

Will our Children be Good Stewards?

I bring my 12 year old granddaughter to church occasionally. Much to my chagrin she hasn't grown up in a church-attending family. She doesn't attend church with me very often either, but when she does it's usually an eye opener for both of us.

She is a gifted student both academically and musically. I'm probably over concerned about the lack of a regular church element in her life. Some things are happening that tell me that God really does work in mysterious ways.

Take last Sunday – the day of the annual Christmas Bake sale. It was also Intention Sunday – the day when parishioners are asked to return an Intention Form on which they indicate their intended weekly or annual giving for the coming year. The Stewardship Committee of which I'm part was hosting Coffee Hour – sort of a wrap up to our year-round stewardship efforts.

My granddaughter had helped my wife wrap a variety of Christmas cookies and cakes earlier that morning. Wendy dropped the baking off in the parish hall on her way to an early choir practice, and when my granddaughter and I arrived about 45 minutes later, she proudly pointed out the cookies she'd help to wrap. She noted that the cakes were already sold.

She's in a family where there's enough but not much spare change. So just as she was off to church school I gave her a little money - \$2.75 to be exact - to buy a snack from the Bake Sale table. After the service she reappeared at coffee hour, smiling. She was holding a small, partially eaten plate of colourful cookies; and change of 0.75 which she promptly returned to me.

Initially I declined, but she insisted, so I put the three quarters in my pocket. But a moment later she asked for them back. Thinking she was about to buy something else to eat, I was taken aback when she tossed it all straight into the basket where parishioners voluntarily make donations for coffee supplies.

Instantly I thought about how often I have mentally objected to that basket for voluntary donations. After all, didn't Andrew Weeks (the Magnetic Church Conference guru) strongly advise us not to put out a plate for such donations? "You wouldn't expect your house guests to pay for coffee, would you?" he said.

But I guess Andrew wasn't thinking about 12 year olds. It wasn't much, really - less than a dollar. But the gesture touched my heart in a way that was quite unexpected, and I wondered why.

There is a direct connection, I think, to that story in Mark 12:41-44: *"Sitting across from the offering box, he was observing how the crowd tossed money in for the collection. Many of the rich were making large contributions. One poor widow came up and put in two small coins--a measly two cents. Jesus called his disciples over and said, "The truth*

is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford-- she gave her all."

It was certainly not a widow in this case, just a 12 year old girl. And she didn't give her all, just the leftover change that she had that Sunday morning. But at that moment I felt a connection to that passage that I won't soon forget. Something or someone along the way set an example for her about giving. Maybe it was me, more likely it was not. We're all setting, and living, examples all of the time about giving. We do it by what we say, and by what we do. That's how we'll create a culture of stewardship in Niagara. And we never know who might be watching.