

Gifts That Keep Giving

Giving gifts is a wonderful way to express your love and care and to honor another person. Not only in the holiday season, but throughout the year on special occasions, to express thanks, or 'just because', you have many opportunities not only to give a material gift, but to give gifts of meaning and help co-create a better world. I hope these examples will spark your own creative ideas to deepen relationships and make a difference in someone's life through your gifts of time, resources and your self.

GIFTS OF SERVICE & EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE:

Give a 'gift certificate' for jobs or chores the recipient normally does.

- For the month of January, I will do the dishes.
- Once a month, I will take your car to get washed.
- For the next year, I will pay for lawncare service so you don't have to spend your Saturday doing it.
- One Sunday a month, I will take the kids out for the day so you can have a day just for yourself.

Give a gift of something you know the other person enjoys:

- Once a month I will take you to the restaurant of your choice as a way to just celebrate our love/friendship.
- I will go on a 2-hour shopping outing with you.
- I will treat you to 3 football/basketball games and will go with you.

Give of yourself in expressing love:

- Give a 'gift certificate' of a back rub, foot rub, full massage . . . done by YOU.
- Give a give certificate that says "over the next year, each month, I will find one new way to say "I love you".
- Write a love or friendship letter, saying how much you love or appreciate the person, how important he or she is in your life.

GIFTS OF SERVICE FOR OTHERS:

- Create a family project to help build a house with Habitat for Humanity, or serve a meal at a homeless shelter.
- Contact a service organization that you decide as a family you want to help. Find a way to volunteer -- whether it is only one time or once a month.
- Check with your religious community or other service organization and 'adopt' a person or family, or community project.

DONATE TO HELP THE WORLD

Here are some groups I like, but you can check these and others at www.charitynavigator.com (it also rates the charity.) For those of you with children, it is a great way to have them learn about helping others and sharing their own resources.

WWW.HEIFER.ORG

You can buy a cow for \$500 or a flock of chicks for \$20 (or a llama, rabbits, a goat or a water buffalo) that will give a family milk, eggs, protein, or wool for themselves — plus some to sell to buy other needed supplies. If you can't buy a whole one, you can buy a share of animal(s) that will combine your gift with others to purchase one for a family. The site tells how families use animals to make their lives better.

WWW.AKDN.ORG

The Aga Khan Development Network, a Muslim based group, works in numerous countries to provide education, healthcare rural development, etc. for poor people regardless of race, religion or gender. They have received numerous awards. They also promote dialogue and peaceful coexistence between groups. You can donate through their U.S. office:

Aga Khan Foundation USA, 1825 K. Street Suite 901, Washington, DC 20006

WWW.OPERATIONSMILE.ORG

Operation Smile works around the world to repair cleft palate and lips in children, allowing them to live a normal life instead of being outcasts. Surgeons and nurses donate their time. \$250 provides a complete surgery for a child, but you can donate any amount.

STARFISH

This one is for children who have been orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Personal friends, Aliya and Aren Leekong designated this in lieu of gifts for their recent wedding and are actively involved in getting needed items to children in Soweto. www.starfishcharity.org/

WWW.JUSTVISION.ORG or WWW.MULTIFAITHEDUCATIONPROJECT.ORG or WWW.SEEDSOFPEACE.ORG

All promote education, dialogue, understanding, peace for all people in the Middle East. The Seeds of Peace also works in other geographical areas where there is conflict, helping to develop young leaders in reconciliation and coexistence skills. The Multifaith Education Project in Orlando empowers Jewish, Muslim and Christian middle-school students to become peacemakers.

WWW.MERCYCORPS.ORG

A highly rated humanitarian organization that works around the world and in the US, especially where disasters strike.