

IT REALLY IS

A WONDERFUL LIFE

For those of us blessed with family, health, adequate financial resources and Christian faith, the Christmas season is indeed a joyous time of year. In addition to participating in traditional festivities such as gathering around the tree to exchange gifts with our loved ones and sitting down together for a sumptuous feast, we are also presented with opportunities for spiritual reflection and renewal. As we celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus, we embrace a hope for humanity that his life and death represent for us.

Many of us are moved to reach out to those whose circumstances are more difficult than our own at this time of year, either through financial contributions or by offering our time and talents. These acts enrich us as much or even more than they do the recipients of generosity, because there are so many lessons we can take away, depending upon our individual experiences. The lesson I learn in almost every instance is that my involvement really does make a difference, no matter how little I may feel I'm contributing in the face of sometimes daunting need. Perhaps the need to learn and relearn this lesson is the reason that the classic holiday film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, remains a favorite year after year. I'm struck, though, by the fact that I very often hear both myself and others downplay the impact we think we can have in the world. Think how different the world would be if we all allowed ourselves to be overwhelmed and decided to do nothing at all instead.

The Christmas season may seem like an odd time to start thinking about things like wills and bequests, and planning for the end of life issues. After all, this is a season of joy. Consider this though. How would you feel if there was something you could do, no matter how small or insignificant it might seem to you, that could make a difference to your church or one of its ministries into the future, long after you're gone from this world? To think that I might be able to have a positive effect in the world even after my death seems incredible to me.

Many people think bequests or planned gifts are only for the very wealthy. But this isn't so. In fact, much of the good work of the church is funded through the collective accumulation of gifts from people who are trying to balance as many different economic needs as you might have. But there are ways of estate planning that can not only allow you to leave a charitable gift to your parish, but also provide you, or anyone you designate as a beneficiary, an income for life. A charitable gift annuity is an example of one such gift.

So as you prepare to celebrate this Christmas, be mindful of the fact that you really can help to change the world. And if you'd like to learn more about making an ultimate gift to benefit an Episcopal church or ministry of your choice, please contact the Episcopal Church Foundation at 800-697-2858 or visit our website at www.EpiscopalFoundation.org. We can answer whatever technical questions you might have and help you give a Christmas gift that will not be forgotten.