Faith Formation Files: Vol. 1, Issue 12 December 16, 2018

We are wrapping up the calendar year of Faith Formation classes this afternoon. I am inviting each and every one of you to join us at the GIFT class in Fellowship Hall from 4-6 pm. I am anticipating a very fun time with new friends working together to decorate cookies which will then be taken and shared with someone who needs a visit or a bit of brightening up in their life. Also, we will be assembling Blessing Bags. The concept is that there are many people in our community (I tend to think of Grand Rapids, but there are many who are more local, too) who have come upon hard times and are living on the streets or have become so desperate that they are looking for help on street corners. Just like you, I feel uncomfortable with them looking in at me in my warm car snacking on hot French fries. I think about the $20 in my pocket and wonder if I should give it to him. I rationalize that if I had a $5 or a $10, I’d gladly share, but I need at least part of that $20 for gas and I unfortunately don’t have change. Then I start to justify my selfishness by assuming that he’d probably just spend the money on alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs anyway. I know it is not my right to judge, but I do it anyway. I am human. I wonder why he doesn’t just go get a job. Again, I am assuming and judging, both stepping stones to misunderstanding. Everyone has a story. Just because I don’t know this person’s doesn’t entitle me to imagine one that excuses my greediness. Ultimately, I know that I am called to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and give shelter to the homeless. No matter what defense I give to vindicate myself, it is an excuse, a reason without merit, and a balm for my guilt. And this is where the Blessing Bags come in.

If this person is truly in need of a hand, then I can reach into my backseat and grab a bagged collection of items that might lighten his burden just a bit while pacifying all my reasons why I shouldn’t help. A gallon-sized ziplock takes up little room in your vehicle, but it contains precious items to someone who has hit hard times. A bar of soap, a toothbrush and toothpaste, some warm socks or gloves, a couple snack items, maybe a few bandages and cough drops may not seem like much to you, but that bag might be the thing gives this person hope to face another day, to ask for help to conquer their addiction, to reconnect with estranged family or friends, or best case, to reach out to God to start/strengthen a relationship with Him, and to accept His love and forgiveness.

Those that attend today’s Faith Formation will be able to take a few bags with them to keep in their vehicles and dispense when the opportunity arises. If there are extras, we will put some in the back of each church building. Feel free to take a couple to carry in your own car, to give to someone in need, or to use for yourself if you need one. In our confirmations, we were called to teach others about Jesus Christ. Let your actions do your talking this week by caring for your fellow man.

Since this is my last letter of the year, I would like to wish you an exciting remainder of Advent, the Holiest of Christmases, and a very blessed New Year.

 Blessings,

 Julie Gould

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This Week:

* Sunday, Dec. 16, 4-6 pm at Fellowship Hall: **GIFT Faith Formation class**. Join us as we decorate cookies and assemble blessing bags for the less fortunate. We could use as many hands as possible! Forgot to bring your donation to church? You can still bring new socks and gloves, personal care items, individually wrapped, shelf stable food items, gift cards, and/or a financial donation with you to class. Join us for a fun evening of service.
* There are no Faith Formation classes on December 23 or 30. Enjoy the time with loved ones.