

# THE GENEROSITY

PROJECT: 5G

Growing in God's Grace Generation to Generation

## Foundation and Fundamentals



A synodical, congregational and household ministry



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

## THE GENEROSITY PROJECT

**The Generosity Project** (TGP) is an expression of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) Macedonia Project, with initial funding provided by Thrivent Financial Services®. The purpose of the Macedonia Project is to grow faithful, steward leaders.

The Rocky Mountain Synod, a regional ELCA office, submitted the original proposal for "The Generosity Project" in 2011. Synod staff representing Outreach & Mission (Rev. Jim Hytjan), Stewardship (Rev. Dan Bollman), and Children, Youth & Household Ministry (Linda Staats), collaborated to create an approach to stewardship that crosses generations and equips households.

With continued support from the ELCA beginning in 2013, "The Generosity Project: Our Table is Ready" became an introductory, in-depth workshop. It was piloted nationally, including events in 10 synods and more than 50 congregations. These events provided valuable insight for the 2018 expanded packet of The Generosity Project resources. The Generosity Project is the result of the collaboration, creativity, and dedication of gifted leaders across the ELCA.

### TGP RESOURCE COMPONENTS

- **The Generosity Project: Foundation and Fundamentals** (TGP: FF)

A summary of the basics that grounds the multi-generational, household approach to stewardship and discipleship. TGP is based on commonly held best practices in faith formation, research, Scripture and a Lutheran understanding of baptism.

**The Generosity Project: Introductory Workshop** (TGP: IW)

The three-four hour TGP: IW is intended for hosting by synods or groups of congregations, with the purpose of introducing The Generosity Project to teams of people from multiple congregations and/or a network of leaders within a geographic area. The ELCA Generosity Project Coordinator or a regional Generosity Project Network Leader is available to facilitate the process and content. The goal is for people to "experience" multi-generational interaction, conversation, and a sampling of activities from the TGP: 5G Curriculum.

- **The Generosity Project: 5G Curriculum** (TGP: 5G)

TGP: 5G is a multi-use curriculum and resource for congregations and households to utilize as they grow and live into the faith practice of generosity. Curriculum consists of: a *Planning Guide* • *Five one-hour sessions* • *Worship* • *Live It Out!* a take-home resource.

- **The Generosity Project: Annotated Bibliography** (TGP: AB)

A list of books, web sites, articles and research to go deeper and extend the focus of generosity into a year-round initiative.

## **THE GENEROSITY PROJECT – Is About**

### **VISION**

- Being Generous – An individual’s identity and daily decisions as a consumer shaped by God’s Story in Jesus.
- Connecting Generations – All ages and all generations recognized as recipients of God’s grace and as stewards of God’s abundant generosity.
- Equipping Households – Households equipped as places where God’s generosity is received, practiced, and responded to with joy, at home and away, 24.7.365.
- Creating Centers of Generosity – A spirit of generosity developed that overflows from households to congregations to neighborhoods and into all the world.
- Living God’s Story – A confidence and trust in God’s grace and generosity created that fosters a belief: With God, all things are possible, “there is more than enough!”

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- God’s Story in Jesus shapes our lives, our identity and our daily decisions.
- All ages have the ability to be generous and God’s stewards.
- Generosity is best practiced and formed in households, supported by the community of faith and all generations.
- Faith is nurtured and a climate of trust developed when values and finances are discussed between generations.
- Generosity is essential, as the vital, daily expression and practice of Christian faith.

### **GOALS**

- Grow an individual, household and congregational culture and spirit of sharing.
- Recognize God’s grace and generosity through cross+generational interaction.
- Practice generosity and mature as Christ’s disciples and God’s faithful stewards.
- Celebrate God’s Story of generosity, locally and globally.
- Sing, pray, practice, move, laugh, learn and worship together.

## OVERVIEW

### Scope

The TGP: 5G Curriculum includes five sessions, a sixth session that is a celebratory worship, and accompanying “Live It Out!” take-home discussion guides. The goal is to equip participants to live out the five-fold vision of The Generosity Project: 5G. Each session includes its own Overview outlining the Foundation, Focus and Bible story or biblical text as well as resources and prompts for the Planning Team as they “Prepare, Ponder, and Pray.”

<b>SESSION I</b>	Being Generous	The WHY	Genesis 1:27-31a
<b>SESSION II</b>	Connecting Generations	The WHO	John 6:1-14
<b>SESSION III</b>	Equipping Households	The WHERE	Acts 2:41-47
<b>SESSION IV</b>	Creating Centers of Generosity	The HOW	2 Corinthians 8:1-9
<b>SESSION V</b>	Living God’s Story	The HERE and NOW	Matthew 19: 23-30
<b>SESSION VI</b>	Gathering at the Table	We WORSHIP	All the texts above

### Sequence

Each session is designed to be educational and worshipful – an “edu-worship” experience. Each session has six distinct parts or sections, similar to that of a liturgical worship service. The sequence and flow within each section is fully described in this TGP: 5G Planning Guide, along with the preparations that are common to all sessions. The sessions are designed for a quick-paced, interactive hour. Suggested timeframes are offered with the flexibility to lengthen or shorten sections as you choose.

#### WE WELCOME (5 minutes)

- Greet
- Start It Out
- Preview
- Fun Facts & Map It

#### WE GATHER (15 minutes)

- Sing
- Invite
- 5G Connect

#### WE HEAR (15 minutes)

- Act it Out
- Talk It Out
- Reach Out

#### WE SHARE (20 minutes)

- Center It
- Connect It

#### WE SEND (5 minutes)

- Sing
- Pray
- Bless

#### WE LIVE (every day)

- Take it Home
- Live It Out!

## TGP: 5G and the ELCA Discipleship Connection

The Generosity Project: 5G Curriculum easily compliments and lifts up the ELCA Five Gifts of Discipleship also known as the Affirmation of Baptism. ELCA's Story Matters is also core to The Generosity Project's conversation between generations. Continued reading of TGP: 5G Foundation and Fundamentals offers further insight and applications.

<b>SESSION I</b>	Being Generous <i>Hear the Word of God</i>	The WHY and Share in the Lord's Supper	Genesis 1:27-31a
<b>SESSION II</b>	Connecting Generations <i>Live Among God's faithful people</i>	The WHO	John 6:1-14
<b>SESSION III</b>	Equipping Households <i>Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed</i>	The WHERE	Acts 2:41-47
<b>SESSION IV</b>	Creating Centers of Generosity <i>Serve all people following the example of Jesus</i>	The HOW	2 Corinthians 8:1-9
<b>SESSION V</b>	Living God's Story <i>Strive for justice and peace in all the earth</i>	The HERE and NOW	Matthew 19: 23-30
<b>SESSION VI</b>	Gathering at the Table <i>Hear the Word of God and Share in the Lord's Supper</i>	We WORSHIP	All the texts above

## The Generosity Project: Foundation and Fundamentals<sup>1</sup>

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Linda Staats

Ponder for a moment the number of Bible stories you know of God's grace and abundant, overflowing generosity. Perhaps you remember Genesis and the creation story, or the Gospel stories of the Feeding of the 5000. Do you recall Jesus' answer to the rich man's question about eternal (abundant) life? Paul's report of the unbelievable selflessness of the Macedonian's Spirit led care for others? What about the story of a community's desire to follow Jesus as reported in Acts and Jesus first miracle of turning water into wine? As you add your favorite Bible stories and verses, it makes for quite a long list.

Now think about all the hours you and others in your household give to practicing: piano, guitar, choir, dance, baseball, soccer, swimming, yoga, math, cooking, and keeping one's balance as we age, and the list goes on. For all the various reasons and hours we commit to practicing, doesn't it make sense to practice – to practice generosity!

This paper offers an approach to stewardship and discipleship based on the practice of generosity that is grounded in commonly held best practices in faith formation, research, Scripture and a Lutheran understanding of baptism. A summary of thoughts and ideas are offered along with questions to ponder and next steps to consider.

### What is Stewardship? What is Discipleship?

Stewardship and Discipleship are not everyday words. Rarely does one hear conversation about stewardship or discipleship outside the walls of a church, although "stewarding the earth" is a popular phrase reflecting growing concerns related to the environment. So what then, does it mean to be a *Steward*? A *Disciple*?

Stewardship is most often defined as supervising or managing something entrusted to one's care. In Jesus' time a steward was the manager of the household. The steward was not the owner, but a trusted administrator of the owner's property. We are God's stewards of ALL things inherited and entrusted to us. Stewardship is the act of "stewarding" the earth, our wealth, our time, our possessions and our physical bodies. Being God's steward is a role and a responsibility to which one wholly and enthusiastically commits in response to God's grace and goodness.

Discipleship literally means "one who engages in learning through instruction from another, a pupil."<sup>2</sup> As Christians, the term "disciple" refers to following Jesus and becoming like Jesus in every way. As Lutheran Christians, we enter a life with Christ through our baptism - a life of imitating and following Jesus so others will know Jesus through us. In our Affirmation of Baptism we commit to continuing in the covenant God made with us. The ELCA "Five Gifts of

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<sup>1</sup> Staats, Linda. "The Generosity Project Foundation and Fundamentals" is based on a paper created by this author for keynote presentation at The Stewardship Summit, Southaven, MS 01.23.18.

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disciple\\_\(Christianity\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disciple_(Christianity)).

Discipleship” *Live, Hear, Proclaim, Serve, and Strive* help guide us in the practice of our baptism in daily life.<sup>3</sup>

### What is Generosity?

The word “generosity” is a popular word today, both inside and outside the walls of the institutional church. It often seems a nicer and safer approach to a conversation about money. But, the concept and practice of generosity is not a substitute for, nor the same as stewardship.

The modern English word “generosity” is derived from the Latin word *generōsus*, which means “of noble birth.”<sup>4</sup> As God’s stewards and disciples of Jesus we are called “to be” – to be noble and generous in spirit, generous with our time, talents and resources. Being generous is our response to the character of God, like the fruit in an orchard. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Eric Law, in the preface to his book, *Holy Currency Exchange*,<sup>5</sup> offers this explanation, “As a Christian, I believe in a compassionate God who shows me the pattern of God’s will and action in the person of Jesus. At the heart of holy currencies is the consistent choice to exchange our resources according to God’s will, following in Jesus’ footsteps.” [Law xi] Dr. Law reminds us that generosity is in both the giving and receiving, “We all have resources – time, place, leadership, relationship, truth, wellness, and money. What makes these resources holy is a dynamic process of exchanging them to empower the cycle of blessings that sustains communities.” [Law xii]

To summarize: Being generous is a role and responsibility of being God’s steward we joyfully fulfill. Living generously is the giving of our whole-selves as students who want to be like Jesus. Generosity is an exchange of resources, both giving and receiving, that blesses and sustains communities. Generosity is God’s promise. Jesus’ example. Our wholly, holy practice.

### Why Focus on God’s Stories of Generosity?

- To *hear* the Word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper
- To *proclaim* the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

As people who value stewardship and discipleship as a way of life, how do we answer the questions, “Why be generous?” and “What does it mean to live an abundant life in Christ?”

In Genesis 1:27-31a it is recorded that we are made in God’s image. If we believe that God is the maker of all things then we also believe that God is responsible for our own be-ing. Stewardship education is discipleship – it is about deciding whom we follow and want to emulate. It is about how we respond to the One who gives us our very life – the One from whom we receive our identity.

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<sup>3</sup> Living our Baptismal Covenant. ELCA <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Living-Our-Baptismal-Covenant>.

<sup>4</sup> “What is Generosity?” Science of Generosity. College of Arts and Letters. University of Notre Dame.

<sup>5</sup> Law, Eric H. F., *Holy Currency Exchange*. Chalice Press. Saint Louis, MO. 2015

We Christians have a story – a story of God’s grace and generosity in and through Jesus. Dr. David J. Lose, pastor, preacher and author, catches one’s attention when he explains that when Christians do not know God’s Story or see God in our story, then Scripture loses its capacity to affect our daily living. It is crucial that we reconcile the world’s message and endless marketing for us to consumer with God’s message of extraordinary generosity and invitation for us to share.<sup>6</sup>

Our biblical stories illustrate for us God’s promise, God’s covenant, over and over again – that there is more than enough! Yet, the cultural and political manifesto for our time is one of scarcity, “Never believe you have enough.” Commercials on TV want us to believe that we can buy happiness – we need more things or we are missing out. The world says the winner is the one with the most stuff. The unspoken belief in our society is that stuff equals happiness and the “good life!” As followers of Jesus we ask, “Is the good life the same as the abundant life?” Is happiness the same as joy?

At its foundation, being a consumer is an issue of one’s identity. Have modern logos and emblems become the current “cross” or marker of who one is and what defines us? With more than 3000 messages a day urging us to spend, how do we lift up the voice of the faith community inviting us to be generous?

The richness and over-arching narrative of the Christian faith is unfamiliar to most households, especially when viewed in terms of how God’s story impacts one’s identify and daily decisions. There is an urgent need for knowing and living the narrative of our Christian faith, as the story we tell ourselves is ultimately what influences our decisions to share, save, invest, and spend. How do we connect God’s Story to the lives of busy families in our culture?

Jeremy Myers, associate professor of religion at Augsburg College shares, “We bought into the consumer culture as sort of the normal practice, and we started to think of church as a product and people as consumers. But what people are yearning for is the ability to connect what their faith community believes with their daily life.”<sup>7</sup>

Congregations are an untapped resource to offer creative approaches to practical, lifelong stewardship education and faith formation for all ages. Development of steward leaders and disciples happens through personal, trusted relationships where God’s Story is articulated and freely shared across generations. We need safe spaces for individuals and households to discover God’s Story in “your story” and “my story” and to wrestle with the implications<sup>8</sup>.

Resourcing for deepened stewardship and discipleship need not depend on the newest curriculum, or reading the latest book, or outside “experts” coming to share their expertise. Rather, congregational goals can be accomplished through conversation around real-life

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<sup>6</sup> Rev. Dr. Lose, David. Senior Pastor, Mount Olivet, Minneapolis, MN. “Abundant Life,” Dear Working Preacher. May 08, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Myers, Jeremy. “A chance to re-engage.” *Living Lutheran* p. 40. Volume 2 Number 8, November 2017.

<sup>8</sup> ELCA “Story Matters.” An initiative to help congregations articulate their unique missional identity using the Bible as the framework.



questions and faithful approaches to ministry beginning within the walls of our own churches, in our communities, and homes. Conversations and activities centered on generosity!

When we know, claim and make daily decisions based on our Christian narrative — the stories of a loving God who showers us with abundant grace and forgiveness in Jesus — the results will be households and faith communities with increased capacity to be generous, influencing the world in which we live.

### Why Focus on Cross<sup>+</sup>Generational Engagement?

- To *live among God's faith people*

Core to practicing generosity as God's stewardship and Christ's discipleship is meaningful interaction and conversation between all ages and generations, recognizing every age and each generation's capacity to be generous.

The phrase "cross<sup>+</sup>generational engagement" is used intentionally, to create an image of all ages gathering around the cross of Christ. A cross<sup>+</sup>generational approach to stewardship education embedded within a community of faith meaningfully engages children, youth, young adults, adults and elders into its very life, witness and practice of generosity. When we model a dynamic cross<sup>+</sup>generational ministry within the walls of our congregations, then households are better equipped to be God's stewards and Christ's disciples in the domestic church called home.

Our news is filled with articles about generational characteristics, giving differences and the challenges and benefits of working together. Scripture is also filled with references to the generations. Yet, seldom are people able to name all the generations present in our society or identify each generation's uniqueness and gifts.

It is not as important to know the names of each generation or be an expert in generational theory as it is to recognize that each generation's beliefs, values, giving patterns and attitudes toward money are shaped by its time and place in history. Each generation has a unique worldview. Each generation offers a gift to the other generations. The Body of Christ is not complete when the views, skills, faith narratives and perspectives of a generation are absent in the ministry and life of a congregation and community.

In her book *Almost Christian* Kenda Creasy Dean states, "A generative faith, one where faith is viewed as God's gift and our identities are of a people who follow Jesus Christ and enact his love upon the world, requires a missional imagination. Our missional principles describe not only the way we ferry faith across borders but across generations."<sup>9</sup> [Dean, 98] She writes, "Peer groups have their place in ministry, but when churches mimic the age-stratification created by a market-driven culture, discipleship formation suffers...." [Dean, 94]

Our faith language refers to "passing on our faith to the next generation." Christina Embree, a pastor, spouse, and mother, reminds us that our role is to inspire firsthand faith, "Just as Timothy's mother and grandmother, and indeed, Paul and other believers, invested in him as a

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<sup>9</sup> Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Almost Christian*. New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2010.

young man, so must we “light the pilot lights” of those who come behind us; our children, our friends’ children, young people in our faith community, our neighborhood, our world ... but we don’t want to create secondhand Christians, that live only off of our experiences and convictions. We want them to burst into bright flame because of their own revelation of who God is and what He [God] has for them.<sup>10</sup>

Congregations are a vast, untapped potential for bringing the generations together – to build relationships, hear God’s Stories, share one another’s stories, and practice and model the Christian faith. Yet, too often even the most experienced Christian education and faith formation leaders are fearful of bringing people ages 2 to 102 together in the same space.

At an ELCA Global Mission Gathering, youth and adults participated in the Cross+Generational Engagement track for a brief 45-minutes of interaction.<sup>11</sup> When the adults reflected upon the experience of their encounter and conversation with the youth, there were tears – tears of appreciation and tears at the new found understanding of the potential power of face-to-face exchanges between youth and adults. This – the result of a mere 45 minutes together!

We have become so accustomed to age-segregated learning (and worship) in our congregational settings, that most often one must first experience cross+generational interaction to fully understand and appreciate its power. Most often when people engage in meaningful interaction between all ages, knee-to-knee, in the same space, the ardent response is, “When can we do this again?”

The foundation for a cross+generational approach to stewardship and discipleship is strengthened at all levels when the gifts and perspectives of every generation are woven into the very fabric of a faith community. When all ages are included, counted, and involved, the stories of generosity lead to a growing awareness of God’s faithfulness as well as a deeper understanding of our response as God’s stewards and Jesus’ disciples.

Creating a safe space for authentic conversation between generations offers the opportunity for an honest exchange about generational and cultural differences in understanding and defining wealth; exploration of what hinders generosity, sharing of one’s life-experience related to faith and finance.

Doug Cook, Cheyenne, WY, served as a member of the initial Rocky Mt. Synod, ELCA Generosity Project planning team. He offered this reflection following the series of pilot workshops, “I think one of the more powerful moments was hearing how a person’s life events impact their understanding of giving. I witnessed people sharing stories unique to their age group (i.e. the depression, the Great Society initiatives, Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam War, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, Haiti earthquake, two simultaneous wars, the Great Recession) and how those events affected their faith and what it meant to give of themselves and resources to their church and other entities. The conversation between generations provides a means to examine our faith journeys, our financial priorities, and helps us discern why and how we share with others.”

Congregational leaders often ask, “Where does one begin when incorporating a cross+generational approach to stewardship and discipleship into one’s ministry?” It doesn’t

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<sup>10</sup> Embree, Christina, “Fan Into Flame: The Gift of Firsthand Faith.” REFOCUS MINISTRY Blog. April 12,2018

<sup>11</sup> Staats, Linda. Workshop led at invitation of Sunitha Mortha, Director Mission Formation, Global Mission, ELCA.

take a program, or a line item in a budget, or a committee's approval to begin. Start by simply naming, claiming and celebrating the generations already in your midst inside the walls of your church and in your neighborhood. Weave intentional interaction and discussion of generosity into the unfolding life and witness, disciple forming, steward leader ministry of the congregation.

When we live-out our baptism; to know, claim and make daily decisions based on our Christian narrative, the stories of a loving God who showers us with abundant grace and forgiveness in Jesus, the results will be households and faith communities with increased capacity and generosity to influence the world in which we live.

### **Why focus on Equipping Households?**

- To hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's supper
- To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed
- To serve all people, following the example of Jesus

Those of us formally engaged in faith formation know that like learning to speak one's native language, to become fluent in the language of faith, it is best to hear it and practice it daily in the home.

In the journal of Lifelong Faith, John Roberto writes, "As church leaders and educators, we all recognize that the family is the first community of faith and the most powerful influence on the faith of children and teenagers. We also recognize that parents are the first educators of their children, providing the foundation for a spiritual and religious life. We know that ... parents need help to assume their roles in fostering faith and a deeper spirituality within their homes ... Unfortunately many congregations have contributed to the situation by over-emphasizing age-segregated programming, which further divides families ... Oftentimes there is little to no programming that engages the entire family, or that empowers and equips parents for their task as the primary religious teachers of their children and teens."<sup>12</sup>

Nathan Dungan, founder and president of Share Save Spend®, offers the following observation, "An overwhelming majority of people say that they received little or no instruction about money – be it share, save, or spend. Everywhere I go, the answer is the same, which means the primary responsibility for teaching about money most often falls to parents. Therein lie both the problem and the opportunity." He continues, "The unfortunate byproduct of this approach is that most people, unknowingly, cede the narrative of money and values to culture ... Imagine the possibilities if congregations proactively addressed these issues. What if the new stewardship normal moved beyond a pledge card and expanded to a year-round educational focus on money and values and the role it plays in our lives?"<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Roberto, John. "Best Practices in Family Faith Formation." *Lifelong Faith*. p. 1. Volume 1.3, Fall/Winter 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Dungan, Nathan. "Money Sanity U." *Center for Stewardship Leaders*, Luther Seminary, Blog post December 04, 2012.

Raising children in the 21st century has become increasingly complex. The choices parents and kids face have grown exponentially. Companies spend \$17 billion in advertising each year to reach our kids. The average child sees 25,000-40,000 TV ads each year. Teens spend \$160 billion of their own and parents' money annually; in addition to influencing another \$160 billion of their parent's spending. Kids today experience instant gratification for most of their needs and wants.

We join Nathan Dungan in asking the question, "Who is engaging, educating and equipping our households and young people for current and future financial opportunities and responsibilities?" When our children are bombarded 24/7 with messages urging them to spend, where is the voice inviting them to share? How do we not allow our changing culture engulf us and overwhelm us?

In the midst of a culture that tells us what we need and what to buy, how can the church respond with a lively faith and take seriously the cultural and daily realities impacting family life? How can the church partner with the domestic church called "home" without adding to the guilt and demands on time that too many parents already feel? How can congregations model faith practices when people gather, so people are equipped when they scatter?

In the Road to Emmaus story recorded in Luke, Chapter 24, it is at the household table where Christ is revealed and recognized, that hearts are warmed for greater sharing and generosity.

In God's story found in Acts 2:41-47 we learn, "They gathered in the temple AND at home." They were like family to each other and they practiced what it meant to follow Jesus – they heard and studied God's word, ate together with friends and family, prayed for one another, and they joyfully shared what they had with others. Household by household they grew as followers of Jesus Christ. This holy story offers a view of what a healthy faith community looks like when it is open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and practices in the formal setting called church what it looks like to follow Jesus in the domestic church called home.

To develop a deeply owned faith that grounds one's identity as the child of a generous God and a follower of Jesus, requires congregations to create a vital church-home partnership and intentional cross-generational culture that forms disciples as steward leaders. The church is called to provide a place to practice and ways to practice our faith. The church is called to equip households to learn and speak the language and stories of faith – at home.

Rev. Dana Lee Simon, an ELCA Pastor said it well: "After attending a Generosity Workshop, I am convinced that I, not the culture, will shape my child's identity, values and attitudes toward giving, saving and spending."

We gather as family at the Lord's Table so we are able to gather as households of faith at our picnic tables, coffee tables, kitchen tables, and restaurant tables. In the midst of the challenges that our 21st century congregations and families face, consider creating "training tables" for a daily life in Christ – training tables for *hearing* the Word of God and *sharing* in the Lord's Supper. As God's living, breathing gospel in the form of God's Son born among us takes root at our tables and in our hearts; we are freed to live generously.

In his book *The Mission Table*, Rev. Stephen P. Bouman offers these inspiring words: "When we talk about "tables," we do not speak of bureaucratic systems or techniques or programs. We

again take our seat at the kitchen table, bathed in stories and values and rhythms of faith that have anchored us in a gracious [and generous] God from generation to generation ... From the kitchen table, we are sent to the altar table, and from here into the world as story and sign bearers of the Creator's vision for reconciliation, forgiveness, restoration, and grace.<sup>14</sup> [pp. 19-20]

### **Yes, But...**

Challenges to the idea of equipping households as the center for faith practice are often voiced. Yes, it is a fact that not all who show up on a church campus or attend a church sponsored event return to homes where faith is practiced, let alone supported. In some households faith related conversations and traditions are explicitly forbidden. Congregations regularly welcome and engage individuals who may participate on their own without the support of a spouse, parent, a nuclear family, extended family, or network of friends. In these situations the influence and power of the cross+generational community takes on even more significance.

In the *Journal of Lifelong Faith*, John Roberto refers to the following research, "What becomes clear in the "Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry" is that in addition to learning about God through excellent Bible teaching, young people come to know a living and active God through relationships in the community. The young people in these congregations get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Jesus. The study concludes that the power of faithful, multi-generational Christian relationships is at the heart of effective youth ministry."<sup>15</sup>

Although the preceding statement is focused on youth, might we conclude that the premise is applicable to individuals of every age and stage of life? Where a supportive household or extended family is absent, the role and importance of the cross+generational community becomes even more essential in the nurturing of an individual's faith for whenever, wherever, and however that faith might be outwardly expressed and practiced.

### **So What?**

- *To strive for justice and peace in all the earth*

How does one measure the impact of practicing generosity? Has giving increased? More Bible stories known and shared? Development of the next stage of faith?<sup>16</sup> Recipients of grants are well aware that grantors look for quantitative data as proof of impact. Qualitative data – the narratives of impact are not so easily measured.

Theories of innovation tell us that to change the culture in any organization, for new thought and approaches to go deep and become part of one's DNA, takes a minimum of three years. The goal of a cross+generational, household practice of generosity is to change the culture of how a congregation approaches stewardship and discipleship. The desired outcome is an

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<sup>14</sup> Bouman, Stephen P. is the Executive Director, Domestic Mission – ELCA.

<sup>15</sup> Roberto, John. "Importance of Intergenerational Community for Faith Formation." *Lifelong Faith*, Spring 2012

<sup>16</sup> Fowler III. James W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (1981).

increased number of individuals of all ages who become steward leaders and devoted disciples at church, at home, and in the world; and yes, increased sharing and giving.

The following quips, both quantitative and qualitative in nature, express the potential impact when a multi-generational, household focused approach to generosity is adopted.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately it is all about stewardship and discipleship.

**Personal:** “In my ministry, seeds have been sown regarding various means of communicating the essence of generosity. This has affected my preaching and my husband's and my personal giving as well. When I have been uncertain that we should give, because it's been a tight month, we give and somehow we always have enough.”  
*An ELCA Pastor, Upstate New York Synod*

**Household:** “Because of the conversations about generosity at church, we are now having them at home as a family. Our ten-year old daughter is on a whole different wavelength in terms of giving than she has ever been before. I was surprised to see how quickly the messages of generosity have taken root in her actions and attitude. She is now tuned into giving an offering at church or in Sunday school. She has become involved in directing her money that is designated for sharing from the piggy bank she received at a Generosity Project event.” *A mom and participant with her daughter at a New England Synod – ELCA hosted Generosity Event*

**Congregation:** “... After sending four youth and four adults to a Generosity Project workshop, it was rewarding to see our participants (young and old) create *Crazy Generosity* events for the congregation. The youth became part of our Stewardship Leadership Team. They loved being the experts and were excited to be the teachers of the folks who gathered. The design of the Generosity Project is brilliant in that it is accessible to people of all ages. Kids embrace the games as we expected they would, but they also blew us away theologically, which was a beautiful, spirit-filled surprise!” *A former pastor of Elim Lutheran, Ogden, UT*

After *the pastor and leaders of an ELCA congregation in Ft. Collins, CO* were introduced to the “Generosity,” approach, their stewardship team decided to jump in with both feet, renaming themselves the “Generosity Team.” They asked people to share their own generosity stories. The Pastor reported, “The congregation responded with over 40% of pledging households increasing their commitment.”

**Judicatory:** *Rev. Laurie Skow-Anderson, Bishop of the NW Synod of WI and former Director for Evangelical Mission* writes: “We have had a lot of fun working with The Generosity Project and approach. We have made ideas from the initial TGP Pilot our own. Here are some of the things we have done and continue to do in the NW Synod of WI - ELCA: The most profound effect has been on our language. We are talking more and more about generosity and gratitude. This is so positive and helpful to me and I think to our congregations as well.”

“Our Cross-Gen team designed a Cross-Gen Care of Creation class that they are taking on the road and leading in at least seven congregations this fall and winter. Our Campus

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<sup>17</sup> Participants’ experience based on The Generosity Project – an expression of the ELCA Macedonia Initiative.

Minister will work with college students to lead these cross gen events in congregations. How cool is that!"

"A retired Pastor and I are leading Wednesday night classes for clusters of congregations called, "Generosity across the Generations." Last year we had over 200 participants, between the ages of 0 and 90, at seven events. We create the Circle of Generations, teach a little generation theory, have cross-gen table conversations about generosity, Bible study about tithing, and pig based Share Save Spend® activity."

Equipping households to daily respond to God's extravagant generosity is a year round opportunity. Equipping individuals of every age and stage of life to live as grateful stewards and committed, followers of Jesus striving for justice and peace in all the earth, offers endless, creative possibilities. May we claim the gifts the generations and households in our midst already possess, as we develop steward leaders and devoted students who follow Jesus.

### Questions to Ponder

What are further thoughts, questions and "Yes, buts?" What might we imagine? As we ponder the following questions and engage in conversation, may we view one another through God's eyes — in a "cross†formed," grace-filled, generous way of life that goes beyond any boundary of age or stage and is shared with abundant joy from our hearts and households into all the world.

- How has my life experience, culture, and/or generational cohort shaped my understanding and approach to money? My ownership and accumulation of "things."
- What is the narrative or story I tell myself that influences the majority of my purchasing decisions? The "narrative" in my family of origin? In my current household?
- When have I, or my family, needed financial assistance? Depended upon and been the recipients of other's generosity? In what form was that generosity offered (money, time, talent, relationships, leadership, networking, empowerment, accompaniment...?)
- How have God's Stories of generosity shaped my life or that of my congregation?
- Name all the things I, or the members of my household "practice."
- How do I, or others in my household and extended family "practice" generosity?
- How have I engaged my extended family and generations in conversations about generosity?
- What is a positive memory and experience of a cross†generational gathering and interaction?
- How is my household a part of the process of exchanging resources that is essential to sustaining the larger community?
- When in the life of my faith community do all ages and generations worship, study, eat, pray, sing, serve, talk, cry, and laugh together?

- How does my congregation equip households for sound financial practices and as centers for practicing generosity?
- Where do I witness the work of the Holy Spirit in my congregation? My household?

### Next Steps

The concepts summarized in this paper provide the foundation and fundamentals for **The Generosity Project** (TGP). The purpose is to grow faithful, steward leaders.

The Generosity Project is a resource for ministry available as an **Introductory Workshop** and a six-session curriculum, **The Generosity Project: 5G™** that includes worship and take-home activities. The goal is to connect and equip all ages and generations as year-round steward leaders and disciples, at home and away from home. The curriculum will be available through the ELCA early Fall 2018.

For additional information about the curriculum, to host a Generosity Project: Introductory Workshop, or to discuss next steps, please contact:

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