



GENEROSITY WEEK



Living Faith: Giving In Community



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. **As generosity is at the heart of our faith, living out the Christian faith means exploring what it means to live a generous life** – though hospitality, time, attentiveness, and many other attributes. Generosity is not just about giving financially, although that does form a part of generosity when exploring stewardship and material possessions. 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 what it means to be a community, and how generosity helps to shape the way we live out our faith together. We give thanks for the generosity which we both give and receive, and celebrate the way our gifts combined creates a beautiful tapestry of mission.

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.

St Paul says,

'For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.'

Romans 12.4-8

Living God,
you bring us together in community
and teach us to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world.
May our light so shine before others,
in love, in truth, and in action,
that we may glorify your name
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.



Beginnings

As human beings, we have an inherent need for one another. We are social beings, created to be relational, and have a human need to connect with others. As Christians, we believe that God creates us to live in community, and we grow together when we love, share and support one another.

- What does community mean to you?
- What do you value about having a sense of belonging? Are there any stories or experiences about being part of a community that you particularly value?
- How does being a part of a church community help to shape or influence your faith?



For where two or three
are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.

Matthew 18.20



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Time of Reflection

Bible Reading

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints— and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you— so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written,



Being part of community is fundamental to human life. We find community in our friendships, our families, our places of work, the places we live, and in our churches. Living in community with others helps to shape our identity, and as a community of God we find our identity in how we live out our faith together.

As Christians, we believe that God is by nature a God who is generous – in fact, it's possible to read the entire Bible as a narrative of generosity. We also believe that God is a relational God, both within the Trinity – a community of love within itself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and with us as human beings. God calls people together and gifts people to one another, offering the very essence of relationship as a gift. Community itself is a gift that we receive, being thankful to be part of a team with a common vision and purpose, and in turn offer as we generously live alongside each other.

So what does a community of God look like? Any community, of faith or none, is often grounded in love. Being a community of God is about being a community of love, and about how we express and share that love with one another through acts of generosity. In doing so, we each take it in turns to be both giver and receiver, and grow together in sharing the resources which we each possess. We learn to see God's nature in the face of others, we are called to grow in the likeness of Christ in our life together in community, and reflect his character in the world.

St Paul talks about this community of God in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, writing about the churches in Macedonia who expertly model this relational generosity. In giving to fellow churches, they were expressing their love and their faith by responding to those in need, generously supporting one another and putting their trust in God. They put their trust in God by giving beyond their means, and importantly they saw this act as a joy and a privilege – the churches in Macedonia kept their eyes on the end point, of what their resources would enable in giving them away, and this inspired their generosity as their heart and faith motivated them. Giving as a whole community meant that they could make a lasting change. The same can be said about our churches today. As communities, we are brought together in the way we express our love to one another, but also in what we are motivated to be and do together. Communities of God are grounded in the same things that God cares about, and should be known by the way that we approach and address these things as well – through community cafés, activities that combat



loneliness, hosting Foodbank centres, helping the homeless, community action, visiting those who are ill or in hospital, and many other things besides.

With God, our purpose and priorities are the same, and this propels us into a collective response in generosity to the world – most particularly in the local communities in which we are set. We are gathered together with a common goal of responding to human need.

Generosity itself is a very joyful activity, as it expresses love and brings hope. When we think about the needs of our local community, often it's our generosity combined that enables us to make a difference. We can be inspired by those who are extravagantly generous, but we can be equally inspired by those who give in simplicity. We all have something to give, and there is beauty in those simple acts which speak volumes beyond the act itself, because the act has come from the heart. It's these acts of simplicity which help us to build a generous life, and inspire and encourage others to do the same.

Collectively, our generosity allows us to build communities of love. We take time to learn how to share in God's love by giving it away to others, and in doing so we reach out in generosity and in love to the world around us.

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.



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Conversation

As we reflect on the communities in which we are set, and the way we collectively reflect the generous nature of God, understanding our own place can be explored through faith, hope and love.

Faith

As Christians, our faith and trust are rooted in God, and grows in prayer and community. Who has influenced your faith, and why? Has someone else's generosity towards you inspired or shaped your faith? How could we encourage one another to grow in generosity towards each other and to those in our community?

Hope

Parish churches are often the most active sources of community and charity in their local area – serving others in creative ways such as Foodbanks, Messy Churches and outreach to combat isolation and loneliness. How can we best use our churches and resources to serve and bring hope to our local community?



Love

As a response of faith and a source of hope, our generosity is an outpouring of love. In what ways are we showing God's love in our community? Is God nudging us to share his love in new ways?



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,
generous and true,
to you be glory and praise for ever.
From you comes every generous act of giving,
every good and perfect gift;
you call us into community
to share your gifts with reverence and grace.
In fulfilment of your promise
you give us birth by the word of truth,
that as the first fruits of your new creation
we may glorify you for ever:
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>



Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

1 Peter 3.8

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