



Living stewardship

By Bishop Lorna Halaas

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:1-10).

This is the story of Zacchaeus. A story that preacher and professor Anna Carter Florence says is a story "about climbing trees": "Climbing trees enables us to get a change in position, find a new angle, and a new insight."

We want to see Jesus and, like Zacchaeus, we, too, are short. Too short-sighted.

We want to see Jesus and like Zacchaeus we cannot see over the crowd. The crowd of power and traditions that have formed us and created for us a wall.

We want to see Jesus and like Zacchaeus we need to climb a tree. Climb out on a limb, to see beyond our old ways and see Jesus here and now, present in our lives and in all the world around us.

Jesus comes, bringing a new vision for the world—do we not perceive it?

So let's talk stewardship at home and at church!

Let's be real—money is a part of our lives. And talk about money is indeed biblical.

Money and faith have powerful connections. Might we need to change our position and take a new look at:

- What money means in our lives?
- How does our faith influence our choices in life?



Bishop Lornia Halaas

Zacchaeus was changed on the day that he climbed a tree.

Might we, too, be tree climbers, seeing beyond our old ways with new eyes of love and generosity.

Might we, too, be tree climbers, seeing Jesus in one another and in all of creation.

So we pray ... gracious Spirit, open our eyes and grant us courage to go where you lead. ५

For further reading

Embracing Stewardship by Charles R. Lane and Grace Duddy Pomroy. "Stewardship is a wonderful word that describes how a follower of Jesus Christ faithfully travels through this life. Contained in this one word are three important biblical teachings.

- God is the creator and owner of all that is.
- God loves us so much that God has entrusted some of what God owns into each person's care.
- How God's people manage what God entrusts into their care both flows from their relationship with God and impacts that relationship."

God loves a cheerful giver

By the Rev. Jeff Unga

How would you define the word “generosity”? When asked, some might have difficulty defining the word but say they know it when they see it.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines generosity as “the quality or fact of being generous.” But what does the quality or fact of being generous even mean?

Wikipedia defines generosity as “the virtue of being unattached to material possessions, often symbolized by the giving of gifts. Generosity is regarded as a virtue by various world religions and is often celebrated in cultural and religious ceremonies.” Although this definition remains somewhat limited, it is a helpful starting point when discussing generosity. Generosity may be demonstrated through the giving of our **time**, **talents**, and **possessions**.

Although we do not often think of our **time** as a material possession, we can determine how we will spend it. Since time is such a valuable possession in our culture, it may be difficult to give up our time. We become attached to and want to possess control of *our* time. But as good stewards, we recognize that time is not really ours, but is a gift from God. We are called to live our lives and use the time God gives us on the earth to the glory of God.

Some very generous people in the Western Iowa Synod give their time to God in their congregation



and in many synod ministries. No ministry happens without people generously giving of their valuable time. Thank you to all who serve on the Synod Council or your congregation council, synod or congregation networks and/or committees, or volunteer your time to make Christ known. If it is true that we know generosity when we see it, then one does not have to look far to see generous people in the church of the

Western Iowa Synod. May you be blessed for blessing others with your time.

There are generous people who give their **talents** to make Christ known in the church. A group of very talented musicians came together and formed a band to lead our worship at the 2019 synod assembly. A parliamentarian was present to make certain all decisions and votes were made in an orderly and proper fashion. Many forums were offered that demonstrated the gifts of God’s people at work making Christ known.

In congregations, many generous people give of their talents in many ways to make Christ known—from the quilters to the teachers to the musicians and more. Again, we do not have to look far to see generous people in the church. Thank you for sharing the gifts and talents that God has given you in many and various ways.

And finally, the generous giver of money—our **possessions**. The widow gave only two copper coins worth about one penny to the collection, yet Jesus said she put in more than all the others. In her poverty, she gave all she had to live on. Being a generous giver of money is not about how much money we give, but the attitude with which we give.

Giving to God through your church is one way you can express gratitude to God for all that God has given you. In 2 Corinthians 9:7-8 we read: “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God can provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.” For all those who generously give money to make Christ known in your congregation, in the synod and in churchwide ministries, thank you!

**All that we have is
a gift from a very
generous God.
Our time, our talents
and our possessions all
belong to God.**

Generosity is a condition of the heart that recognizes that we do not possess anything. All that we have is a gift from a very generous God. Our time, our talents and our possessions all belong to God. We are stewards or caregivers of all God has given us. As we gathered together as the Western Iowa

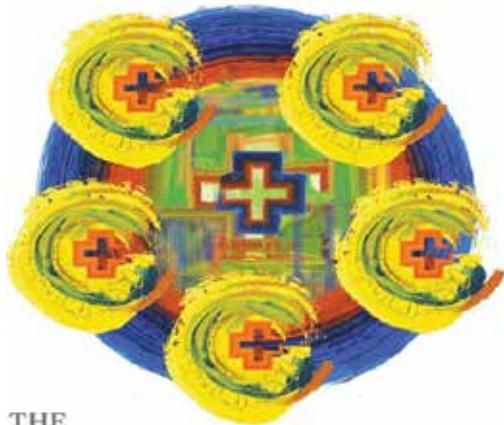
Synod at our recent assembly, and every time we gather together for worship, Christ is made known through your generous sharing of time, talents and financial resources. On behalf of the countless lives that have seen your generosity and whose lives are positively impacted through your giving, thank you for sharing what God has generously given you.

May your generosity bring you great joy as you make Christ and his abundant love for all known to the world. ✚

Jeff Unga is director for evangelical mission and assistant to the bishop.

Samples of generosity within the Western Iowa Synod

- The Rev. Perry Aalgaard’s family, which acknowledged they already were blessed much, gave to SACCOS (Tanzanian microfinancing) rather than spend more on each other at Christmastime. These funds helped to support Grace Lutheran in Primghar’s challenge fundraising effort for SACCOS, which raised even more matching money. Thank you!
- There are congregations with farm and endowment income sources that give in a variety of ways. Thank you!!
- Ryan Johnson, a high school student from Our Saviors Lutheran Church in Rock Valley, is giving his time and energy to serve on the ELCA Youth Core Leadership Team. He attended the synod assembly, shared information with the youth, and assists in the planning of the Youth Leadership Summit, which is held each fall for high school students. Thank you!
- The Western Iowa Synod Women’s Organization and Women of the ELCA groups have consistently and generously given time and money to projects in both Tanzania and in Chile. And now, members of Lutheran Men in Mission are giving of their time and resources to assist with the Massai men’s ministry. Thank you!
- Inmates from the Church of the Damascus Road heard the story and used their voice and presence to attain good, used and highly needed microscopes for the science laboratory at Igumbilo Lutheran Girls Secondary School. Additionally, they routinely give to Mission Support and to their companion congregations and our Hatua Kwa Hatua projects. ✚



THE GENEROSITY PROJECT

equips congregations to connect and support all ages as *steward leaders* in the congregation and in the home. TGP is a lively, interactive, and fun educational plus worship experience for all generations.

The Generosity Project includes these resources:

- **Foundation and Fundamentals**
- **Introductory Workshop**
- **5G six-session curriculum**
- **Live It Out** take home
- **Annotated Bibliography**

Join the growing network of TGP leaders, view photos of cross+gen workshops, preview and download TGP samples and stay informed of recent developments:

The Generosity Project ELCA Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/thegenerosityproject/>

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Synod hosts Cross+Generational Ministry Lab

Last March, the Western Iowa Synod hosted a Cross+Generational Ministry Lab in Sioux City in collaboration with the Nebraska Synod, the ELCA Generosity Project, outdoor ministries, Faith Ink, GenOn, and Thrivent. With seven generations gathered together, we learned about generosity through various interactive activities. One older gentleman commented how much fun this event was, and he was glad he chose to attend.

Those in attendance also learned about ways to incorporate cross+generational (all generations gathered together around the cross of Jesus Christ) activities into their ministry setting. Our two main leaders were Linda Staats and Emily Dalen. There were approximately 70 people in attendance, and we heard many positive comments about the event. It's been great to hear how participants are already using or planning ways to incorporate what they learned into their ministry. We will continue to look for more ways and opportunities to share about the Generosity Project and Cross+Generational Ministry ideas throughout the synod. 𐄂



Submitted by Deacon Lynn Egesdal, faith formation coordinator