

Dear Spirit of Grace Congregation & Friends,

November 2017

Does the logo to the right look familiar? If you have one of the Thrivent t-shirts, then you have seen and probably worn this logo. Coincidentally, this is also the theme of the 2017 Generous Giving focus that begins this coming *All Saints* weekend. For the next three weeks, our congregation will look at what it means to be called by God to “Live Generously.”



It's truly exciting to see how spiritual growth empowers generosity and increased giving when we know in our hearts and minds, *and* when we get that all our giving is in response to God's amazing grace first given to us!

Spirit of Grace Congregation & friends really responded with great generosity earlier this year; taking spiritual and financial Leaps of Faith through study, prayer and providing giving commitments over a three year period to take care of each of God's houses for the congregation & the community. The new roof at the North Campus is a great tangible example of Leap of Faith dollars put into action and so is the \$25,000 directed to the 2017 Ministry Spending Plan which already made a difference in Aug, Sept & October.



Gap Update: The financial gap between income and expenses is the lowest it has ever been for SoG! – such significant progress as this is the result of increased faith, increased generosity, financial transparency and making the best management decisions with every dollar entrusted to SoG to be Christ's People in Motion by Connecting, Serving and Growing! The gap in 2017 hovers around \$47,000.

Did you know that most congregations balance their income and expenses? While the financial gap at SoG is the lowest it's ever been, it is not sustainable; *there isn't supposed to be a gap*. How great it will be to announce when the gap is gone and financial balance, even growth, is underway! There are congregations where generous giving even exceeds the ministry spending plan – that's where we want to be; then as a congregation together we are truly making responsive giving to God the priority in our lives.

If you are considering making an increase in your giving – either by stepping up 1% or 2% or making a significant contribution to get SoG toward financial balance and beyond, please prayerfully consider making that faith commitment this coming November. On the weekend of Nov 18/19, together in worship, we will present our estimates of giving, or commitments of giving, in support of the vision and ministry to which we are called at Spirit of Grace Congregation.

Communications over these upcoming weeks will provide articles from the Giving Magazine about generosity for your own reading, prayer and spiritual growth as well as identifying ministry vision ahead for 2018!

We are blessed to be a blessing!

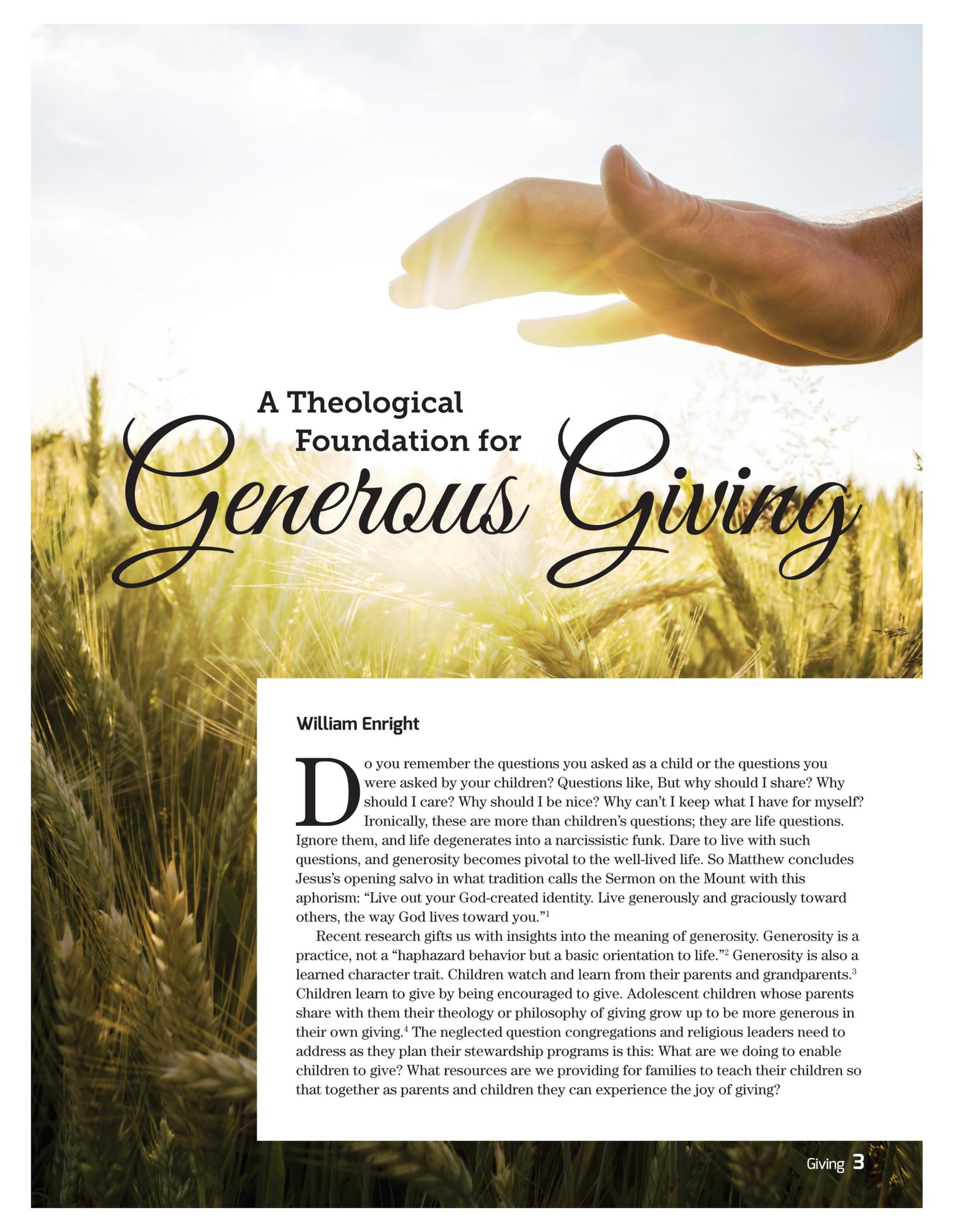
Live Generously,

SoG 2017 Stewardship Team,

Sharon Burke, Stephen Minister & Volunteer Project Coordinator

Elaine Waldrup, Council

Pr. Rita Gardner Tweed, Lead Pastor, Spirit of Grace

A hand reaching out over a field of golden wheat under a bright sky.

A Theological Foundation for *Generous Giving*

William Enright

Do you remember the questions you asked as a child or the questions you were asked by your children? Questions like, But why should I share? Why should I care? Why should I be nice? Why can't I keep what I have for myself? Ironically, these are more than children's questions; they are life questions. Ignore them, and life degenerates into a narcissistic funk. Dare to live with such questions, and generosity becomes pivotal to the well-lived life. So Matthew concludes Jesus's opening salvo in what tradition calls the Sermon on the Mount with this aphorism: "Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you."¹

Recent research gifts us with insights into the meaning of generosity. Generosity is a practice, not a "haphazard behavior but a basic orientation to life."² Generosity is also a learned character trait. Children watch and learn from their parents and grandparents.³ Children learn to give by being encouraged to give. Adolescent children whose parents share with them their theology or philosophy of giving grow up to be more generous in their own giving.⁴ The neglected question congregations and religious leaders need to address as they plan their stewardship programs is this: What are we doing to enable children to give? What resources are we providing for families to teach their children so that together as parents and children they can experience the joy of giving?



In giving generously we become a part of something bigger than ourselves.

In the New Testament, two different words are used to capture the idea of generosity. In Galatians and Ephesians, Paul talks about generosity as a virtue, a habit of the heart, and a character trait.⁵ In Corinthians II when Paul is raising money to meet the needs of the persecuted members of the Mother Church in Jerusalem, he uses another word to capture the essence of generosity as a practice of giving.⁶ Generosity as both virtue and practice marries attitude to action.

There is more to generosity than money. As a virtue and a practice, generosity has to do with the way we use our skills and the manner in which we share ideas, practice hospitality, offer encouragement, make connections, and use our time to address the needs of others. Generosity is reflected in the quality of our relationships and the way we engage with people via acts of caring and compassion. As a lifestyle, generosity is measured by our giving and volunteering as well as the manner in which we nurture relationships and live out our neighborliness. Research now substantiates what the Bible teaches concerning generosity: “Generosity is a sociological fact; in giving we receive and flourish, in grasping we lose!”⁷ To put it somewhat crudely, it is in our own self-interest to learn and practice generosity.

Theologically, generosity begins by asking two

questions: Who is God? and Who am I? God is good. God is gracious and generous in love. God is the supreme giver. We humans have been created in God’s image—*imago Dei*—to live life in conversation with God as we serve as God’s stand-ins and the caretakers of God’s creation.

My Jewish friends use the word *tikkunolam*—to mend or repair the world—to capture this cocreative aspect of creation. It reflects the conviction that while God created a good world, good things go awry; things rust and break, leaving the world in constant need of repair. In our giving we partner with God in the healing and redemption of a frayed and broken world and the flourishing of humanity. What are we to do with the possessions with which we have been blessed? We use them to repair a broken and hurting world.

The two questions—who is God? and who am I?—frame the way I have come to see my role in God’s world. I did not create myself; neither can I say that I have earned and deserve all that I possess. Everything I have is the gift of a generous God that comes to me as lavish grace birthing within me a sense of gratitude. How, in turn, do I express my gratitude? By living generously, by offering hospitality to all, by setting injustices right and by caring for the hurting of the world.



In giving generously we become part of something bigger than ourselves. Matthew 25 has been described as “the most important text for the early church.”⁸ In this parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus tells us that it is in our giving and caring for the hungry, hurting, and homeless that God shows up and we meet Christ. The parable suggests that indeed there is something sacramental about giving and being generous. In our giving we receive grace, and via our giving God’s grace changes lives, wrongs are set right, and hope is born. It was this notion that there is something sacramental or eucharistic about giving that transformed the understanding of charity and philanthropy in the later Greco-Roman period from its focus on public buildings, parks, and statues to loving care for the poor, called alms. Historian Peter Brown writes: “By bringing God Himself into human society in the form of a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation added dramatic power to the notion [that in giving generously] we find ourselves standing in the Presence of God.”⁹

When people of faith catch a glimpse of what happens because of their generosity, they don’t give just to give. They give because they have discovered that there is something sacramental about giving. In our giving heaven meets earth, earth meets heaven, and God shows up! 🙏

- ¹ Matt 5:49 (The Message).
- ² Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson, *The Paradox of Generosity*.
- ³ *Next Gen Donors: Shaping the Future of Philanthropy* 2013.
- ⁴ Steinberg and Wilhelm, “Giving: The Next Generation—Parental Effects on Donation,” 2003.
- ⁵ Gal 5:22; Eph 4:32.
- ⁶ 2 Cor 8-9.
- ⁷ Smith and Davidson, p. 224.
- ⁸ Gary Anderson, *Charity*, p. 6.
- ⁹ Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, p. 92. Also see *Through the Eye of a Needle*.

Dr. William Enright is the Founding Karen Lake Buttrey Director Emeritus of Lake Institute on Faith & Giving. He is a former Senior Pastor of Second Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis, Indiana. Dr. Enright is a director of Lilly Endowment Inc. as well as a trustee of Hanover College. He has also been an Advisor for the National Cathedral Association of the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. He has authored several books, the latest being *Channel Markers*, and lectured at numerous colleges, universities and theological institutions as well as for business associations such as The Young Presidents and World Presidents organizations.