

In Bristol England, there are a number of orphanages that cover 13 acres of ground on Ashely Downs. When God put it into the heart of the man who built them, George Muller, he had only two shillings or 50 cents in his pocket. Eventually, through the generosity of others, \$400,000 pounds or the equivalent of \$7 million today was sent to him. And time and time again, what he would find is that with trust in God, and the generosity of people, an incredible difference could be made.

One evening as night was falling over the harbor of Bristol, England, and in the orphanage founded by George Müller and his wife, the children were getting ready for bed. George was working in his study when his wife arrived with alarming news. "We're out of milk," she said. "There isn't enough for the morning oatmeal."

George laid aside his pen. This wasn't the first time that money needed to buy food and other supplies was tight. The Müllers took in their first group of thirty girls in 1836, and their orphanage now housed over a hundred. From the first George remained resolved never to borrow money. He went to God alone for every need, trusting wholly in the Lord's faithfulness and provision.

The pastor rose from his desk and reached for his wife's hand. "Mary," he said, "let us pray." Two orphanage employees joined them, and together they made their humble yet necessary request to God. Tiny, helpless mouths were depending on them for sustenance. "Be assured, if you walk with Him and look to Him and expect help from Him," George reminded them afterwards, "He will never fail you."

Someone knocked on the door. Mary hurried to answer, returning to the study a moment later. She handed her husband an envelope. "It's a letter, George. Hurry up and open it."

Enclosed was a sum of money, more than enough for the milk. Within minutes, two more letters arrived with money and pledges of support.

This immediate and abundant response to prayer had become a typical experience for Müller. After he came to faith and started meditating seriously on the Bible, he determined to simply trust God at His Word. As a pastor, he decided to live without a salary, relying only on money given to him. George learned to pray faithfully from his heart, asking His Father to

move the hearts of men so that they would supply him and his family with what they needed to survive.

As a self-proclaimed “poor man,” regarding good works and holiness, George was well aware of what he lacked spiritually. George had grown up the privileged, arrogant son of a lawyer and routinely, drank, gambled and skipped out on bills. As revealed in *The Autobiography of George Müller*, one night he went to a prayer meeting, and everything changed. He got rid of his library of over three hundred books and kept only one, the Bible, the only book George felt he now needed.

One night while seeking the Lord regarding the orphanage, he heard, “Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.” And so a great experiment of faith began.

Faced with difficulties regarding the rented houses where the children lived, he dreamed of building an orphan’s home on his own land and with every amenity. It took eighteen months to amass the initial sum of money, and throughout that time George counted the days he spent in prayer and recorded the funds as they trickled in. Each donation—God’s answer to his

prayer rather than the fruit of a plea to man for money—spurred him to continue. Eventually he built five homes, costing more than \$100,000 to build, which is over \$14,000,000 in today's currency.

These institutions were models at the time, when very few such places existed. Many orphans lived on the streets or went to poorhouses, where they were treated like slaves. In the Müller homes, each child was tenderly cared for, clothed, fed, and educated, with Christian instruction as the bedrock. When they left the orphanage in their late teens, they went on to live productive lives.

George raised each and every penny for this wonderful ministry on his knees, through unceasing, persistent, thankful prayer and an unwavering faith in God.

Almost two hundred years later, the George Müller Charitable Trust in Bristol still operates today and continues to adhere to George's commitment to seeking money only through prayer. Tens of thousands of souls—orphans and other needy children, families and the elderly—have been helped.

His story goes to show you what can happen when people both trust in God, and give freely with no strings attached to make a difference. As we hear in our first reading, Moses is addressing the tribes of Israel and tells them to express gratitude to God when offering their gifts, stressing to them that God was the one who came through for them in Egypt and liberated them, and that the gift of the promised land is given to them; and in return, they share their gifts with God.

There are many stories like Mullers of people who gave freely to make a big difference. As you know our own parish story is one of thousands of people over the years each donating so much of their time and talent and treasure to make our parish thrive now for 151 years.

This weekend at all of the Masses as we begin Lent, we are taking the time to talk a bit about giving of our gifts to God, as one of the pillars of Lent is almsgiving. On the plus side, when you take our capital campaign plus our weekly offerings, giving is actually up slightly over the past few years.

People at our parish are also incredible generous with their time as evidenced by our recent 150th anniversary book that was a labor of love

and chronicles how our parish has always been a hub of activity. With the capital campaign, we'll have our debt down to around \$3.5 million after all the pledges are fulfilled. We'll also be hiring a youth minister with those funds which will greatly help our faith formation program. On top of this, people have been very generous with our Endowment Fund which is now \$70,000.

These are great things, but unfortunately our Sunday collection has taken a bit of a hit with respect to our expenses. We've been working hard to reduce expenses as well. The lights above you are LED which we have financed through a reduction in our electric bills. We've been investigating the installation of a solar photo-voltaic array which would be financed by the power generated by that array. This could happen as early as this spring (assuming the snow melts in our lifetimes). We've also improved our maintenance systems to better keep our heating and cooling systems running as efficiently as possible.

With respect to regular donations, many of you are faithful stewards, using envelopes or EFT, to help keep the parish going, increasing our giving as our incomes increase. All of that is very much appreciated. But we're not

quite where we need to be. As we work to reduce our expenses, we also want to work on increasing our stewardship. If each family could increase giving by \$5/week or \$20/month, we could be where we need to be, where we could continue without reducing our staff and ministries, where we could rebuild our Update/Repair fund.

As we start Lent this year, consider your giving to God and make the first check you write, after you get paid, a check to address the needs at St. Joe's, and then you'll be giving your first fruits. And for families who may be new to this practice, please be sure you're on the same page as your spouse on your giving, pray about it and stay together but, as God said about our giving in the book of Malachi, "Put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, and see if I do not open the floodgates of heaven for you, and pour down upon you blessing without measure."

Much like the orphanages, one man didn't build them, but rather the donations of many from all walks of life. And because of that, so many children were saved from horrific situations. Our parish too isn't about one person, but about families past and present who come here to pray, but are

also the answer to the prayers of one another as we together glorify God with our time, talent and treasure.