

Blessings in hard times

Look for abundance amidst scarcity

By Katharine Jefferts Schori, April 28, 2009

[Episcopal Life] How do we cope in tough economic times? How do we nurture an enduring sense of hope in ourselves and in those around us?

Start with gratitude for what you are and have. Begin with the simple (!) task of listing the blessings in your life – shelter, family, friends, skills and your breath. Include your hungers: for relationship, greater depth in those relationships, the desire to be of service and to give to others out of your blessings.

Look at the opportunities in your life that are the result of what others call a downturn. The society mavens in New York City have discovered that they don't have to go shopping every day in order to be real, and that there is freedom in that discovery. They and others have begun to discover that it is at least unfashionable to be conspicuously consuming and that there are other joys to be found in recycling old fashions and looking for bargains. It is a start! What are the deeper joys in disconnecting your self-worth from consuming?

Unemployment can be an unexpected sabbatical, even in the midst of job hunting, and an opportunity to reflect on how to put your gifts to work in new ways. Find others who will help you reflect on your skills and vocational assets. The current economic situation is an excellent opportunity for congregations of all sizes to do some gifts-discernment work.

The teaching of Jean and Bernard Haldane and/or the classic *What Color is your Parachute?* would be a great starting place. Schedule a weekly opportunity for job seekers to reflect together on their journeys, learn from and support each other and discover something new about God's abundant gifts to each.

Vocational and gifts discernment should be a regular part of congregational life – not just for those discerning a vocation to ordained ministry!

Each baptized person is challenged to put his or her gifts to work in the world in service to God's mission. Daily life is where most of the baptized exercise their vocations – as parents, teachers, firefighters, professors, students and lawyers. Unemployment or partial employment can be a remarkable opportunity to do that work of discernment in a deeper way.

Economic restriction of household budgets can be an opportunity to reflect on the difference between wants and needs. Living more simply involves a series of choices that can bless us as well as others around the globe, for our own patterns of consumption have direct impacts on greenhouse gases, the availability of clear water and the price of food, both nearby and far away.

Think about eating lower on the food chain and from sources closer to home. Eating plants costs less both in economic terms and in environmental impact. It also makes more food available for others. Eating more locally produced food also usually costs less, as well as reduces the environmental burden of transporting the food. It also helps to build a sustainable community – support your food-producing neighbors!

Our choices about the source of food can have impacts on more distant neighbors as well – we will grow less corn for ethanol if we need less fuel for transportation. Less need for corn-based ethanol will have a salutary effect on the price of maize in Africa and make more food available locally there as well.

Cooking a meal at home rather than eating fast food or a restaurant meal also can offer more opportunity for deepening relationships with family or friends.

How might a pinched entertainment budget be refocused on relationships? Rather than go out to a movie, invite friends in to play games, read a play together or simply gather for creative conversation. Consider how your leisure time might bless a child – your own or a neighbor's. Take a walk in the park, read a book together or sign up to help in an afterschool program.

Counting your blessings can be an opportunity to develop a greater sense of compassion. Knowing the abundance in your own life can encourage liberality toward others, born out of the fundamental reason for all acts of stewardship – gratitude for the abundance we have been given.

Naming a sense of scarcity or shortfall also can be a motivation toward gratitude, for knowing our own dependence – on God and on others – is the root of the spiritual journey.

Reframe your perspective – look for abundance where the world sees scarcity – and discover a renewed sense of connection to, and love for, God and neighbor.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. -- **Romans 12:4-6**

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