

SMT 10/12/18 “Giving Gifts That Matter” by Skip Ober Miller, Business Manager, San Marino Community Church

I never know what to buy for my father. Every Christmas, birthday, and gift-giving holiday it's always the same question: “What do you buy someone who needs nothing? Or when he DOES need something, goes out and buys it for himself? This year I delayed the question by getting him a new laptop – and teaching him how to use it. But I'll be right back in square one come Father's Day.

Fortunately churches and other nonprofit groups provide most of us in this situation with alternative gift giving opportunities – especially at this time of year. When I was younger, receiving a note that said someone had made a donation in my honor to a charitable organization was right up there with unwrapping socks and underwear from Grandma on Christmas day. But now that I'm a grown up with far too many possessions for my own good, a donation in my name is a *preferred* gift. Not only do I not have to find room in my home for something that may or may not be interesting, useful, or to my taste, I know an “alternative gift” is a gift that gives twice.

This double dipping appeals to me on many levels. I get the benefit of receiving a gift that is thoughtful, meaningful, and is always the right size. And the gift goes out into the world, in my name, and does good for an individual or community that is far less blessed than I. Most of us know educators with a shelf (or closet) full of “world's best teacher” mugs. How much better to support the education of a child in a developing country, where a few dollars can make a lifetime's difference? How about most of those on our gift giving lists?

When my mother was a young child, her parents didn't have much money for the basics of life, much less Christmas gifts. She told of a Christmas when she excitedly received an entire brand-new box of 16 crayons for her very own. That story changed the way I looked at the holidays and gift-giving. Making that kind of impact on a child (or an adult) is so easy for most of us. It takes so little to make a big impact.

So I encourage you to seek out gifts of the heart this gift-giving season. Find ways to make an alternative gift that makes a different sort of impact. (Our church's Christmas Mission Market is Sunday, November 11, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm and there are many others out there.) Solve the conundrum of what to give someone who needs nothing with a gift to someone who need everything.

Happy gift-giving!