

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

Contact Dr. Frantz on the web at www.mlcchurch.com

The blessings of a generous spirit. Did you know that giving is good for you? Again and again, studies have shown that giving makes people happy. It makes us feel better about ourselves.

For many people, giving is the most fun part of Christmas and the holiday season; no surprise there. Clearly, there's joy in giving—for both the giver and the receiver.

Part of the joy is in giving to something larger than ourselves. Not only does it make us feel good, it gives us a deeper sense of life-purpose. There's a warming from within that transforms the spirit.

I see this in the church all the time, especially with people who are struggling financially to make ends meet. Often times, people in such circumstances feel particularly blessed when they are able to give. There's a sense in which generosity enriches and dignifies the human spirit.

Still, we all know people who are uncomfortable receiving. They never want anyone to give them anything. Without realizing it, perhaps, they deny others (friends and family) the joy of generosity.

None of us likes to feel like we are forever indebted to someone simply because he or she has more financial resources than we do. We like there to be a mutuality, an equality of dependence, to our giving.

In any season of holiday giving, it's easy to get caught up in the *down side* of giving, the giving that keeps score, that worries too much about *who gave what to whom?* The usual, *Did they give us something this year? Or, Do we need to give them a gift for the holidays?*

Giving is not about control and getting the upper hand in a relationship—like a *you owe me, now* sort of thing. When we give something to someone—to an individual or a church, for example, we relinquish control of the gift. Otherwise, it's not a gift; it's like a payment to gain some advantage or control.

When giving makes everything better. Some years back, my younger brother, Doug, taught our whole family more than a little about giving. Almost out of the blue, it seemed, my brother offered to give one of his kidneys to his good friend, Dan, who had been on dialysis in recent times.

They had been close friends in college and, for a time, had been raising their families in Appleton, Wisconsin. Although my brother eventually relocated to the Minneapolis area, he apparently learned that Dan had taken a turn for the worse. Soon after that,

unbeknownst to any of us, he got himself tested at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota where he learned that he was indeed a match for Dan.

In no time, it seemed, the transplant was underway, a surgery that is more difficult for the donor than for the recipient. Fortunately, it all turned out well. However, it continues to leave us in awe of my brother's considerable generosity and courage.

For Dan and his family, it has been an inexpressible blessing. Furthermore, what's been interesting is how Dan began showing up (with his Frantz kidney) at virtually every Frantz-family event—the weddings of Doug's three sons, my mother's Memorial service; and these were mostly in different states.

In fact, my older brother and I joke all the time about how we're praying for Doug's lone kidney because we wouldn't want to have to go through, for him, what he went through for his friend Dan. We'd do it, assuming we were a match, but we're sure hoping we don't have to. It's like Doug has raised the bar of giving for all of us.

Although this is a profound example of giving, still, it shows us how giving makes everything better. It touches the human spirit in ways that we cannot totally anticipate. And along the way, it transforms us as human beings.

Again, our giving makes us feel better about ourselves; it makes everything around us better. At the end of the day, we know that our lives are not just about us as individuals; they're about us as family and as community.