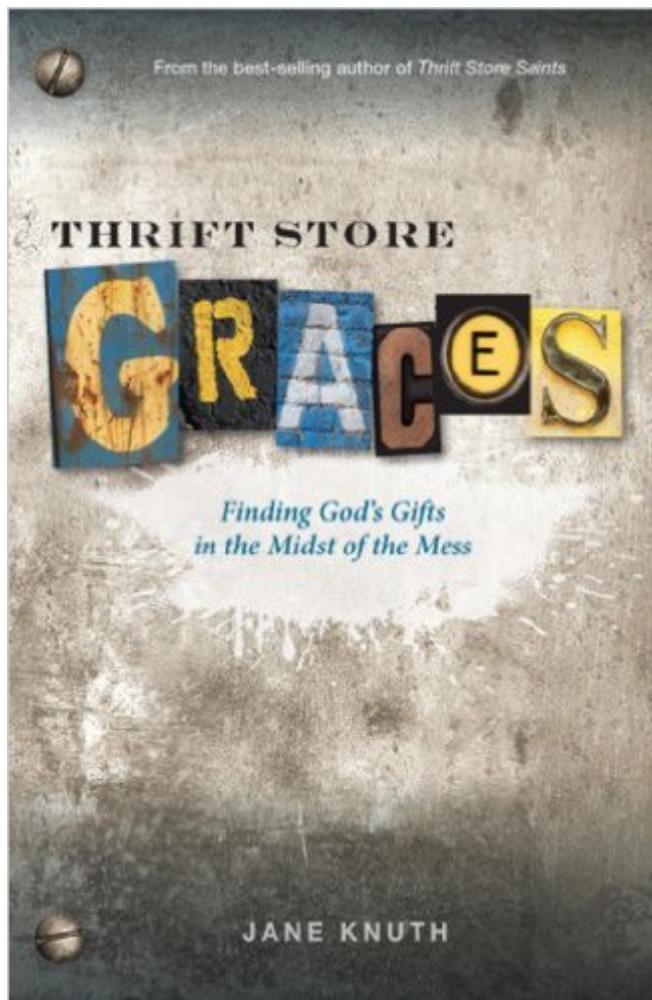


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# Thrift Store Graces: Finding God's Gifts In The Midst Of The Mess



## **Synopsis**

This absurdly religious thinking "that when we help the poor, they end up helping us" is at the heart of the 30 stories that Jane Knuth shares in *Thrift Store Graces*, the sequel to her popular *Thrift Store Saints*. Similar to the first book, *Thrift Store Graces* contains personal accounts of Knuth's experiences serving as a once reluctant, now enthusiastic volunteer at a thrift store in Kalamazoo, Michigan. What sets *Thrift Store Graces* apart from her first book is that Knuth introduces us to some far more challenging personal situations that emerge as a result of her volunteer work. Additionally, she invites us to join her as she hesitantly embarks on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in war-ravaged Bosnia. Through it all, her delightful sense of humor keeps her going, along with her conviction that some of God's greatest gifts come disguised as difficulties. Witty, inspiring, and thought-provoking all at once, the stories in *Thrift Store Graces* subtly compel us to redefine what it means to volunteer and to rethink why it is that we volunteer in the first place.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Loyola Press (March 1, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0829436928

ISBN-13: 978-0829436921

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.3 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (19 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #316,505 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #72 in Books > Business & Money > Job Hunting & Careers > Volunteer Work #353 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Church Institutions & Organizations #355 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Poverty

## **Customer Reviews**

I took this book and Jane Knuth's first book, *Thrift Store Saints*, with me on vacation last week. These two books about her volunteer work with the poor through the St. Vincent de Paul Society might seem an odd choice for a vacation that put us squarely in the ranks of the privileged, but it was the perfect time to contemplate this author's many subtle and nuanced spiritual insights. Ms. Knuth has volunteered at a thrift store in Kalamazoo, Michigan, run by this Catholic charitable organization for almost 20 years. In her books are tales of her encounters with customers at the

store and in the surrounding neighborhood. The refreshing thing about her point of view, however, is that she doesn't consider herself to be serving the poor, or teaching the poor, or in any way condescending to a class of people not her own. She has wholeheartedly assumed the Society's position that the people she helps are her teachers, and she their student. That simple, yet profound, shift in thinking informs Ms. Knuth's every interaction. It produces a curiosity and humility that makes her storytelling so very touching. Yet Ms. Knuth is no saint! She is honest about her struggles to help people who might be lying to her, people who don't smell good or who are drunk and abusive, people who -- as one of the ongoing stories in this book reveals -- rob her while brazenly turning an innocent face to the world. In this book, Ms.

What strikes me most in reading Jane Knuth's experiences; with the St. Vincent de Paul thrift store is the abundance of creativity among the volunteers. No question, the St. Vincent de Paul Society and services in which Knuth is engaged adhere to specific guidelines; however, there's plenty of room for going the extra mile and exercising personal judgment to meet special circumstances. And there are special circumstances. Of Otis, a thirtyish father of two presenting an eviction notice, Knuth writes, "There have been just too many sad stories for me today." She turns to the locked filing cabinet that sometimes contains cash--today there is a twenty, which she gives to Otis. The money is harvested from small donations and instances in which customers say "keep the change." Otis is mightily depressed, despite Knuth's decision that the agency will extend its promise of rent money for a few weeks. She tells him to use the \$20 to take the kids to McDonald's. This and several similar gestures give rise to discussions about spending patterns of the poor. Is it okay for a parent who gets bonus clothing for the kids to spend money on ice cream? And what about the client your gut says is lying in order to get help? No cut and dried answers emerge, but the principles of the society and the work of St. Vincent de Paul would suggest a preference for erring on the side of generosity. The team of volunteers working with Knuth face these and less philosophical questions every day as they not only sort and price items but also contact outside agencies and organizations for help, dip into their own wallets, and search their closets to supplement agency support, and operate a complex system to help clients choose items from the shop as Christmas gifts for family.

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