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## Helping the Needy

### Some need help more than once in a while

Prior to last Christmas we decided some changes were needed. As families grow, so does the present-buying budget; and it occurred to us that our lot generally did very well, especially the kids. I recall in the past trundling round the store with our gift list, finding most of what we wanted, substituting something different when certain items weren't available. Having ticked off the list, we looked at the trolley and thought: "That seems a bit mean," so round we went again, adding a few bits and pieces to make up the shortfall. In truth, the original selection would have been adequate; but, as often is the case, with kids, especially those in the younger age bracket, quantity matters. The consequence of this amended shop was a huge bill at the checkout.

Well, we thought, it's only once a year and we can afford it. That was then; now, however, we are more mindful of those who are not so lucky. There are individuals and families which are barely surviving financially. Rent chews up most of their income leaving little for food, medication and certainly not enough for treats of any kind. The homeless are even worse off, and this demographic is increasing constantly. It's all very well to sit in our comfort zone and expect governments and the like to fix an ever-growing problem; but they are only fiscal managers. There are, of course, the charity organisations – the Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul, Food-Bank and various volunteer groups battling to keep up with the demand; and although they do a good job, they also need help.

While downtown to pick up a few bits and pieces from the supermarket we saw a table set up by 'Vinnies' selling raffle tickets. We bought some, not really interested in the prizes; just thinking of it as a charity donation. Chatting to one of the ladies, we found out that there were collection points in various places where items like food could be dropped off; and this would later be sorted, packaged and distributed to the needy. At Christmas time this would be especially welcome for those who could barely afford to put any food on the table, let alone serve up a feast. And imagine the kids of these families missing out on presents... It's an awful, very sad situation. So, we thought, forget our own - let's buy gifts for others instead.

We did just that and spent quite some time trawling round the shops, picking up non-perishable food items with a decent use-by date that we thought would be handy. There was rice, pasta, canned soup, baked beans and spaghetti, and all manner of other stuff. We also went to the Reject Shop to buy a selection of gifts for the kids. None of this cost us a fortune; and we felt good about ourselves for doing it. That was reward in itself, topped off by the fact that when our donations went into one of the collection bins, we had to tell the shopkeeper handling it that the bin was full and needed emptying. Thanks to our change of strategy, some folks, at least, wouldn't be going without over the coming Christmas.

Donating money to charities still funds organisations catering for the needy; but the extra thought and effort that goes into personally buying goods that can be handed over for distribution seems more gratifying. We believe so, anyway. And I got to thinking that many will feel the same – you know: peace and goodwill to all. The thing is, though, that Christmas comes but once a year; whereas those unfortunate people who are barely surviving, they are hungry every day, every month, all year round.

So, where would be the harm putting into the pot on a more regular basis? Adding an item or two to the trolley every time we went to the shops wouldn't break the bank; and once there was a reasonable selection it could be passed on to one of the charity organisations. I very much doubt that it would be refused, certainly not by the people destined to eventually receive it.

Please give it some thought. Decent folk are usually generous and caring. Maybe they and we can take it one small step further...?

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