

Find peace by helping other people

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Many of us are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus, often called the Prince of Peace. Peace is not merely the absence of war and conflict — it is the presence of wholeness, healing, wellness, inclusiveness, hope, belonging, fairness, equality, and freedom. These values underlie the Hebrew “shalom” and the Arabic “salaam” — words far richer in meaning than our current understanding of the English “peace.”

The prophet Micah offers good ideas for appropriate gifts of peace, calling us “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly.” Consider these examples from recent news articles:

- Wall Street may soon give billions of dollars in bonuses — barely a year after the industry’s greed and irresponsibility nearly toppled the world’s financial system.
- We will soon have 100,000 soldiers in Afghanistan — the funds to deploy one soldier for one year could build 20 schools.
- Our high school students drop out at an average rate of one every 26 seconds — we are failing to prepare our youth to be citizens having good lives and meaningful work.

Do these examples seem just, kind or humble?

You can counteract these examples by making smart choices, having both individual and collective impact.

Individually, decide how to invest — yes invest — your time, talent and treasure. If your support has been solely financial, consider sharing your time and talent, too. We humans have a need to be of service, especially to connect with those less fortunate — the need to hear their stories, see their dignity and resolve, share their joy or sorrow. Yes, the homeless and the hungry benefit from our service — but what is the benefit to us? To nurture our humanity, to grow our hearts to full measure.

Collectively, find a group which supports your values and makes a positive difference in the world — and then get involved! Such a group will warm your heart and strengthen your own voice, while amplifying the hearts and voices of others. (Question groups with partisan agendas on how they promote peace.)

That’s what I admire most about Greensboro Urban Ministry, where I am the treasurer and an active volunteer — we are individuals who work “to express the love of God to people in need through practical action in the greater Greensboro area.”

Diverse in our faith backgrounds, work and life experiences, and political affiliations, we are one in service.

As we enter this season of giving, we are mindful of the world around us. Our problem, put succinctly by Urban Ministry Chaplain Frank Dew, is that “we have smart bombs and dumb social policy.”

As a nation, we have pursued our individualism at the expense of our collectivism. We have lost our drive to work towards “a more perfect Union.” We have become disconnected from our source.

The best gift, then, for a Prince of Peace? Listen to our hearts, give ourselves and our resources away in loving service, take responsibility for our collective well-being — and remember the expansiveness of Peace, Shalom and Salaam.

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