



GENEROSITY WEEK



Living Faith: Celebrating Our Legacy



Introduction

Generosity is inextricably linked with living out the Christian faith. Generosity at its core is in the nature of God, and we see this weaved throughout the Bible in many guises. Generosity is not just about giving financially, although that does form a part of generosity when exploring stewardship and material possessions. **The link between living out the Christian faith means exploring what it means to live a generous life** – though hospitality, time, attentiveness, and many other attributes. It's about our state of heart, and the relationship we have between material and spiritual things.

With generosity being at the heart of our faith, it can be shown through everyday acts of kindness that make a huge difference to peoples' lives and is a hallmark of our faith in action. Every day we see generosity in our churches and Christian communities, reflecting the generous God we believe in.

This guide helps us reflect on the legacy we have received from past generations. We are invited to celebrate the rich culture we have inherited in our church buildings as places of worship and welcome, our beautiful stained glass and architecture, music which raises our hearts heavenwards, and the story of our churches in serving the communities in which we are set.

As you make your way through this booklet, we encourage you to take time in prayer together, gaining a deeper understanding of God's generosity towards us and how we can live more generously in our daily lives, both personally and within our church communities. We hope that as we journey together in celebrating generosity, we encourage one another to be a living church today, and gift a glorious inheritance for the church of the future.

April 2021



Opening Prayers

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ.

Let us bring our gifts to the Lord
that they may be used for his glory.

May the Spirit of God fill our hearts
as we come to meet him in this place.

Silence is kept.

Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Matthew 6.19-21

Loving God,
through the expression of grace
your Son came not to be served but to serve.
Nurture in us generous hearts,
that, in word and action,
your glory may be revealed;
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

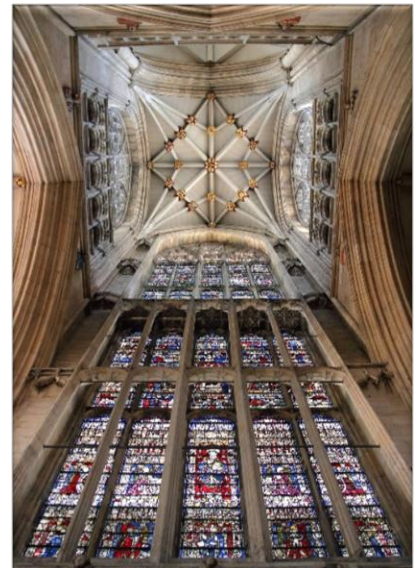


Beginnings

We all love stories – we all have stories to tell, and so do our churches. In some cases for hundreds of years, our churches have been at the heart of communities, offering a place of welcome and hospitality, a spiritual home and a space of prayer, which together help to tell our church's story. All these have been cared for by past generations, and passed onto us as a gift.

As we begin this session, take a tour around the church building, to learn more about it and how it was created. As you walk around, you might like to think and talk about some of the following questions.

- What do we know of how our church was founded? What have been the significant changes and developments in the church since it was first built, and how were they funded?
- What do you value about your church's story? Why do you value those things?
- Are there stories of former members of the community that make up your church's history?



In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5.16



Time of Reflection

Bible Reading

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

'See, I am laying in Zion a stone,

 a cornerstone chosen and precious;

and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

'The stone that the builders rejected

 has become the very head of the corner',

and

'A stone that makes them stumble,

 and a rock that makes them fall.'

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Once you were not a people,

 but now you are God's people:



The stories we share about our church are invaluable. They teach us so much about the things we value, the history which shapes us, and the ways that bring us together as a community. In most cases, this prompts us to reflect on things that we have inherited – material and spiritual things that have been cared for and passed from generation to generation. We tend to think of this as a legacy – a legacy that we both receive and give, and not just something we do at the end of our lives, but something we do every day as we care for the things that we value.

The material things we inherit in many of our churches tend to be fairly prominent. Many of our churches are steeped in history, with beautiful stained glass and architecture, and music that raises our hearts heavenwards. Our buildings are also invaluable, often sitting at the heart of our communities, standing as a place of worship, a place of quiet and solace, a place for prayer and contemplation and a space in which to offer hospitality and welcome. We value and cherish these because they speak of our faith; they are places where generations of people have encountered God, where they have prayed to God, worshipped God, where God has been found. That's what we benefit from, and what we are called to pass on.

Because these material things that we inherit speak of our faith, they also help to shape our identity. Our faith is grounded on a relationship between God, people and place – and so places matter. They are literally a sacred place in the local community, a place where God is found, and a space which strengthens our sense of community, and brings us together.

Beyond the material, we also receive a spiritual legacy. Music, stones and stained glass mean little unless the faith that inspired their creation is passed on as well. The concept of celebrating our legacy extends to how we live out our faith in the world today, so that there will be a faith to pass on. We are invited to celebrate the faith, attitudes and knowledge that have been passed onto us, as well as traditions that reveal God's love and heart for his people. We can invite everyone to experience God's love through the way we share the inheritance of faith, and communicate a shared need for community.

The way we celebrate and live out our faith is explained in the First Letter of Peter – that, as God's people we are living stones which can be built into a building which gives thanksgiving and praise to God. A living church is built on these living stones, revealing the generosity of God in the way we use the resources we've been given to bless others. Without living stones there can be no living church, just a building.



It is our faith, our ministry, that makes us living stones and so makes a living church where God is at work

The notion of being blessed in order to be a blessing resonates beautifully with how we have inherited a legacy from those before us through our faith, our wonderful church buildings, music, architecture – all those things that we value and speak of our faith. Those are all blessings for which our predecessors cared for, ensuring that their blessings were passed onto us. As we receive that legacy, we also receive the invitation to become the next generation of responsible stewards, joyfully caring for all those material and spiritual things which we can then use to bless others. We've been handed on this treasure and inheritance, a gift to us, a gift which we are called to give thanks for, celebrate, and in turn, hand on.

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you,
and make your name great, so that you will be a
blessing.

The church, like the world it serves, is not just for us now – it's a gift for the future both spiritually and materially. It's important for us all to consider how we care for and share this heritage with those who come after us. This is a question for all of us – we believe our local church is a treasure, and we treasure it because it speaks of our faith, so we have to carefully steward our resources to care for it.

Conversation

To pass on a legacy is to pass on the faith of the church and the faith that is within us, receiving a treasured place from previous generations, and handing it on to the next. The church, like the world it serves, is not just for us now – we are given the privilege of being responsible for a sacred place where God has been found, and which we then hand on to others.

At the beginning we talked about our church's story.

- Giving begins with God because he has given us his Son. By understanding and living consciously in God's story, we find that our own personal stories gain their greatest significance.
 - Our faith starts with a gift – God gave us his son. How do we give in response? How do we motivate others to give to his church?
- How do you play a part in your church's story? How might you encourage others to share in that sense of belonging?
- How do material things – such as the church building, architecture and stained glass – influence or shape your faith? How does your church building make people feel? How can we enable others to feel that too?



'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

Genesis 28.17



Closing Prayers

Come, you that are blessed;
as you serve these who are members of my family,
you serve the Lord our God.

from Matthew 25.34-40

Silence is kept.

Blessed are you, Sovereign God,
our Rock and our salvation;
to you be glory and praise for ever.
You walk with your pilgrim people:
make us to know your ways and teach us your paths.
You sow in our lives the joy that comes from sharing,
and teach us that the gift grows with giving.
You breathe in us gracious hearts,
and reveal to us the delight of outpouring generosity,
so that in your presence we sing;
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

Generous God,
send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory.
Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.



Taking it Further

If you would like to continue thinking about generosity, and how it enables us to serve our communities, we encourage you to look at the Generosity Week's Connected Disciples resource. This is an eight-day series of podcasts, daily reflections and a challenge. You could take this eight-day journey independently, or with others in your church community. You can find the resource here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/generosity-week>



They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

1 Timothy 6.18-19

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