Compassion Story of the Month

With Brattleboro voting overwhelmingly to become part of the international Charter for Compassion, the Reformer and The Commons have agreed to publish a "compassion story of the month." This is the twenty-seventh. Information on submissions from Brattleboro area residents is offered below.

Discovering Compassion in a Church

Story 1 From Centre Church Congregational Church in Brattleboro

Two months ago, and again two weeks ago, items were stolen from our church on Sunday mornings while worshiping. Afterwards, it might not have been unreasonable for members to be suspicious and wary of strangers who looked as if they might be in need. Happily, this was not the case with our Brattleboro congregation. Last Sunday a young man came to the church early, asking if he could attend the service. After being assured that he was most welcome, the man asked meekly if there were any socks or shoes around that he could have. All he had were a pair of sandals, and his feet were hurting. In fact, they were badly calloused and blistered. We took him downstairs to an area where donated clothes are sometimes available, and then to our Lost and Found box, but could find nothing.

Groundworks and Experienced Goods are closed on Sundays, but other stores were open. So, I got him some towels, suggested he go into the restroom and wash his feet so that, after the service, we could go shopping. The young man, let's call him 'Ethan', reminded me so much of a close family member who has struggled with substance issues, depression, and extreme anxiety all his life, is on the Autism spectrum, is on disability, and is currently in transitional housing – although he's been close to being homeless. Wouldn't I be grateful for people who showed kindness to him?

After the service I walked with Ethan down to Sam's and bought him shoes and socks. I was thankful that my husband and I had the means to do so. Walking back afterwards, we passed a young homeless woman asking for money. Ethan pulled out a crumpled dollar bill and handed it to her. 'This is all I have", he said, apologetically.

By happenstance, just before Ethan and I had departed from the church, I overheard a comment another young man was saying to him: "There are a lot of nice people here".

Story 2 by Louise Cochran

Visiting Kolkata (earlier Calcutta) India with my husband some time ago, we were nearly overwhelmed by the extremes of poverty and deprivation we were seeing. We then happened to pass St. Paul's Cathedral in the large park at the center of Kolkata and decided on an impulse to go in.

A service was taking place, and a guest preacher from England was giving a sermon. The preacher was speaking about a recent car trip he'd taken out of Kolkata with the local Indian bishop. Stopping at a railway crossing they were confronted by the inevitable beggar. What should they do? 'On principle' they decided not to give – although neither the English preacher nor the Bishop was quite sure exactly what that principle was. The driver of the car, however, presumably 'less principled', gave something to the beggar who, in turn, said something to the driver in Bangla. The English preacher, now curious, asked the driver what the beggar had said. The answer was one that captures the essence of religion for so many dispossessed persons throughout history. The beggar had said, "I shall remember you when I am in the Kingdom".

Now my husband I were both in tears. When we went up to thank the preacher he said, "My greatest hope in coming to India was that I might touch the heart of at least one person. And now I know I have done that".

Submissions, from Brattleboro area residents, for future publication, not to exceed 650 words, should be emailed to: compassionstory@gmail.com or mailed to: Compassion Story of the Month, PO Box 50, Marlboro, VT 05344. Please include your name, address, phone number and email address. Earlier submitted stories will automatically be considered in subsequent months.