

CARTONS AND CHRISTIAN GROWTH

"If you then know how to give good gifts. . . how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?
Matt.7:11

Do you remember when our government handed out rations (groceries and clothes) to the Indian people of our country? Probably not - we don't either. Those were the days when they could no longer hunt and fish as before and were not yet trained to farm and work on factory assembly lines or in the professions. Those were the days too, when we, as a Reformed Church, began our ministry of the Gospel and its social implications in certain Indian communities. We were ten jumps ahead of the government in the release of the innocent children of the Apache prisoners of war, in the building of boarding schools for Indian education, in the establishing of a hospital for Indian health.

Dulce, New Mexico and Winnebago, Nebraska became well-known to our mission-minded churches because here, we were building great institutions. In the minds of the Indian people too, we were really doing the job because there were cows, chickens and hogs on the mission farms; there were dormitories, classrooms and teachers; there were nurses, doctors, and rows of neat beds; and a church.

On the home front, Ladies' Aids, Women's Mission Societies, and Sunday Schools packed box after box of food, clothes, soap, etc. For every Indian child there had to be enough new toys and new clothes to make their Christmas at the dormitory as full as our own. Where the families of the children came into the community house to celebrate Christmas with the students and ambulatory patients there had to be gifts for the entire group. It became a festive occasion! What fun it was to pack Christmas boxes for the Indians. We visualized shiny dark eyes dancing with delight, and copper-tone smiles widening into grins and even giggles. The missionaries had great fun too. The out-caloried corset, given to slenderize some Indian matron, when modeled with a flashy red tie and an ostrich plume hat and spike heels by some distaff clown released the pent-up pressures of a busy pre-Christmas season and no doubt saved some counseling bills.

It is really a pity to spoil such a lovely expression of a beautiful Christmas that arose out of genuine Christmas motives. But times have changed. The government has taken over the schools and hospitals. The Indian people have learned how to stand beside the non-Indian on the assembly line, in the office, and at the hospital bed. The welfare lists of nation, states, and counties include the names of needy Indian families beside those of other ethnic backgrounds. Indian and non-Indian Christians worship and

work side by side in some of our churches in Indian communities. The government has discontinued its rationing program except for surplus food in economically depressed areas.

It was with all this in mind that staff and lay people from our various fields met to discuss the future ministry among the first Americans. Because both Macy and Winnebago, Nebraska lie side by side along the western slope of the Missouri River, these two fields were asked to formulate a policy applicable to the needs and conditions of their communities. Therefore, the decisions arrived at here may not apply to other fields. We speak for these two fields only, and we do so only after a thorough and sincere evaluation of what we are accomplishing or failing to accomplish by continuing Christmas cartons, used clothing, and layettes or baby articles.

We are trying to build in our churches, as you are in yours, Christians with a real sense of responsibility in church and community life. We are trying to raise before the community in which we live, a true image of what it means to be a Christian of integrity and noble character. We are trying to cultivate a kind of Christian stewardship that will someday make us as proud as our Comanche brothers to say, "We are ready to pay our own way as a congregation". And from there we want to go on and help win other parts of the world for Christ. We are trying to say in our community that Christ came to give us all so much more than a coat. We agree that where there is need for a coat, that need must still be met. But if the coat becomes the image of what the church is we may well listen to Peter's answer to the beggar, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I give unto thee. In the name of Jesus rise up and walk." We must change the image of impotency to an image of self-help and self-giving. Just as affluence distorts the Christian's sense of Kingdom values, so displays of cartons in an age when needs have changed, creates a spiritual near-sightedness that moves heaven farther away and leaves us all concerned as to who wants spiritual bread and who comes for material bread.

We question, as we're sure you do, the efficiency of sending large cartons of goods when shipping costs are becoming more and more prohibitive. Finally, however, having laid all other reasons aside, we want the churches to know that the time has come for our congregations to have the same kind of Christmas blessings other churches have; the experience of the joy of giving and receiving. We will lift our heads a little higher each year when we are able to say, "Our congregation has done this." We therefore recommend that the churches give consideration to the following decisions adopted by our joint staffs.

1. That Christmas gifts for Winnebago and Macy be sent to the Board offices in the form of check or money order rather than in material goods. Such gifts will be recorded properly as non-budget items (credit cannot be given toward the benevolent goal) and then disbursed to the fields.

2. That until the income level of our people equals that of other rural communities we continue the Used Clothing ministry through our Goodwill Stores, and express appreciation for good usable material.

3. That whereas a certain number of layettes and baby articles are needed, we urge the churches to send money to the Board office for proper recording as non-budget items, and we can then supply according to need on the field. If churches desire sewing projects, they are requested to contact the Mission Field to avoid duplication and oversupply.

In conclusion, permit us to suggest that churches can have a very beautiful Christmas project for our fields by each person bringing a Christmas card (clipped to the outside of its envelope) with a check inside that would cover what you would ordinarily buy plus the amount for postage to send your package. What a beautiful tree it would be when the gifts were totaled! Our Sunday School teachers in turn could purchase like gifts for all of their pupils; needy families could have a merrier Christmas; babies would be more adequately clothed, and other needs could be met with greater wisdom and efficiency. If we know how, and are willing to give good gifts, the Lord will bless and be blessed.

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and
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