

Caught Doing Good  
February 12, 2009

Here is a true story:

"A downtown congregation in a moderately-sized community had occasional transients, homeless persons and street people who would ask for handouts. Often street people would be found sleeping on the front steps. The staff developed rules, guidelines, and policies for how to help or how to refer those who asked for help. They had many discussions about the pros and cons of giving cash, vouchers, and addresses of other social agencies. One day's discussion took considerable staff time with few conclusions.

"As the pastor was leaving the church later that afternoon, he noticed the part-time custodian carrying out the garbage to the large trash bin in the alley. There was a homeless person sprawled out beside the bin, looking barely conscious. As the custodian approached the trash bin, he set down the garbage bag he was carrying, reached into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, and removed a few dollar bills. Without having been asked, he walked over to the homeless person and gave him the money, said something, then continued his work, and returned to the church. The pastor was amazed and humbled by this extraordinary display of generosity. The part-time janitor who earned less than anyone else on staff gave generously without even being asked.

"The pastor asked the custodian why he gave the money without even being asked and also pressed him about whether he thought the homeless person might misuse the money for alcohol or drugs. 'I always do that when I can,' the janitor answered. 'I give them a little money and say, *God bless you*, because I figure that even though they may be pretty messed up, they are some mother's son, some father's child, and so I give them something. What they do with the money - well, they have to answer to *God* about that. I just have to answer to *God* about what I do with mine.' (p. 113-114, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Robert Schnase, Abingdon Press, 2007)"

I have found this story to be touching and moving. It challenges me to look at myself and my attitudes toward *God* and giving. I am touched by the janitor's understanding that "I have to answer to *God* about what I do with mine (resources)."

In a world rocked by economic turmoil and fear, we are faced with the question, how and I going to respond? Am I going to respond with fear? Am I going to fall back into a mentality of protectionism? Or am I going to continue to look to *God* and trust *God* for my life and my resources? Am I going to find a way to continue to give faithfully, as a way to say thank you to *God* for all that *God* has done for me?

My hope is that we will find a way to walk into the future trusting *God*, living generously. In a world of tight-fistedness and fear, living with hope and generosity is one of the best ways to show ourselves and the world, the love of *God*.

In the hope *Jesus* offers us,

*Rev. Scott Carlson*

*The Mission of Sun Prairie United Methodist Church is to invite and welcome people to be committed and compassionate followers of Jesus Christ through worship, through spiritual growth, through fellowship and through service to others.*