By Pat Haggerty

We so often hear that Christmas is a season of giving. And that it is! We see people rushing around with their Christmas lists looking for that perfect gift. We are inundated with mail seeking donations for every possible non-profit---and some organizations we have never even heard of. We are bombarded with catalogs that illustrate all the possible gifts we can procure this year. We see ad after ad on television that suggest just what to buy. The one that gets me is the person who gives a car with a big red bow on it. Now, really, how many people get a car for Christmas!

I am not against gift-giving (or receiving). I love giving gifts and particularly seeing people's reactions once they get the gift. There is nothing better than seeing a child's eyes light up when they open a present and they've received "just what they wanted."

Let's take a moment, though, to think about giving. We often associate gift giving with the Magi and the gifts they brought the Christ Child. O. Henry even wrote a story called "Gift of the Magi." It is one of my favorites. In it, a young couple struggle to buy Christmas gifts for one another. Ultimately, they have each sold something of value to themselves that made their final gifts to one another meaningless. Or, were they? It turned out that they were the most valued gifts of all!

In Luke's gospel for the third Sunday of Advent, someone is questioning John the Baptist and asks: "What should we do? He said to them in reply, 'Whoever has two cloaks should share them with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.'" (3:10-11)

The giving and the sharing of what we have should be marks of who we are as Christians. I propose that we need to be reflective givers---giving in a spirit of John's urging. We need to share what we have and be generous with our own gifts. That also takes in the gift of time. As I get older, I realize how valuable time is. To give of ourselves along with the gift of time can be more meaningful than even a tangible gift.

Let us be generous with our time and reflect on how we can use it for others: visiting an elderly

neighbor to just chat and listen; baking an extra batch of cookies for someone who has no time or resources to make her own; helping to decorate our church to make it a beautiful environment for worship; spending time rehearsing the music for the Christmas liturgies; babysitting so that a young mother can do some of her own shopping. The list could go on and on.

As we prepare for Christ's coming into our hearts, let us open our hearts to those around us. Let our own light shine in the way we give of our time and ourselves to others.