happen?

Charity--it's not always a positive or even a neutral word. Frequently it's used to describe a kind act--as in an act of *charity*. Usually that means giving or doing something for a person who has a need of some kind. However, the same word can also be used derisively as in "That person lives off of other people's *charity*."

The root word that is translated as "charity" in older Bibles is "agape." in [1 Corinthians 13](#) it expresses a depth of love which centers on the well being of the person whom we love--not on us. This level of love is often needed when helping people who are desperate for help and angry about needing to ask. In my experience *charity* often, but not always, involves giving money. However, sometimes money does not go directly to the one asking for help.

When I joined a clergy group in Belfast, Maine in 2002 I listened as the pastors of several churches wrestled with the plight that some of their parishioners faced in what was then a time of rapidly rising heating oil prices. Winters in Maine can be bitterly cold, and not having enough money to buy fuel oil can endanger life.

Pastors in northern New England usually don't have very large discretionary accounts. Nor, typically, do they have parishioners who can be called on in an emergency for \$250 to \$500.00 or more to fill a family's empty oil tank. So, the group of pastors I met with pooled their limited funds. Then they created a centralized record-keeping system for dispensing the fuel oil. Pastors took turns being the designated pastor for a given week to authorize fuel deliveries to needy families. This helped ensure that no one person or family received more than the limit of 100 gallons of fuel oil or kerosene a month from this group of churches.



Carefully doling out limited funds for oil or other forms of energy is one way for the Church to practice *charity* to those in need while being good stewards of their limited funds. There are others. Making space on our church campus available at reduced or no cost to community or support groups is another. Frequently, these groups provide a resource to individuals or to the community at large that might not otherwise be available to people of low income. Purchasing school supplies for children of low-income families has been a way to be charitable that we've embraced in past years here at Campbell UMC. Assembling bicycles to give to needy children is another. There have been and will be other ways to show that we recognize the importance of *charity* offered in God's name.

However, some of us have had only limited experience with being on the receiving end of *charity*. As we get older we may find it difficult to empathize with people in desperate

circumstances. Thus, we may resent requests for help particularly from people with whom we believe that we have little in common.

It may sound ridiculous to claim that there can be great joy in *charity*. We might prefer to grumble about the times when someone has lied to us about their need or otherwise abused our *charity*. Well, we don't stop feeding a teenager just because she or he asks for more food than normal to give to a friend who lacks a reliable source of food. Nor do we put the food collection barrels away simply because we see a presumably needy person taking food from the food collection barrels at church.

Once we give something, we need to let go of it. If we don't let go of our gift our emotions can make it harder for us to open our hearts to God's grace. In a sense we will be holding onto the earthly goods. That makes it harder to open our hands and hearts to receive all that God offers us.

If we meditate daily on God's act of love in sending God's Son in the person of Jesus to free us to love, we will find it much easier to give what others need. If we choose we can make the giving part of a tangible response to God's unique gifts to us. Yes, I mean Jesus Christ, but I also include the gift of God's Holy Spirit sent by God at Pentecost so that we can grow in love and service to God even as we proclaim the Gospel.

Whether we accept God's love or not is up to us. What is not up to us is that God loves each person. In fact, it is not too much to claim that, for everyone to have what he or she needs, God may ask each of us to serve as a channel for God to be able to meet the needs, not the "wants," but the real needs of each person on this world.

Still, we worry about not having "enough," don't we? Yes, I am one of those who spent well over half of my life fearing a time when there wouldn't be "enough." I finally realized that following wherever God leads each day is incredibly more important than having enough of anything. The truth is that even billionaires can't buy God's love or the faith, hope and *CHARITY* that God offers to us so freely.

Joy comes each morning that we awaken with God. Inner peace comes as we gradually give over to God more of what we have in the name of God's *charity* (love) for us! Charity ("agape" love) comes to us as we welcome God's willingness to offer us what we need--the assurance of God's eternal love.

As always, feel free to [respond](#).

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