



Giving time to help someone in need



Giving some coins to the collection plate



STORIES OF GENEROSITY

Giving food to someone on the street without a home



Making lunches for children in a nearby school that go hungry.



Making gifts for someone who otherwise would not get a gift for Christmas.

Stories
of
Generosity

Newmarket Church of Christ
2015

Stories of Generosity

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We are dependent upon God's gifts to us. The survival of creation is dependent upon a gracious God. Churches are dependent upon God's generosity. We as individuals are dependent upon God's generosity. A gracious God continues to breathe life into our midst.

On account of the generosity of God, gratitude becomes our way of life. We are people who continually give thanks to God. In this, we are people whom the apostle Paul is asking us to be, people who are "giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20). A life of gratitude is a life of giving thanks.

Embodying a posture of gratitude towards God, we are continuing in the tradition of Hebrew worship. The book of Psalms invites God's people into God's presence with praise and thanksgiving. In First Chronicles 16, we discover the practice of gratitude within worship: speaking of God's deeds among people, and remembering and telling of God's blessings, wonderful works, and faithfulness.

Paul picks up the theme of gratitude as he continually writes to the early Christian communities to be people who give thanks to God for all things. Gratitude to God and for each other was to be a defining identity marker of the early church; gratitude was to be part of the community's life (Col. 3:15; Eph. 5:3-4, 20; 1 Thess.

5:18).¹ Christian communities are communities of gratitude—giving thanks.

In our Christian tradition, we celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday. We gather around bread and wine and we give thanks for God's love culminating in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We are saved by God's generosity. God's generosity in turn creates us to be communities of gratitude.

Learning how the early church became communities of gratitude, we discover gratitude towards God spilled over into acts of generosity towards each other and the outsider. The generosity of God created communities of generosity.

The historian Luke tells how the early church often shared generosity. On a daily basis, the people of God shared food and possessions. On one occasion, a wealthy landowner sold a field and brought the proceeds to the leadership of the church so that the community of faith could bless others. The apostle Paul traveled throughout Asia Minor and took up a collection of funds so that Jerusalem, undergoing a famine, could have funds to purchase much needed supplies.

In the book of Deuteronomy, when the people of God have entered and are residents in a land they have not sown with seed, are enjoying the wine of the vineyards they have not maintained, and are occupants of homes they have not built, Moses invites them into the

¹ Christine Pohl, *Living into Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 24.

recitation of a story . . . a story that speaks of God's generosity,

'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers' (Deut. 6:21-23).

Reading further into Deuteronomy, we discover recipients of God's generosity become a community where slaves are released and food is shared with the widows and orphans. As God practices generosity so the people of God practice generosity.

Whenever the people of God failed to practice generosity, the prophets were quick to condemn. Isaiah cries out, God "looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress" and as a result, Jerusalem was destroyed (Isaiah 5). Later in the Book of Isaiah, Isaiah says,

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to cloth them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (Isa. 58:6-7)

These words of Isaiah arrive after the people of God question, Why have we fasted and God hasn't noticed?

And the answer is because generosity isn't being practiced.

The prophet Amos condemns the people of God for not practicing a life of generosity. The contemporaries of Amos are people who trample the poor, oppress the righteous, take bribes, deprive the poor of justice in the courts . . . in other words, they are not practicing a life of generosity and so there will be wailing and weeping in the streets (Amos 5).

Sharing the Kingdom of God

Jesus announces, "Repent and believe in the good news, the kingdom of God has come near." Following these words we discover Jesus casting out demons, feeding people, welcoming the outcasts to tables of food, healing the afflicted, and forgiving. These acts of generosity, often towards the outsider, allowed people to see and experience the nearness of God's kingdom.

This just wasn't the work of Jesus; it was the work of the disciples. Jesus called seventy-two disciples and sent them out to "every town and place where he himself intended to go." When the disciples arrived, they were to heal the sick, eat and drink, and announce the nearness of God's kingdom (Luke 10). The disciples were continuing to practice the generosity of God towards the outsider.

There are many ways of practicing generosity. One can be generous with the gift of time, presence, forgiveness, love, and money. Generosity is practiced in a number of ways.

Every week the Newmarket Church of Christ gathers around the table of bread and wine. In doing so, we share in the generosity of God who gave up his life so that all of creation can be reconciled. After we share the bread and wine, we bring our gifts to the table. We bring our gifts because we've received the gift of life from God.

The Newmarket Church of Christ mission is to "Share the kingdom of God through friendship with the neighbourhood." We want our neighbours to experience, witness and be caught up in the new creation—the new heaven and new earth—God is creating. We do this in a multitude of ways. We provide sandwiches for a local school so that children who are hungry have food to eat. We provide a summer camp for children in the neighbourhood that otherwise would not have an experience of a summer camp. We provide a space for our neighbours to grow vegetables. Generosity of money, time, presence, forgiveness, and love become our way of life and by living lives of generosity, our neighbours see and experience the nearness of God's kingdom.

Stories Shape Identity

Stories shape identity. If this is true, then it matters what stories we are telling. Our communal identity is in relationship with our neighbours; so what stories are we telling about living in relationship with our neighbours?

For nearly a year, after we received the generous gift of life from God revealed in bread and wine, we took time to tell a story of generosity. We told stories of making

sandwiches, buying a fridge for a family, helping a family pay rent, buying groceries, giving the gift of friendship to a homeless man, and other stories.

The stories we told are stories of God's kingdom being shared with our neighbours. But they are much more; these stories create identity—they have created us into a community that sees her life intertwined with our neighbours. We are not an isolated community of faith; we are a community of faith that exists for the sake of our neighbours.

In what follows are stories of generosity . . . stories that tell how God's kingdom is being shared with our neighbours. These stories are a collection of stories that individuals from the Newmarket Church of Christ have told. Please note some names have been changed to protect the identity of our friends.

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Marion was born with a curvature of the spine. Scoliosis, they called it. The big word did not mean much to a little girl, and it didn't get in the way of much in her younger years. But as she approached middle age, the scoliosis began to become a problem. Discs in the back started to degenerate, as they do with age, and Marion began to face great pain. Daily routines became a struggle as Marion faced the constant stabbing in her back. Surgery was not a good option since it was risky, and they could not promise any improvement. Opportunities for physiotherapy were also limited.

Marion learned to live with the pain. She did not even get any relief at night as the bed she slept in had seen a lot of years, and it offered little support for her spine. In fact, it probably made the issue worse. When our church learned of the situation, we partnered with Marion's community to buy her an orthopedic bed with significant back support. Because of our generosity, Marion now sleeps comfortably and gets some relief at night. In her note of thanks Marion said, "You are Godly people. When I go to bed at night I pray to thank God for my bed and ask him to bless your church." Our giving has allowed glory to be given to God.

Because of your generosity, we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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There is a couple with three kids who attend Maple Leaf Public School. They have been sending their two older kids to our summer camp for several years now. The kids look forward to camp every year. The mother says, "Camp is the highlight of their summer because we can't afford a vacation and we can't afford to send our kids to other camps because of the high cost."

Because of your generosity, we can tell a story like this.
Thank you for being generous.

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My favourite camp story comes from the family BBQ that concludes our week each year. We were exhausted after a week of amazing chaos but were re-energized by so many parents who brought food to the table as a thank you for what we had been doing with their children. Not only that, but they picked up tongs and started barbecuing, put on gloves and started serving, hauled tables and chairs, cleaned and organized and put \$20 bills into the palms of our hands....just to say thank you. Nothing to me speaks so highly about the good work that we are doing as when our community wants to join with us in helping, talking and sharing.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.
Thank you for being generous.

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Robin is the mother of two girls: Holly and Amy. The girls attend Maple Leaf Public School; Robin is affiliated with the parent student council. Robin says that whenever the sandwiches are brought into the office, the staff beams with smiles. Robin also volunteers with the neighborhood summer camp that the church hosts with our neighbours.

When the church joined in organizing and hosting a dinner to raise funds for the flood victims of the Philippines, Robin was amazed at how much the church stepped up, contributed, and gave their time and generosity towards the fundraiser for the Philippines. She loves the vibe and atmosphere. The church is very welcoming.

Robin informed me she is in no way a religious person. However, she has the utmost respect for our faith community. When all this outpouring of help from the church started a few years back she brushed it aside, thinking it would not last. Instead, she told me she thinks the bond between church and neighborhood, church and school has strengthened. Robin has never seen anything like this from a church. "It's refreshing" were the words Robin used. As a non-religious woman, she ended her story with this statement: "Because of the church's generosity, we have lifted her hope of goodness in people and of humanity."

Because of your generosity, we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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I was leaving work one day and a co-worker asked what I was doing for the weekend. I responded by saying that I was going to cook for the community at *Inn From the Cold*. I proceeded to tell my co-worker how we take a turn cooking a nutritious meal for individuals and families in our community that either don't have enough to eat or who need a community to eat with. I was bombarded with a list of questions, one of which was how much we charge per plate. I responded and said there was no charge; the church picks up the tab. My co-worker was shocked that we would be so generous. I was then asked how much the meal costs. It costs us roughly \$350 for the evening. My co-worker continually says that she wishes she lived closer because she would like to be a part of a community that blesses others like we do.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.
Thank you for being generous.

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Our church does a summer camp for children in the neighborhood every year. Many children who have become regulars say the summer camp is the highlight of their summer. One year we brought in *Zoo to You*. When the kids arrived and saw the animals, the look of excitement on all the children's faces was inspiring.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.
Thank you for being generous.

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When we read Acts we discover a person named Cornelius, a centurion. Cornelius was a God-fearing person and as a result, he prayed continually and gave generously to the people. One day about three in the afternoon he had a vision of an angel of God coming to him. The angel spoke and said, “Your prayers and gifts of alms are coming up as a memorial offering before God.”

Several weeks ago I heard the story of a lady who says to us as a church, “You’re Godly people. When I go to bed at night I pray to thank God for my bed and ask him to bless your church.” The one who told this story than said, “Our giving has allowed glory to be given to God.”

I’m wondering if we can connect the story of Cornelius to what we’re doing as a church. Can we see our gifts of generosity to our neighbors as a memorial offering before God? Let us continue to run with patience the race that is set before us as we look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him made the ultimate sacrifice and is now sitting down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Because of your generosity we can say these words.
Thank you for being generous.

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We learn to live generous lives. We learn by hearing stories of how people practice a life of generosity.

Most, if not all of us, have been raised by families or individuals who have worked hard at providing us with the basic necessities of life. Unfortunately, there are some circumstances where children will not experience this kind of family generosity.

Discovering children around the world are in need, our church partnered with a family who would be visiting an orphanage overseas. Through this partnership we would purchase some much needed items so that children we've never met could be blessed in ways we would never know about.

Within a couple of weeks the church collected over \$800 to send with a couple who would be visiting the orphanage. Upon arriving, the couple spent all \$800 on gifts for the orphanage. Through the church's generosity we were allowing children to be blessed.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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“As a New Testament follower of Christ, in the most affluent society in human history, there’s no way I could ever justify giving less than 10 percent when God had required that, really, of the poorest Israelite.”

- Randy Alcorn

On January 26, 2014 the church, neighbourhood, and MLPS came together to eat a meal. We were responsible for cooking the food. The logistics of cooking for 125 with an outdated kitchen are horrendous, but somehow, Jun and his helpers managed. A beef soup was slowly prepared with the proper ingredients. The pork was marinated and cooked to perfection, then shredded. Vegetables were cut up and sauté. Rice was cooked by the gallons. Eventually we were ready and the neighborhood, school, and church were called to feast at the table. They came from the East and West, North and South to dine. Those who were hungry were filled. Those who were broken found healing. Those who were alone experienced community. This was a meal the neighborhood and school continue to talk about a month afterwards.

Sitting in the back of the gymnasium watching the evening unfold, I saw friendships begin to be formed. Staff of the school were able to be introduced to parents. Parents were able to meet people of faith. People of faith were able to meet children, parents, and representatives of the school in a third space. Amidst the forming relationships, laughter abounded. I can't help but to say the breath of the Spirit was blowing new life into our midst.

Afterwards, as atheists, strangers, God seekers, people of faith were picking up the twelve baskets of food left over, people were saying to me,

- “My child grew up going to church but now she doesn't. My child invited me to this dinner because she told me a church, neighborhood, and school were partnering together. I couldn't

refuse this invitation. Thank you for this feast because I'm sensing God is present and my daughter, with your help, is learning about the work of God. Thank you."

- "I'm not a church goer, and don't know what I think about churches. But what I'm seeing is a church that cares and loves others."
- "I'm an atheist! But if we keep eating together like this I might have to think differently about God."
- "Did you see God here tonight? I did."

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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Practicing a life of generosity is training wheels for learning how to live fully in the kingdom of God.

The phone rings and I answer it. On the other line is a woman who wants some information on whether or not I will perform her marriage to her common law partner. I ask some questions and discover they've been together for over 12 years, have four kids, but have sense that it's now time to have a wedding ceremony. We talk a little bit more and then I ask, "Why are you calling me?"

The answer shocked me. "I've heard of the Newmarket Church of Christ and the way in which you are friends with the neighbourhood. I've seen with my own eyes how the church is friends with people who live across the street from your church building. In fact, it was my friends across the street who said to call you."

The only way this story can be told is because we've been practicing a life of generosity. Thank you for being generous and providing the means whereby people can recognize we are friends with the neighbourhood. Thank you for practicing generosity because through your generosity our neighbours recognize the kingdom people we are becoming.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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Our yearly summer camp program has been one of the most tangible ways that I have seen generosity displayed in our midst. I remember the year *Africycle* wanted to partner with us in order to provide the campers with a bicycle to take home. We needed to fund part of the bikes, but were nervous to take away from providing backpacks and school supplies. \$1000 was needed to cover the cost. It didn't take long for someone in our church family to write a check for \$1000. I will never forget the complete chaos and excitement from the kids as they sat on their new bikes, or the looks in the parents' eyes as their children were given a gift that would give them many childhood memories.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.
Thank you for being generous.

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Whenever I think about a story of generosity, I think about camp. This year though, I looked at camp through different lenses. I looked at camp and saw my daughter wanting to help in any way she could. I saw her building relationships with the children and volunteers. I saw my boys wanting to take whatever leadership role they were able to. Through all of it, I see camp shaping and forming my children into the image of God.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.
Thank you for being generous.

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In April 2010, we discovered there was a family in the neighborhood who were about to have their home foreclosed. When I was contacted I discovered that this single mom recently lost her job and her daughter, who was severely sick, was eating away at their savings. We knew that we could not fix the problem ourselves so several churches were contacted and as a result of this partnership, we helped stall the foreclosure of the house, helped the mom get a job and found a way to allow agencies to help with the medical hardships of the daughter. I want to read the letter we sent to this family in April 2010.

When we met the other week and you mentioned to me your predicament, I became very scared for you and your daughter. Over the past two years I have witnessed you serve the at-risk and homeless individuals of our neighborhoods. Whether you realize it or not, I am convinced that you are doing the work of God. You have become friends with others, lived sacrificially, cared for and helped the poor. Without your efforts the at-risk and homeless would fall through the cracks of society.

After reflecting upon our conversation together I became more and more convinced that we needed to help you get out of this current predicament. Thinking and praying about this situation I contacted some ministers that serve with various congregations in the Town of Newmarket asking for their help. Each of the ministers and churches were more than willing to explore how collectively we could help your family.

On behalf of several churches in Newmarket we want to say thank you for serving. Your servant heart and hands do not go unnoticed. With this, we hope this gift will relieve you of the burden that is being felt by your family at this time.

May the God who is at work in this world to bring healing and redemption continue to work in your family's life.

Only because of your generosity can a story like this be told. Thank you for your generosity.

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Several years ago I lost my job and as a result, my family encountered some difficult times. I was amazed at how the church responded with generosity. The congregation made sure that while I was looking for employment, my bills were being paid, my children had clothes and school supplies, and even people made sure my wife and I were able to get out and relax. Families gave us tickets to the movies so we could have an evening out. Now gainfully employed and getting back on my feet, I too want to practice generosity because I've been a recipient of how generosity helps families.

Because of your generosity, my family can tell this story.

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A family of four in the neighbourhood had their own basement apartment. The family was surviving and doing well, until unemployment happened. As a result, they eventually had to move “back home” with the mom. And so it was grandma, mom and dad, and the two children in a small house. The living arrangement worked for them. Dad beat the pavement, found a job, and the family started from scratch.

About a year goes by and the family has found a house to rent, but the previous tenants destroyed the fridge and stove and the landlord is refusing to provide these appliances. The family calls and says they have enough funds to purchase a stove but they are wondering if we can help with a fridge. Together we shop around and we find a fridge for \$35. The church buys the fridge for \$35 and we deliver it to the family. As we deliver, their eyes are filled with tears of joy as once again they are able to have their own home to live in.

Because of your generosity we not only can tell a story like this, we can provide a family with the means to have their home. Thank you for being generous.

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I had never lived in Newmarket before. I only moved here because my daughter lived in the area. I purchased a condo that just happened to overlook the church property. I knew the church from a distance. I knew the people by the types of cars they would drive every Sunday. One Sunday afternoon as I am sitting in my condo I look out the window and I see the strangest thing: men, women, and children nailing pieces of wood for the purpose of building some sort of frame. I watched as people carried the frames over and placed them on the grass. I wondered "What are these people doing?" The next day I heard a rumor that the church was allowing people to use the boxes as a vegetable garden. I quickly walked over to the church and introduced myself to the minister.

I was graciously received and given a box so I could grow some vegetables. I loved it. Soon I found myself attending Bible study on Wednesday nights, being invited to join other events, and what I have found was a loving, caring community.

Because of your generosity of providing a space to grow vegetables, I can tell this story. Thank you for being generous.

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Within various situations families and individuals find themselves in financial difficulties. There is not a single reason why some find themselves in financial disaster nor does financial disaster affect a single age demographic or class of people. It seems that in today's world single mothers can live with financial difficulties just as easily as a middle class family with children.

At various points in the last few years we have been in relationships with people who have lived through financial difficulty and in each circumstance, we have tried to respond appropriately. At times the church helped pay off a hydro bill while other times individuals have loaned families money until employment or other circumstances that led to a financial difficulty could be overcome.

We can only tell stories of helping each other live through financial difficulties because we are living lives of generosity. Because of your generosity, we are helping each other financially. Thank you for being generous.

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He who is generous will be blessed,
for he gives some of his food to the
poor. - Proverbs 22:9

We must credit Jerry & Sonya Fortnum for helping establish the community garden. One Sunday evening Jerry and Sonya drank coffee and tea with us and told us about our neighbours living in the condo. It was during our conversation that we learned how many of the seniors have downsized and might want a place to grow some vegetables. Shortly after our evening with Jerry & Sonya, we built fourteen garden boxes and invited our neighbors to grow vegetables.

Soon afterwards, Jerry passed away and we were people of peace at Jerry's funeral. A couple of years later Sonya passed away and again we were people of peace at Sonya's funeral. A couple of years later Jerry & Sonya's son-in-law passed away and again, we were people of peace at the funeral. The Fortnum family has experienced God's generosity, not just through a community garden, but in times of death.

We as a church only became friends with Jerry and Sonya and the family, served the family in times of death, because we practiced generosity through a community garden. Because of your generosity in providing our neighbours a space to grow some vegetables, could we enter into friendship with the Fortnum family. Thank you for being generous.

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I'd like you to please close your eyes. Picture having no hydro; you cannot store food: eggs, milk, vegetables meat will spoil quickly. Imagine not having the ability to prepare food: no oven or microwave. A basic human need is now in jeopardy. All this is a harsh reality if a simple bill of \$260 is not paid to Newmarket hydro.

We are dealing with a family of four: a father who works 50-60 hours a week and a mother caring for two children. Unfortunately the money is barely enough to cover food, gas, rent, clothes. They don't possess items in their house that can even be sold to pay for the hydro bill. Historically the family has paid their hydro bill on time, however in this instance; they are threatened of having services cut off. When the hydro company is asked why, the response is, "Because we can; it's our right to."

The church steps in and takes care of the hydro bill. Food will still be eaten. The mother begins shedding tears of joy.

Because of your generosity, we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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We cannot take all the credit in helping Mark; but we can take some credit. Mark is an alcoholic. Nine years ago when we had elders meetings in the evening Mark would show up, knock on the church's door and ask if any of us had \$2. Mark's nickname in the elder's meetings was "Toonie." Each week we would reach inside our pockets and pull out \$2 and Mark would shake our hands, say thank you, and walk out.

Skip ahead several years and Mark is walking across the street and gets hit by a car. Mark spends weeks in the hospital healing from his injuries. During this time Mark found a way to practice being sober. Mark, in his sobriety still stops by the church. He knows who some of us are from his few Sunday's of worshipping with us. He always asks by name about the people he remembers.

Mark has attended several churches in town and he can speak about what he likes and what is unique about each congregation. Mark also speaks about how churches, in their generosity of time, food, prayers, and friendship have helped him find sobriety. Those times we've provided Mark with food, bus tickets, and just as importantly, friendship, we've helped Mark find sobriety.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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Jessica has a community garden plot. One afternoon I am filling up the water barrels and she is there watering everyone's gardens. I notice there are a bunch of radishes someone has discarded beside their plot. I pick them up and ask Jessica if she wants them. Her eyes grow large and it doesn't take long for her to digest the leaves and the radishes. It's obvious she is hungry.

"Someone gave me some groceries to give away. They're in the back of my car. Have a look and see what you can eat." It doesn't take Jessica long to make her way to my vehicle and come back with two bags full of food. "I can eat now for a few days," she says to me with tears in her eyes. It's obvious she is hungry.

Jessica works jobs that pay barely enough to cover rent, food and other life necessities. Most of the time she only has enough money for rent and then hunger sets in. When there is no work, she's always calling for a food voucher. I know she's hungry.

I inquire about living accommodations and how she cooks her food. She's got a basement apartment but there are no appliances to cook with and the landlord either doesn't care or doesn't know. I advise Jessica that she needs to tell her landlord to provide some kind of cooking appliance. I inquire a little more: "How do you cook?" Jessica replies, "I don't. I eat all my food cold and raw." My heart aches.

Because of your generosity we can help Jessica have a future where she doesn't have to go hungry and doesn't have to eat cold, raw food.

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This year at camp I was greeted by Holy and Amy—sisters who have joined us at camp for the past four or five years. They hugged me and proceeded to fill me in on their year—they loved grade 3, took a trip to Niagara Falls, and moved to a new house where they had the entire house to themselves. I was then told their week at camp is the best week all year but that they only had one more year of being campers. Fortunately, they continued, “We can’t wait to be counselors.”

Another sweet little guy named Dillan ran up to me on the first day and with as much energy as a five year kid can muster said, "I've been waiting all year for this!"

The mother of three boys came to take pictures of her kids and their cabin groups. She said after day one that this was a place they would be returning to year after year and she wanted to have memories of them growing up at Summer Camp. Her boys would spend time over breakfast each day bragging about who had the most years left as a camper.

My favourite story of the year comes from David, an elder with the Illinois crew. After spending the week with our children and speaking with their parents at the BBQ, he came up to me with tears in his eyes on Friday and said. This has changed us. We are going to go back and do things differently now.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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Gwen came to be a part of the congregation after the congregation hosted an outdoor movie. Gwen was unemployed, living in poverty, and not able to find full-time employment. Gwen's dental hygiene was not the greatest and so for us to help Gwen find employment we would have to help her with dental work. We took up a collection and raised \$2500 so that Gwen could have dental work done and we could purchase a set of dentures. Through this generosity, Gwen found employment and is now working a steady job and providing for her family.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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I grew up in Europe during the Second World War and watched how families would have to send their children into the care of families in other countries due to, but not limited to, economic factors. I've often thought about the families who cared for these children entrusted to their care. These families practiced generosity without boundaries.

Now I'm part of a community of faith that practices generosity in multiple ways. Watching a life of generosity take place, I've noticed the same spirit and love within this community of faith as the spirit and love within the families who welcomed children during the Second World War. Thank you for practicing generosity.

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The voice on the other line is a thick French accent. Her name is Flora but it took me almost 6 months to figure out how to pronounce Flora's name. Flora lived in the neighbourhood and had a community garden plot.

For years Flora's garden was the garden everybody looked at. It was beautiful. Then I noticed weeds where there was never a weed. I noticed vegetables starting to rot rather than being enjoyed. I called and Flora was nowhere to be found. Eventually I tracked her down. She was staying with a friend because she was filled with cancer and only had a few months to live.

I arranged a visit. We prayed. We told stories. I was told how this church gave her hope.

When it came time for Flora's funeral the church was asked to host the service. This was Flora's church said the family. We never would have known Flora or been able to minister to her in the time of death if it wasn't for the church practicing generosity in multiple ways.

If it wasn't for your generosity we never would have been friends with Flora and never would have blessed the family in a time of death.

Thank you for being generous.

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Arun is an immigrant from Cambodia. If we told the story of his life we would have to tell the story of being a POW, escaping from the POW camp and while escaping, watching his friend get killed. After finding a safe haven Arun was accepted into Canada on humanitarian grounds.

Arun made a life for himself. Eventually he was married, two children, but than a series of unfortunate events, including divorce and suffering from various physical ailments. On a trip back to Cambodia to see his family, Arun would eventually become engaged to a friend who still lived in Cambodia. They were married and when Arun's wife tried to move to Canada, the Canadian government was suspicious that this was a mail bride order and Arun's wife was just looking for a ticket into Canada.

About this time Arun starts worshipping with us. I start spending time with Arun as he lived through immigration hearing after immigration hearing. We wondered together if Arun would ever be able to be united with his wife in Canada?

I tell the story of Arun because if it wasn't for us as a church willing to practice generosity through time and friendship, we never would have known Arun and thus would never have an opportunity to share the kingdom of God with Arun; we never would be a place of hope for Arun.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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I can't help but notice how the congregation practices generosity through the gift of presence and time. The Summer Camp is a prime example. We have individuals taking a week of holidays from work, families giving up a week in the summer to serve, seniors traveling distances each day to wait on tables, not to forget about the people who cook, organize, and plan the summer camp—and everyone else in between. If it wasn't for the congregation practicing a life of generosity through time and presence, we never could tell the story of Summer Camp.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.
Thank you for being generous.

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But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

- Matthew 6:3-4

The Cox's, along with Noel began a Christmas and birthday gift program in 2004 for the area of Neskantaga, Ontario.

In 2006 Noel was able to travel to Neskantaga, Ontario to watch these gifts distributed to the children and youth. He described it as a life changing experience.

Noel had a life changing experience watching children open up birthday boxes. Neskantaga had a life changing experience, but in circumstances we never want to see again. During the winter of 2012-2013 six kids committed suicide and thirty others attempted suicide. A state of emergency was declared and an inquest was put into effect.

In 2014, a conference was held in Toronto amongst the First Nations community and its leaders to discuss the Neskantaga situation. Noel attended the conference and was questioned with hostility by some because the experience has been religious faiths and missionaries come in and try to push "their" ways onto communities.

Kelvin, a representative of Neskantaga, stood beside Noel and validated the goodness of our ministry to the community and its leaders. Because of our gift giving over the past 10 years; Noel had validation of our kindness and simple intentions of loving people as God loves people. Our participation in this ministry has shown the community and its leaders that God is present. Thank you for your generosity.

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I would like to tell the story of Howie who, on two occasions that I am aware of, has volunteered to join a group going to Haiti to construct an orphanage and also perform other charitable deeds, which will help in addressing the heart-rending depths of poverty there. Howie has done this at his own expense and energy, time away from his wife and young family, and job.

Howie will relate the dreadful conditions under which those less fortunate and some in dire need, survive. We are told of how extremely grateful people are for even the smallest item they receive. Now, Howie sits here with us at the Lord's Table every Sunday and together with us is spiritually fed and nurtured. He has been taught and invited to live out and put into practice the principle of 2 Corinthians 9:12-13, and has done so quietly and with remarkable humility. We lay claim to him as representing the church here at Newmarket and so, can safely say that, it is because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.

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In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive. - Acts 20:35

The principal of MLPS sent an email inquiring if the Newmarket Church of Christ could have a representative “Meet at the Flag Pole”—an event where Christians gather at the flag pole to pray for the school and community. People from the church, the principle, several Christian teachers, and a parent from school council attended the service.

The principle read I John 4: 7-19 and prayed for the school, our community, and the world. Each person had an opportunity to pray on behalf of MLPS. It was a very humbling experience, and as a result I felt quite close to these people, some whom I hardly knew. There was a bond between us because of our love and commitment to Christ. At the end, the principle prayed for Nathan and our church. After the service, we felt we should do this again in a couple of months.

Our church has given financially to MLPS through the lunch program and Summer Camp. We also sacrifice our time and talents to serve the school. To see a school administrator, teachers, parents, and church gathering in prayer on behalf of the school and neighbourhood reveals one way God is at work amongst us bringing all things into God’s new creation, and how we are living out our mission, “Sharing the kingdom of God through friendship with the neighbourhood.” It’s becoming clear to me God is able to make all grace abound to us, so that in all things at all times, having all that we need, we will abound in every good work. Praise to God!

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.

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My story this morning takes us to the United Republic of Tanzania, in East Africa. Through World Vision Tanzania the Ladies' Class here at Newmarket decided to sponsor a HopeChild. We were introduced to a new friend – a six-year-old girl named Fatuma Musa Ramadhan. You may have noticed a photo of Fatuma on the bulletin board in the lobby. Her picture presents a little girl who, by all appearances, definitely did not want to have her picture taken. Just notice the deep frown on her face!

In our letter of thanks from World Vision in October 2010, they stated that the lives of so many children were shattered by the loss of loved ones in communities affected by “the greatest humanitarian crisis of all time”, namely HIV and AIDS. Our sponsorship would help to provide Fatuma, and by extension her family, with essentials like clean water, nutritious food, education and basic health care.

When we met Fatuma she was not in school and lived with her mother who was unemployed and unable to provide for her family. Her parents had been separated for some time. Fatuma, now 10 years old, is in grade 4 and according to the Annual Progress Report, she is performing very well at school.

We are told that our contribution of a monthly donation to Fatuma is a gift that helps change her life and build a better future. You will no doubt agree, Church, that this is a very worthwhile venture. Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.

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The nearness of God’s kingdom is experienced through the tangible—what we can see, touch, smell and experience. This past week we as a church spent \$110 on a family. The money was spent so that a family could have “repairs” done on their house—repairs that would allow a mother to be mobile, children to live in safety, and a husband to have his sanity. Later in the week I received the following words in an email, “Thanks so much for your help. This has made a huge difference.”

Thank you church for practicing generosity for your generosity has allowed a family to experience the nearness of God’s kingdom. Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.

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A single mom of two kids stands inside the building of the church crying. She has no money and only enough food for the children. She’s rationing so that her kids don’t know they are without food. The food bank helps but it’s never enough, and it’s not always nutritious.

We provide this mother and her children with enough groceries to eat properly. This mother entered with tears of hunger and now she leaves with tears of relief that there will be a Thursday night dinner.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this. Thank you for being generous.

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Kenny shows up to work in the community garden and notices the person lying on the ground just inside the bushes. Kenny walks over to make sure all is okay. The man, who looks like he's in his 40s but probably is in his 20s is homeless and just passing through the area. Kenny comes into the office and says, "We have to do something."

One can count the ribs of the homeless man. One can see all the possessions he owns are in the bag that is used as a pillow at night. Introductions are made and we inquire if he is okay physically and mentally. We ask about food and it's been a few days since he's eaten anything nutritious. Eating nutritious meals costs more than eating junk food.

"Can we cook you something?"

"No."

"Can we buy you something to eat?"

"No."

"Well, you're not leaving without eating something."

A long silence follows. We eventually provide a gift card from Tim Horton's that will make sure he has at least one meal a day for a week.

Because of your generosity we helped a homeless man eat something nutritious. Thank you for being generous.

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Most of you know that a few years ago, in conversations with the neighborhood, the church learned that some of the students at Maple Leaf Public School would regularly come to school with very little or nothing to eat. A decision was made to provide lunches for the children, and since then we have been providing the school with approximately 30 lunches each week, consisting of a sandwich, granola bar and juice box. In addition to affecting the lives of the students who receive these lunches, we later found out that we have impacted the lives of the administration staff who have been touched by our continuing generosity.

In addition to the staff and students of Maple Leaf, we are also influencing the children in our own congregation. My children are now more aware of the problem of poverty and hunger, even within our own community. Helping to make the sandwiches each week my children have seen that they can make a difference in another person's life.

Because of your generosity we can tell a story like this.
Thank you for being generous.

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Each Sunday before we take the collection we have been sharing a story of generosity. I think it's encouraging and amazing to know that this congregation has helped so many people in need.

This morning I would like to thank you all for helping me out in my time of need. Raising and caring for Mason is no easy task. But thanks to your continuing love, generosity, support, encouragement and prayers, this new chapter in my life has been made more manageable and enjoyable. You have all helped me out so much.

They say it takes a village to raise a child. Well my village is the church of Christ in Newmarket and I'm proud to bring Mason here and to raise him in the Christian faith.

Because of your generosity I can tell this story. Thank you for being generous.

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If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

- James 2:15-16

After we gained credibility with MLPS, we asked if there were families who might need some help with Christmas. MLPS quickly gave us a list of names and with your generosity we started helping families at Christmas time.

Unbeknownst to us, there was a woman named Sandy who discovered families of poverty living in our neighbourhood. Sandy, with the help of MLPS, organized a shopping experience where specific families could come, receive gifts for their children, a box of food, and the opportunity to shop for gift items.

MLPS told Sandy about our congregation and said that if she needed help, we would help her. Sandy called, explained the idea and invited the church to provide a breakfast for these families. And so for the past few years, we've been providing a breakfast for families.

Those of us who serve at the breakfast each year watch as families open their bags and discover the gifts they have requested. We watch as tears fill their eyes because now parents have an opportunity to give a gift to their child. We watch as hugs are passed around because a mother can finally have a set of pots and pans to cook with. We watch as high fives are given because a grandma who cares for her three grandchildren now has a new set of bed sheets. We watch a mother leap for joy because her son will now have a gift he really wants. Your generosity in purchasing gifts this Christmas has provided tears of joy and happiness.

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Epilogue . . .

Why are these stories important? They're important because these are stories of God's kingdom being shared and God's kingdom coming near. God is creating a new heaven and a new earth where the rich and poor become equal, where the powerful and the powerless sit at the table together, where the captives are set free, where the sick are healed. These stories are stories of how God's kingdom is coming near.

When Luke writes his gospel he writes a story about Jesus asking when he returns . . . returns to make the world right . . . returns to complete the work begun in and through Jesus . . . returns to end evil and suffering once and for all . . . returns to bring justice . . . Luke asks if God will find faith on earth (Luke 18:1-8). I don't think Jesus is asking if he will find people who believe; Jesus is asking if he will find people at work to bring justice, who are continuing to make the world right, who are sharing lives of generosity.

These stories are important to tell because these are stories of the Newmarket church of Christ practicing a life of generosity; practicing the nearness of God's kingdom.

Stories of Generosity

Jesus started his ministry with the words, “Repent and believe in the good news, the kingdom of God has come near.” Reading through the gospels we discover how the good news was experienced: blind being healed, lame being able to walk again, the demon possessed being set free, the outcast finding a place of welcome at the table. The kingdom of God was experienced in tangible ways.

The local church strives to become a manifestation of the kingdom of God. Meaning, one place people can experience, see, and taste the reality of God’s kingdom is through the local church. For this reason, churches must always continue the ministry of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit. And by doing so, the local neighbourhood will begin to discover the redemptive work of God—the nearness of the kingdom of God.

In this small booklet are stories the Newmarket Church of Christ told in 2014. These are stories of people experiencing the nearness of God’s kingdom through people’s generosity. These are stories of the crucified and risen Messiah forming a cross-shaped church; these are stories of a crucified and risen Messiah still at work in our neighbourhood.

Newmarket Church of Christ
www.newmarketchurchofchrist.ca

