

Charity or Stewardship?

I love our Anglican tradition and how we address the faith. I especially love the way in which we are encouraged to leaven our faith with reason. It is in this spirit that I want to address the question of how we give, especially to our community service groups as they reach out in loving service to people in need.

This reflection arises from a movement in community service organisations, such as Anglicare WA, to offer targeted and effective support to people suffering from financial stress and crisis. This is an intentional change to improve the work they do, but is made difficult in the face of increasing operational costs, decreasing rates of volunteering and the uncertainty associated with donations from the public.

I attend a number of meetings where we discuss the problems of food and other donations made by the general community (including those from Anglican schools and churches). Donations by their very nature are random - both in what is offered and when they are made available to agencies. They involve complicated logistics. How will they be collected and who will get them to relief centres? How do we then get these items to people in need? How will people reliant on public transport tote their supplies home?

There is also the issue of quality control. When I have been involved with past emergency relief efforts I have been both awed by the generosity of donors and have occasionally blushed at what has been offered. Rusty cans. Out of date food. The Mung Bean puree that looked good at the time but has spent the last year sitting at the back of the pantry. Someone, sometime thought that this was an acceptable offering but it is not what we should be offering those we serve.



These sorts of issues make the effective provision of material assistance and low cost clothing or household items difficult indeed. An increasing amount of energy and organisational costs are driven by logistics which take away from the essential work of organisations like Anglicare WA. That is, effective support offered to people and families as they move from surviving to thriving.

As the Anglican Community how are we to consider all of this? If we are to apply 'faith with reason' - what are the implications for us as we try to support agencies such as Anglicare WA when they offer material and financial support to people in need?

This is all about how we give as Christians. Giving covers many areas of our life together. Our giving to support the life and mission of our Church. The way in which we support local service and overseas mission. How we offer our time and our talents in our communities of faith, within the larger Church and as good citizens in our localities. In short - what is under discussion here is 'stewardship'.

At the risk of over simplifying all of this there are two world views when it comes to giving.

I choose to give

'Charity'
Voluntary contribution
Individual choice and discretion
Giving from what is left over
Largesse
Volunteer

I am called (required) to give

'Stewardship'
Required commitment
A focus on spiritual maturity
Setting aside what is needed as a first step
Budgeting / tithing
Disciple

My friend grew up in a manse where the minister's family were expected to get by on very little income, supplemented by the random gifts from the people of the Church. He still can't look a pumpkin in the face without quailing. The sense behind all of this was that ministry was to be sustained by the well-meaning care of the People of God. There was no system. No planning or intentionality. Ministry was supported through charitable goodwill and that was to be enough.

We know now that such an approach to the life and mission of the Church is inadequate. We do struggle with the notion of planned giving with a number of our people, but there is a general consensus that ministry does not happen by accident and cannot rely on generosity alone. To be a spiritually mature people we must be intentional in this regard. We are to plan and prepare. To enable the mission of the Church we are to ensure that the finances, skills and time we offer are presented in a planned and organised manner.

When it comes to the way in which we donate there a similar set of attitudes.

I choose to give.

'Charity'.

Helping out is important. People will make do with what they get and in the way in which I offer it.

Donations made at my discretion.

People in are in transition and just need something to tide them over.

Random food and other offerings.

I am called (required) to give.

'Stewardship'.

'Serve' is one of the three basic aspects of our Diocesan Mission Plan. If we do not serve as individuals and faith communities we are not fulfilling our calling.

Mission PLAN i.e. we do these things with intent and maturity, calculated to give the best outcomes.

People most often experience poverty and long term hardship because of systems and structures that make moving out of that situation very difficult.

Planned donations - carefully selected donations or money directed to making a difference in a particular area of need.

The general public often operates out of the first perspective when it comes to giving. As do many Anglicans - individuals, churches and schools. Service organisations are the recipients of very generous giving, but it is often not planned or targeted by those who give.

A spiritually mature attitude to supporting the work of organisations such as Anglicare WA would look more like the Stewardship option. It applies the same values that we use for the life of our faith communities and addresses how we serve others. It is not enough to give in unplanned and even impulsive ways. We called to fulfil our mission in the best way that we can - with planning and intentionality.

Three things that this means for us as the Anglican Community

1. Stewardship before Charity. There is an imperative here if we are to develop our faith communities and grow in maturity. When it comes to our calling to serve we can challenge our people to plan more in the way that they contribute to the work of others in this area. As we plan and promote our own activities in this regard we can

emphasise the importance of a considered response to appeals and provide guidance and suggestions on how our people might contribute to our efforts.

2. Engage in Active Partnerships. When we support an agency such as Anglicare WA through donations we become partners in mission. We engage with their work to a certain extent. The support of the Anglican Community is crucial to their work and the impact they have on the lives of many Western Australians. We can grow the nature of our partnership in this area of financial and material support.

Here are some useful questions to ask:

"Did we contact the organisation to plan together what would be the most effective way to make a donation? What should be collected? Would money be better than goods? How can we ensure it gets to where it is needed?"

3. Provide money before material donations. This is the contentious item! For deep psychological reasons donors often want to provide a tangible gift towards a cause. Yet for the reasons listed earlier in this paper (and many more) a gift of money is many times more effective than a material one of food or goods.

It is not impossible to move away from the food basket to the collection bowl or planned mission giving. One parish in the southern suburbs of Perth WA, for example, actively discourages donations of food. In its place, after education and challenge, their people contribute to Anglicare WA's emergency relief program through a gold coin donation. Another parish in the northern suburbs still collects food for a local Anglicare WA community centre, but does so with clear planning and direction. Their people are asked month by month to donate particular food items which meet the needs of that emergency relief centre. This is supplemented by a regular parish mission tithe to their work.

I love being an Anglican Christian and I am very proud of our Church. We engage in the area of service and care in many ways. We make a significant difference in the lives of many people here and around the world. I believe our people are up to the challenge. I know that with challenge and education we rise to greater levels of spiritual and corporate maturity.

In this one small area of our life together- my call is that we take stewardship seriously.

Mark McCracken
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June 2103

How Can You Respond?

1. Circulate this document to your mission team and parish council. Make it an item for discussion at your meeting.
2. Invite me to take you for coffee so that we can chat about it further.
3. Invite an Anglicare WA representative to make a deputation to your church / agency / school with the specific purpose of speaking about this sort of intentional giving.
4. In consultation with your mission team / parish council, develop an intentional 'Giving Program' around these principles.