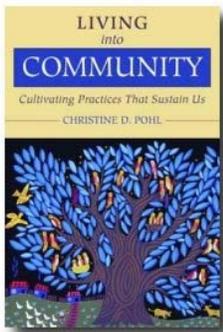


INSIGHTS ON FAITH & GIVING

Living into Community

Christine Pohl looks at four specific Christian practices: gratitude, promise-keeping, truth-telling, and hospitality



Lake Institute on Faith & Giving MISSION: to foster a greater understanding of the ways in which faith both inspires and promotes giving by providing knowledge, education, and training.

The Center on Philanthropy MISSION: to increase the understanding of philanthropy and improve its practice worldwide.

Happy Thanksgiving
from all of us at
The Lake Institute on Faith & Giving



GENEROSITY: The Birth Child of Gratitude

As I look at research data on charitable giving and listen to the stories told by religious leaders, it strikes me that charitable giving in America while voluntary is nonetheless essentially obligatory and transactional. For example, many view their giving to their religious congregations to be little more than the payment of membership dues or fees. Likewise, we perceive our giving to community service and arts organizations to be an act of good citizenship or a tip to be placed in the hat for services rendered or enjoyed. The upshot is that our charitable giving is minimal. For the past sixty years the charitable giving needle has been stuck at two percent of household income. Theologian Sondra Wheeler writes, "The Christian [religious] life cannot have obligation as its deepest root. Instead, the life of faith is entirely responsive, springing from gratitude rather than duty."¹

And I wonder whatever happened to gratitude? Decades ago, before Google and the Internet, the Readers Guide was one window to a literature review. One year, with Thanksgiving just around the corner, I decided to see what types of articles had been written and published on Thanksgiving as a witness to gratitude. When it came to Thanksgiving nearly everything written had to do with table decorations, turkey preparation and the Pilgrims first thanksgiving. As for gratitude, there were ten times more references to the band The Grateful Dead than to the virtue of gratitude.

Where does gratitude begin? In her book *Living Into Community*, Christine Pohl observes that "gratitude begins with paying attention, with noticing the goodness, beauty and grace around us." Pohl offers other pearls relative to the embrace of gratitude as a way of life. She writes, "Communities suffocate when we fail to express how grateful we are for the goodness we find there." Our capacity for gratitude is not connected with an abundance of resources but rather with a capacity to notice what it is that we do have.

- Gratitude is an uncomfortable reminder that we need other people and that our lives are dependent on their gifts and generosity.
- Gratitude and wonder are squeezed out when our lives are packed full with busyness and responsibilities.²

As many congregations begin planning for their annual fundraising or stewardship programs ponder this: instead of begging for money invite members of your community to tell stories - give testimony - flagging the good things and caring relationships that make their religious life rewarding and unique. Generosity flourishes when faith communities intentionally nurture the awe of gratitude.

Insights of Dr. Bill Enright

Contact Us

[Bill Enright](#)

[1] Sondra Wheeler, "Freely Give" in *Religious Giving: For Love of God*, Indiana University press, 2010.
[2] Pohl, C. (2012). *Living Into Community*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 51-55.

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2006-2011 Congregational Economic Impact Study

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[Webinar featuring Dr. William Enright, Director of Lake Institute](#)

"Growing Generous Givers for a New Era"

Wednesday, November 28th at 2:00pm (EST)

A 90-minute, live Presbyterian Outlook Webinar. Join us as one of the world's leading stewardship experts explores the year-round rhythms and practices that grow and nurture generous givers. Take-aways: (1) Learn critical insights into the altered landscape of faith-based giving. (2) Learn to personalize your story and say "Thank you." (3) Explore practical tips and tools for putting generosity into practice.

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