

Financial Generosity - By Gary Johnson

In our 33 years of marriage, Joan and I have always given financially far more to St Matthew's than all other charities combined. Blair and Dan White have asked us why? Quite simply, it is because our spiritual life is paramount! We believe that the nourishment and growth of our spiritual lives is not a private endeavor but happens through Christian community, and St Matthew's is our Christian community.

There is another reason, though, why St Matthew's is significantly more important to us than other nonprofits to which we give much smaller donations. A few years ago, a Catholic Cardinal was speaking at Harvard University and responded to an audience question: "What do you people [you religious leaders] think you bring to society?" What if we were similarly asked: What do we think St Matthew's brings to society?

Let me paraphrase how the Archbishop responded. What would the world be like if the voices of religious traditions were not heard in our society? What would our community be like if we did not hear the Christian/Judaic commandments: Don't kill, don't steal, don't lie, don't covet? What would our land be like if we did not hear the religious imperatives of love your neighbor, do unto others as you would have them do unto you? What would our culture be like if children grow up not understanding or experiencing the love of God, Christian grace, forgiveness, reconciliation? How much more harsh would our society be if people have never been inspired by the Gospel of Christ or never grow up hearing: Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers? What would the world be like if we never are reminded that someday we will have to answer to God for our actions?

Unlike some of our secular friends who think everyone can work out privately their own ethical behavior, what resonates with us is the timeless wisdom of our first President, George Washington, who in his Farewell Address reminded our country that "reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in the [absence] of religious principles." Science doesn't teach us to love our neighbor. Rational thinking doesn't compel us, much less inspire us, to follow the radical call of the Gospel to love our enemies, to give up our life for others, to forgive those who harm us.

How would you respond to the Archbishop's questions of what our world would be like devoid of religious voices? To his credit, the young Harvard student responded: "It would be a mess".

So as Joan and I look around at all of the other institutions of our society, these are the reasons why we will continue to give far more of our money to St Matthews where we believe God is working through all of us to make a profound difference in our community and beyond.