

32963 Article 11-19-09

by the Rev. Drs. Casey and Robert Baggott
Community Church of Vero Beach

The Year's Greatest Gifts

Michael Lindvall has written a humorous novel about a pastor's years of work in a little church in a small town in Minnesota. One incident from the book that particularly stands out in our memory occurred one morning during Sunday worship. As the choir sang its well-rehearsed anthem, the collection plates were quietly passed through the congregation. Back and forth, front to back the plates went, until they contained the tithes and offerings of the faithful flock gathered that day in worship.

By the conclusion of the anthem, the ushers were waiting expectantly at the back of the church to bring the day's offering forward. At the appointed moment, as the organ struck up the familiar Doxology, the ushers walked forward to present the offering, and the minister descended the three steps from the chancel area to meet them and receive the offering plates. Then the minister turned and began walking back up the steps to place the offering on the altar and ask God to bless the day's gifts.

Here's when the unexpected occurred. As the minister walked back up the stairs, an offering plate in each hand, the toe of one of his shoes caught the hem of his clergy robe. He stepped again and the next shoe caught in the hem as well. His hands were both full with the day's offering, and he found himself precariously balancing on the stairs, caught in his clothing and in imminent danger of toppling over. Somehow, as he tried to right himself, both arms flew up and he tossed the entire contents of the two offering plates backwards over his head, showering the congregation with little white envelopes and bills and coins. Front to back, side to side, the day's collection was sprayed wildly around the church to the surprise and great amusement of the congregation members, who found themselves the happy recipients of everything they had just given away, in fact, sometimes more than they gave away!

God's response to generosity is not usually so direct, but it is, we think, just as real! When we give, we can count on receiving – often far more than we gave in the first place. Take a look back over this year. Compare what you have given to what you have received. Even most of us whose bank accounts and investments have suffered recently can surely claim we have received generously, nevertheless! If you are one of these, we hope that in this holy season, you will stop to count the extraordinary blessings that are yours and give thanks! And as you look at the gifts with which you have been showered this year, we hope you will count as dearest the gift of God's Child to you. Merry Christmas!