



Related articles:

Inspiring generosity
(page 54)

Living Lutheran,
September/October 2019

Contact us:

LivingLutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, ext. 2540
livinglutheran@elca.org
livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the
magazine of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.

Study guide

Inspiring generosity

New stewardship project engages toddlers to centenarians

By Robert C. Blezard

Generosity is a value, a characteristic and a practice that lies at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. And yet, we lament that many Christians exhibit a miserly spirit. How does one become a person with a generous spirit? How can this key trait be nourished from generation to generation? The ELCA's Generosity Project aims to cultivate generosity in families and congregations through workshops and exercises at church and home.

Exercise 1: "More blessed to give"

In the New Testament, Acts 20:35 recalls Jesus' teaching: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It's an amazing statement with lots of ramifications for us today. Discuss:

- What does Jesus' statement mean?
- What does it mean for you?
- Share a time when you have experienced or witnessed this as true.
- Why are those who give blessed?
- In what way are they blessed?
- What does it mean for people who give as a way of life?

Exercise 2: Generosity vs. stewardship

Though often used narrowly (and inaccurately) to describe the fundraising efforts a church takes to pay for its ministries, stewardship is actually a much broader concept. A steward is someone entrusted to care for something that belongs to someone else. Our faith tells us that God owns everything, including us and our lives, and entrusts us to use our time, talents, possessions and creation for godly purposes.

Generosity is different. But what exactly is it? As a study group, come up with a working definition of faithful generosity.

Start by breaking into small groups of two or three and then write at least five statements that begin with the phrase "Faithful generosity is"

When each small group is done, share your statements with the group as a whole.

From the statements everyone came up with, distill the best of them into a good working definition.



Reprints:

Permission is granted for individuals, small groups and congregations to reproduce this study guide for local use.

Contact us:

LivingLutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, ext. 2540
livinglutheran@elca.org
livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.

Study guide: **Inspiring generosity** *continued*

Exercise 3: Teaching generosity

It can be argued that people are hard-wired to be generous and giving, but certainly generosity can be nourished through our experiences and relationships. To help explore how this happens, share with one another and discuss:

- What is your earliest memory of experiencing generosity? Where was it? Who was involved? How did it make you feel?
- What is your earliest memory of being taught about sharing and generosity?
- Who taught or modeled generosity for you? How did he or she do it?
- How have you taught it to your children, family or friends?
- How is generosity talked about in your congregation?

Exercise 4: Rituals and storytelling

How do we pass on our faith from one generation to the next? For centuries, the older generations have used personal witnessing and storytelling. This is one approach that the Generosity Project uses to help develop a joyful spirit of giving. An added benefit, sharing stories is a wonderful way for families and congregations to draw closer to one another and deepen relationships. Discuss:

- In your family, what is the role of sharing stories and experiences among the generations—from great-grandparents down to great-grandchildren?
- How do storytelling and sharing help create a common family history and identity? Why are these important?
- What rituals—such as saying grace before meals or praying at bedtime—help to nurture common identity and pass along values?
- How do all these elements—sharing, storytelling and rituals—work together to mold people in healthy and life-giving ways?
- As a family, how can you deepen the use of sharing, storytelling and ritual to draw more closely together, build common identity and nourish values?
- Using tools from the Generosity Project, how can your family cultivate the value of generosity?

Now go through the questions again, this time substituting “our congregation” for family. When finished, discuss:

- What are the similarities in the role of sharing, storytelling and ritual between families and congregations? The differences?
- How do these elements help form people in faith and values that are essential to Christian discipleship?



Tell us:

Do you find this guide helpful? Send comments and suggestions to rcblezard@embarqmail.com

Contact us:

LivingLutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, ext. 2540
livinglutheran@elca.org
livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Study guide: **Inspiring generosity** *continued*

Exercise 5: Generous-hearted

Generous people command a special place in the lives of our family, community and church. But what is it about them that makes them special? Start with everyone sharing:

- Who is the most generous person you have ever known?
- Besides being generous, what were they like?
- How did their generosity manifest itself?
- What impact did that person have on you and your family?
- With what were they generous?

When done sharing, discuss:

- Are generous people generous only with money?
- What other qualities of character do generous people typically possess?
- For these generous people, is generosity a practice or a way of life? Explain?

Exercise 6: "God loves a cheerful giver"

In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul provides the churches in Corinth a deep teaching about giving and generosity. Though the chapter's best known line is from verse 7b, "God loves a cheerful giver," the fuller context reveals much more wisdom. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 and discuss:

- What is the teaching of verse 6? What is being sowed and reaped? What does it mean to a follower of Jesus?
- In verse 7, what does it mean to give "reluctantly or under compulsion"? How do people tend to give in your congregation?
- Go through the passage and identify the phrases that talk about God's abundance. What is the connection between abundance and generosity?
- What promise does verse 8 make to those who give?
- What promise is made to givers in verse 10?
- What blessing and promise is bestowed upon generous people in verse 11?
- How would you summarize the key point of this passage?
- How do the promises of verses 8, 10 and 11 correlate to Jesus' teaching of Acts 20:35 (see Exercise 1)?
- What does this passage say about faithful generosity?

Exercise 7: Scarcity or abundance?

A chronic attitude that we do not have enough, even if we possess above-average wealth, is called a "scarcity mentality." A persistent awareness that we actually



About the study guide author:

Rob Blezard

is an assistant to the bishop in the Lower Susquehanna Synod. He holds degrees from Boston University School of Theology and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Pa).



Contact us:

LivingLutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, ext. 2540
livinglutheran@elca.org
livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Study guide: **Inspiring generosity** *continued*

do have more than we need, even if we are not wealthy, is generally called an “abundance mentality.” Discuss:

- Compare and contrast the differences between mentalities of scarcity and abundance.
- Is the dominant mentality in our country one of scarcity or abundance? What evidence can you cite to defend your position?
- Can someone be rich and still possess a mentality of scarcity? Explain.
- What kind of behaviors would such a person likely exhibit?
- What kind of personal traits might this person have?
- Can you share an experience of such a person?
- Can someone be of modest means and still possess a mentality of abundance?
- What kind of behaviors would such a person likely exhibit?
- What kind of personal traits might this person have?
- Can you share an experience of such a person?
- Which mentality—scarcity or abundance—is more likely to encourage generosity? Explain.
- Thinking of the generous people you have known, did they tend to operate from a mentality of scarcity or abundance?
- Is there a correlation between one's generosity and one's attitude of generosity or abundance?
- How can the Generosity Project exercises help cultivate an abundance mentality in your family and congregation?

Exercise 8: Generosity and gratitude

The Generosity Project includes an exercise called “a circle of blessing” where participants talk about God's grace and generosity. As a study group, do your own “circle of blessing” exercise by taking turns talking for five or 10 minutes apiece about your experience of God's grace and generosity. Here are the rules: Everybody shares. As each shares, the group leader may ask questions to encourage participants, or clarify or explore their experiences. When done, discuss:

- Was it comfortable talking about God's grace and generosity? Explain.
- What did you feel as you talked about God's grace and generosity?
- What did you learn about yourself that you didn't know before?
- What did you feel as you listened to others talk about God's grace and generosity?
- Was the overall experience positive? Explain.
- How did it strengthen community connections to listen to one another?

Inspiring generosity

New stewardship project engages toddlers to centenarians

By Jennifer Bringle



Members of all ages from the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod Latino network participated in the Generosity Project workshop.



Generosity Project workshops include many resources. Participants find the take-home activities to be critical components to applying the lessons with their families.

Sharing God's gifts with one another through stewardship is an integral part of the Lutheran faith. But sometimes the idea of stewardship gets misunderstood, equated simply with monetary giving rather than a generosity of time, spirit or love. ELCA member Linda Staats is trying to change that with "The Generosity Project," a new stewardship resource she authored for ELCA congregations.

The project was born through a collaboration between Staats and two others serving in the Rocky Mountain Synod to create innovative approaches to stewardship. The resource they designed focuses on promoting generosity across generations and in households. And that sense of generosity is less about specific monetary amounts than a shift in behavior.

"The goal is not to increase giving by a percentage. The goal is to change the culture in a congregation," she said. "We're building a culture to bring all generations together and build an atmosphere of trust, and equipping the home as a place where generosity is practiced."

The resource, which was tested in congregations and will be formally released this fall, engages congregants of all ages in a four-hour workshop. In it, participants share, engage and discover their capacity for generosity.

"One of the most powerful exercises we do is a circle of blessing," Staats said. "We form a circle of the oldest to youngest, and we talk about those who come before us and after us. And we talk about God's story of grace and generosity. It's a new way of seeing each other and changes the way we talk to each other."

Additional sessions and worship follow, but the most critical components are the take-home activities, which challenge participants to apply new learnings in their homes.

"One of the moms in the project said, 'Our children don't know we're generous because we do it online, and we need to sit down and talk it out with our kids,'" Staats said. This project inspires conversation at home about how families share and receive gifts, she added.

Congregational connections

In the six years since it began, the Generosity Project has reached congregations from Alaska to Delaware.

In the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, the resource has taken off, particularly in the Latino community. Irma Bañales, the synod's director for evangelical mission, helped launch the initiative in the Panhandle Conference. The response was so positive, she suggested they take



In the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, the Generosity Project spurred conversation and connections across generations.

it to other Spanish-speaking congregations, reaching as far as Chicago, where she helped launch a pilot program.

Bañales sees the resource not only as a means to open hearts to stewardship, but also to connect congregants to each other. She relates her experience of not having a close relationship with grandparents, and those of members whose relatives live far away. Cross-generational fellowship—instigated by these workshops—can fill a void in our lives, she said.

“It’s another way to experience the pieces we haven’t had in our childhood,” Bañales added. “And the children have the opportunity to feel really welcome and like, ‘They care about us.’”

Bañales is working with Staats to create a Spanish version of the resource to launch later this year.

In the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, Laurie Skow-Anderson implemented the resource in confirmation classes prior to her election as bishop. The questions asked ranged from your first telephone to the first person who told you about Jesus. The answers, which varied across multigenerational groups, spurred deeper conversation about faith and generosity.

“Sharing the wisdom, faith and values to the next generation in an intentional way ... [is] so

important,” Skow-Anderson said. “We live in such a crazy, fast-paced society where we don’t have those conversations anymore, and the church becomes this sacred space where we create those conversations.”

Enlightening exchanges

What comes from those sacred exchanges can be enlightening. That’s true for members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Palmer, Alaska. “With the directed conversations, we didn’t talk about weather, we didn’t talk about taxes or politics—we talked about something specific,” said its pastor, Diane Krauszer. “It was a wonderful, joyful thing.”

That joy is especially relevant today, she added, which is why the congregation will initiate a six-week version of the Generosity Project next.

“This allows us to turn our minds and hearts away from the fear that says we don’t have enough to realizing we have an abundance that we can share in many ways,” she said.

That spirit captures Staats’ purpose behind this resource—to connect people with each other, with their communities and, ultimately, with God.

“The Holy Spirit just shows up when a 10-year-old and this 101-year-old woman who have never met are sitting hand-in-hand, gazing into each other’s eyes,” Staats said. “It’s something to literally gaze into each other’s eyes and know one another’s story and feel the Holy Spirit. I think people are craving that, and it brings joy.” **L**

The Generosity Project resource will be available this fall at elca.org/generosityproject. Additional stewardship resources can be found at elca.org/resources/stewardship.

Download a study guide for this article at livinglutheran.org by clicking on the “Spiritual practices and resources” tab.



Jennifer Bringle is a writer, editor and lifelong Lutheran who lives in Greensboro, N.C.