



THE JOY OF

“There is more
happiness in
giving than
in receiving.”

Acts 20:35



GENEROSITY



Generous lives.
Joyful community.
God's work together.



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

THE JOY OF GENEROSITY

Generous lives.
Joyful community.
God's work together.

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“There is more
happiness in giving
than in receiving.”

— Acts 20:35 GNT

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PROGRAM MATERIALS



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INTRODUCTION TO “THE JOY OF GENEROSITY”

“The Joy of Generosity” is designed to be a complete annual response program. Community members will learn from God’s word, be encouraged to think about their own giving as a joyful experience, celebrate their congregation and its ministry to the world, and be invited to increase their giving to the congregation by 1% of their household income.

Much of the program is ready to use. Other parts of the program are customizable so you can share specific facts and stories about your congregation and its ministry.

There is no such thing as a “one size fits all” program. Each congregation is unique and has its own culture and ways of doing things. If something in the program feels like a mismatch for your congregation, change it for a better fit. You can choose not to use parts of the program, though we encourage you not to skip too much. Often, doing less will not get your appeal where you want it to go.

A quick word about vocabulary: the authors have discussed what to call those people who participate in the congregation’s life. “Members of the congregation” has long been used, but more congregations now have active participants who aren’t members. “Congregants” is commonly used in some denominations but doesn’t seem to have caught on in the ELCA. Words from the fundraising world, such as “donors,” don’t seem satisfactory. We have decided to use “members of the community” or “community members.” This may not be perfect, but we consider it the best option.

“The Joy of Generosity” is presented to you in two sections.

SECTION 1, “PLANNING MATERIALS,”

contains the materials you will use before the program begins. The section contains:

- a. Suggestions for how to use “The Joy of Generosity.”
- b. Suggestions for when to schedule the program.
- c. A timeline that can be customized to your specific dates.
- d. Encouragement to spend a few weeks before the program telling stories in worship about your congregation’s ministry.
- e. Ideas for how to use this program with online worshipers.
- f. An announcement of the program, to be sent to community members as either a postal letter or an article in your regular newsletter.

SECTION 2, “PROGRAM MATERIALS,”

consists of the materials for each week of the program. **Materials for weeks one, two and three consist of:**

- a. Biblical and theological reflections for leaders and preachers, including sermon suggestions. We expect and strongly encourage you to align your sermons with the weekly themes.
- b. An introduction to each week of the program, to be sent to community members before that weekend by either email or postal letter. The

introduction should also be posted on the congregation’s social media pages, with a link to the content on the congregation’s website.

- c. A bulletin insert for use in worship.
- d. Ideas and instructions for talking about the program in worship.
- e. A projection slide to introduce worshipers to the weekly theme.

During Week Four, community members will be invited to increase their giving to the congregation by 1% of their household income. There are materials for congregations asking community members to complete a commitment card and for congregations not using such cards. We strongly encourage you to use commitment cards, which contribute to increased giving. The materials consist of:

- a. A letter to be sent to community members, with a table to help them determine 1% of their household income. For congregations that choose to use commitment cards, there is a suggested card; we encourage you to include a return envelope.
- b. A script for worship, to explain the materials sent and how to use the 1% increase sheet.

Section 2 concludes with instructions for thanking and following up with community members:

- a. A thank-you letter, to be sent to those who return a commitment card.
- b. Suggestions for reporting the results of the program to members.
- c. Suggestions for follow-up activities.

SECTION 1

PLANNING MATERIALS



HOW TO USE “THE JOY OF GENEROSITY”

Visit elca.org/thejoyofgenerosity to download the customizable materials.

Initial planning:

1. Print out this document, place it in a three-ring binder and read the entire text.
2. “Telling Your Congregation’s Stories Before the Program Begins,” below, invites you to spend the six weeks before the program sharing stories of your congregation’s ministries in one-minute talks during worship. Using this as your guide, select the six ministries you will feature and plan how you will tell your stories.
3. Once you have confirmed the dates for your program, use “Develop a Timeline,” below, to plan it in detail. When completed, this timeline will serve as a “to do” list, with deadlines for each task.
4. To inform your decisions as you plan the program, use “Evaluating Your Congregation’s Ways to Give” and, if your congregation offers online worship, “Using ‘The Joy of Generosity’ With Online Worshipers.”

At least two weeks before Week One, complete the following tasks:

1. Customize “Introducing ‘The Joy of Generosity’ to Your Congregation” and decide whether to distribute it as a letter or publish it as an article in the congregation’s newsletter (or both). A letter sent to the congregation’s mailing list will have far greater readership than a newsletter article. This introduction to the

program should be mailed no later than 10 days before the Sunday of Week One.

2. Recruit the people who will give talks in worship during each of the four weeks. Take care to find people who can speak effectively to each of the themes, using personal stories and examples. Provide each of them with the subsections “For Leaders and Preachers” and “Talk in Worship Ideas” for their week.
3. Customize the subsection “Message Before the Weekend” for weeks one, two and three, using personal stories and examples, and print the text for distribution each week.
4. Create a section for “The Joy of Generosity” on the congregation’s print or online communication tool. All materials will be added to this section as the program unfolds. If possible, post video of the sermon and the talk in worship.

WEEKS ONE, TWO AND THREE

1. On Tuesday or Wednesday, distribute the respective “Message Before the Weekend” text via email, social media and the congregation’s website.
2. If applicable, place the respective bulletin insert in your weekly bulletin.
3. If applicable, use the respective projection slide before worship begins, during the offering and after worship ends.

4. Focus the sermon on the weekly theme, using material from “For Leaders and Preachers.”
5. Present the talk in worship.

During Week Two, prepare the mailing to be used during Week Four. This mailing includes the letter (keyed to whether you’re using a commitment card), the 1% increase giving table and (if applicable) a commitment card and return envelope.

WEEK FOUR

1. On Monday of Week Four, post the congregation mailing. If bulk mail is delayed in your community, post the mailing earlier, but try to time this so that the mailing arrives in mailboxes after Week Three.
2. During Week Four worship, deliver the appropriate talk in worship, depending on whether you use commitment cards. Make available any unaddressed envelopes from the week’s mailing to community members who may not have received one.

REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP

1. See “After the Ask,” below, for guidance on how to thank those who return a commitment card, how to report results to the congregation and how to follow up with those who usually return a commitment card but have not yet done so.
2. Send thank-you letters to those who have done extra work during “The Joy of Generosity”:
 - a. Those who gave talks in worship.
 - b. Church staff.
 - c. Volunteers who helped with mailings.

3. Don’t skip this section!

WHEN TO CONDUCT “THE JOY OF GENEROSITY”

It is important to have a careful conversation about when to present “The Joy of Generosity.” The pastor and members of the committee who will be leading the program should be involved in this conversation, and the church council should be made aware of the plan.

If you have a history of annual stewardship response programs, think about when you have presented programs in recent years and how well this time of year has worked. If you have a pattern in place that has worked well, stick with that.

If having a stewardship emphasis is new for you, or if there have been problems with past dates, consider the following:

1. What is the congregation’s fiscal year? Completing the response program at least six to eight weeks before the beginning of the new fiscal year will allow the council to incorporate the giving pledges of community members as it plans the following year’s budget.
2. Are there big events in the congregation or community that should be avoided? “The Joy of Generosity” will be a major focus during worship for four weekends. Scheduling these four weekends during another major event would be a mistake.
3. What are past worship-attendance patterns? In some parts of the country, many retired people “fly south” to avoid the worst of winter.

Many families with children travel during school breaks. If this is true for your congregation, such times should be avoided.

4. Traditionally, fall is “stewardship time” for many congregations. If this is your pattern, make sure you start “The Joy of Generosity” late enough in the fall that you aren’t competing with your other fall programming. It is equally important to complete the program before Thanksgiving weekend. Follow-up efforts can continue into December, but the holiday season is not an ideal time to conduct this program.

DEVELOP A TIMELINE

INITIAL PLANNING

DATE

- ☐ Print out and read this document.
- ☐ Decide when to conduct the program.
- ☐ Develop a plan for “Telling Your Congregation’s Stories Before the Program Begins.”
- ☐ Consult “Evaluating Your Congregation’s Ways to Give” and “Using ‘The Joy of Generosity’ With Online Worshipers.”

At least two weeks before Sunday, Week One

DATE

- ☐ Customize and prepare to mail “Introducing ‘The Joy of Generosity.’”
- ☐ Recruit and give materials to all four people who will deliver talks in worship.
- ☐ Edit and prepare all “Message Before the Weekend” materials.
- ☐ Create a place on the congregation’s website for “The Joy of Generosity” materials.

WEEK ONE

DATE

- ☐ On Tuesday or Wednesday, distribute “Message Before the Weekend.”
- ☐ Prepare and include bulletin insert.
- ☐ Prepare and use projection slide.
- ☐ Deliver sermon and talk in worship.

WEEK TWO

DATE

- ☐ On Tuesday or Wednesday, distribute “Message Before the Weekend.”
- ☐ Prepare and include bulletin insert.
- ☐ Prepare and use projection slide.
- ☐ Deliver sermon and talk in worship.
- ☐ Prepare mailing for Week Four.

WEEK THREE

DATE

- ☐ On Tuesday or Wednesday, distribute “Message Before the Weekend.”
- ☐ Prepare and include bulletin insert.
- ☐ Prepare and use projection slide.
- ☐ Deliver sermon and talk in worship.

WEEK FOUR

DATE

- ☐ On Monday (or earlier), post congregation mailing.
- ☐ Deliver talk in worship.

REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP

Continues for three weeks after Week Four

- ☐ Report results to the congregation.
- ☐ Thank those who have submitted financial commitments.
- ☐ Follow up with previous pledgers who have not yet made a commitment.

TELLING YOUR CONGREGATION'S STORIES BEFORE THE PROGRAM BEGINS

Consider telling stories of your congregation's ministry during worship in the weeks before "The Joy of Generosity." These stories should be very brief, about one minute long. Some congregations that have been telling ministry stories for years tell them immediately prior to the offering. The connection is obvious: because of people's offerings, ministry happens. You might try this for four to six weeks before the program begins.

An example of a ministry story might be:

"This past summer, our congregation held vacation Bible school for 54 students. The kids learned about God's love for them, laughed and played together, and generally had a great time. Twelve adults gave their time so VBS could happen. Your offerings made it all possible. Because of those kids, the adult volunteers and you, vacation Bible school was a big part of summer here at *[church name]*. Thank you. The offering will now be received."

If you can project images in your sanctuary, show a photo or two of VBS activities to illustrate the ministry story.

As you consider ministries to highlight, think about those that happen within the congregation (such as VBS), impact your local area (such as a food shelf or housing ministry) or are national or global in scope. Alternate between these three to give a good balance.

Many congregations mistakenly assume that community members know all about the congregation's ministry. Even active

participants may know about the ministries they're involved in but not about others. Taking a minute to tell ministry stories can help worshipers feel more connected with the entirety of the congregation's ministry. Saying "thank you" week after week can remind worshipers that their gifts are appreciated and are making ministry happen.

The weeks leading up to a stewardship program are an important time to help people connect their giving with the congregation's ministry.

If you find telling your congregation's stories in worship to be a positive experience, consider making it a regular part of your congregation's life. Some congregations tell a story every week; other, often smaller, congregations tell a story once per month. Find a frequency that works for you.

EVALUATING YOUR CONGREGATION'S WAYS TO GIVE

A financial response program is a good opportunity to review the various giving methods that the congregation makes available for financially supporting its ministry. We recommend offering a variety of giving mechanisms to lower the bar for participation.

Many congregations find it helpful to provide the following giving mechanisms:



Offering envelopes

Though these are used much less frequently than in the past, offering envelopes should still be available for those who want them. Ongoing monitoring of use of offering envelopes can reduce the expense of sending envelopes to those who no longer use them.



Direct deposit

Many congregations now have more people giving through direct deposit than through offering envelopes. There are various ways for the congregation to set these up. It is important that they are easy for community members to use. It is also important for the congregation to regularly promote the availability of this way of giving.



Online giving

The congregation's website should have an easy-to-use way for people to donate. Additionally, QR codes that link to the online giving site should be utilized and printed clearly in the bulletin, if possible. These are free and easy to create. Giving through the website is often used by visitors in worship and by community members who want to give in support of a special ministry or one-time opportunity.



Donations of stock

The congregation should have a brokerage account for the receipt of stock gifts. Giving appreciated stock can be a tax-advantaged way for some people to give. It is also a way many congregations receive some of their largest gifts.



Giving from IRAs

The congregation should promote giving from IRAs directly to the congregation. These gifts are called qualified charitable distributions and can be given by anyone who is 70 ½ or older. For those 73 and older, these gifts can be applied toward the required minimum distribution. The congregation doesn't have to do anything to implement this way of giving. However, many people aren't aware of this possibility, so promoting it is important.

During the planning phase of "The Joy of Generosity," someone could evaluate each of these ways of giving, making sure that they are in place and easy to use. Then, when Week Four arrives and the congregation asks people to consider their giving, these ways of giving could be suggested to the congregation so people are aware of the options available to them.

USING “THE JOY OF GENEROSITY” WITH ONLINE WORSHIPERS

Some congregations that offer worship online have discovered that their online worshipers outnumber their in-person worshipers. If your congregation offers worship online, consider how you can invite online worshipers to participate in “The Joy of Generosity.”

In most congregations, online worshipers fall into two categories. Some are already connected with the congregation but worship online because they’re ill, they’re out of town, their mobility is restricted, or they enjoy the opportunity to worship in comfy pants occasionally. Others have no history of in-person involvement with the congregation but have connected with it online and find that connection meaningful.

Involving online worshipers in a stewardship program both poses challenges and offers opportunities. Those who fall into the second group above present the clearest challenge. They will experience the program elements that occur during worship, especially the talks and sermons, but may not experience other elements. Experiment with online engagement as it relates to the appeal and see what opportunities emerge.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Dedicate a section of your website to “The Joy of Generosity” and post all parts of the program there, especially the introductory article and the materials for each week. During the program, make a brief announcement in worship directed toward online worshipers, giving them the web address where they can find these materials.
2. If your technology allows, insert a message to online worshipers during worship in Week Four, inviting them to give to the congregation or increase their donation. This could be done during the offering. If you have contact information for these worshipers, use that medium to invite them to increase their percentage.

Online worshipers not otherwise connected to the congregation are unlikely to make a long-term financial commitment but may make a one-time gift. This is a wonderful opportunity to invite them to invest in the congregation’s ministry.

People may surprise you, especially when they see the impact of your ministry through “The Joy of Generosity.” At your invitation, they may commit to a monthly gift. Ensure that your website makes it easy to give either a long-term or a one-time gift, then directly ask online worshipers to make a gift. If you offer text giving, communicate this to those who worship online. As you ask, remember to differentiate between online worshipers who have other connections with the congregation and those who do not.
3. If you make a direct request for giving from online worshipers, consider whether to ask for their general support of the congregation’s ministry or their support of the congregation’s online worship. Some might be more motivated to support the ministry that they experience on a regular basis.

INTRODUCING “THE JOY OF GENEROSITY” TO YOUR CONGREGATION

Approximately two weeks before the first weekend of “The Joy of Generosity,” the following article should be shared to introduce the program to the congregation. It could be sent via mail, or it could be prominently featured in the congregation’s newsletter.

Visit elca.org/thejoyofgenerosity to download the customizable materials.

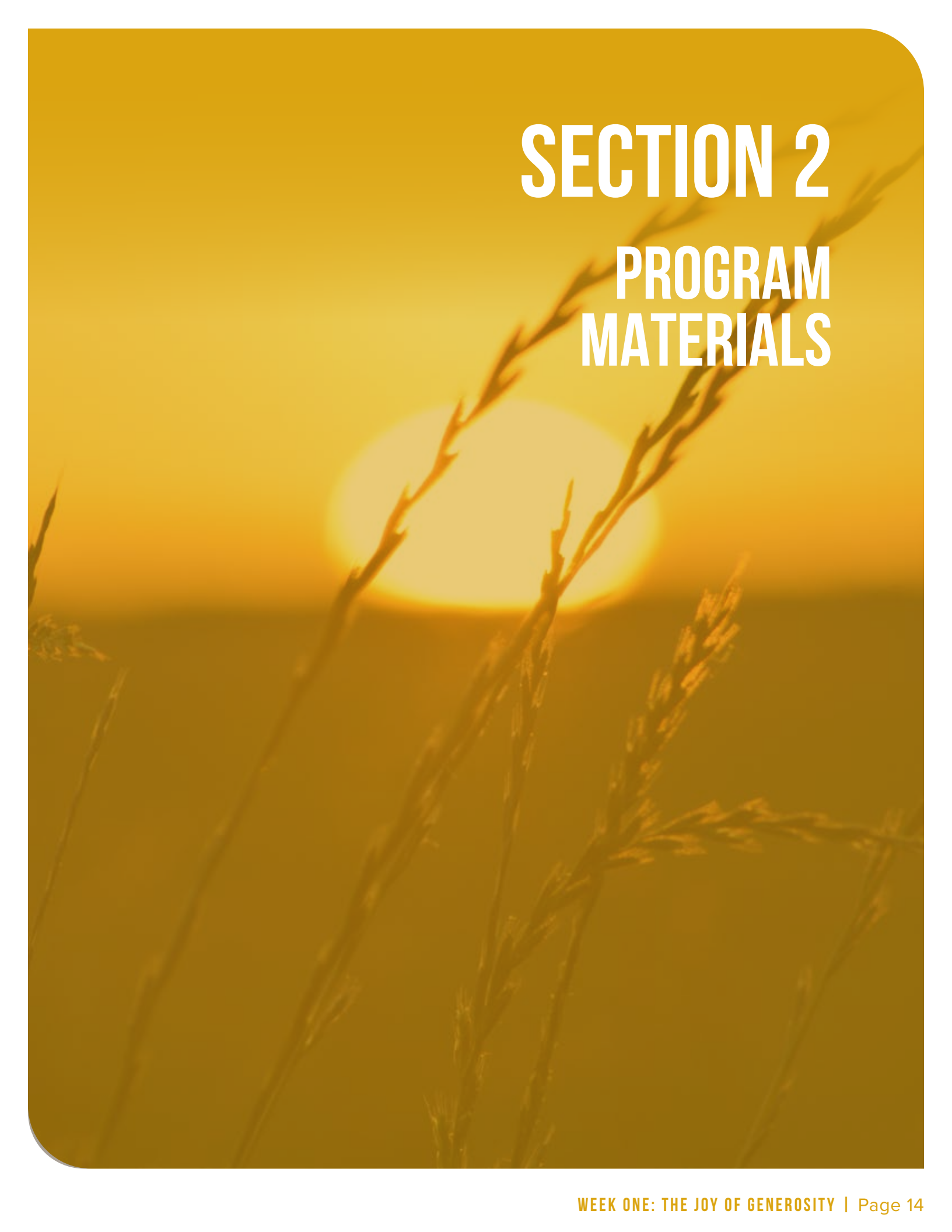
Have you ever done something generous and been surprised at the joy this brought into your life? Perhaps you made a generous financial gift. Perhaps you volunteered many hours of your time to a nonprofit organization. Perhaps you shared your talents in a way that benefited another person. Whatever the specifics, you were surprised by how much joy your generosity brought you.

In this experience, you bore witness to the truth of Jesus’ words recorded in Acts 20:35: “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving” (Good News Translation).

Over the next few weeks, we in the community of **[church name]** are going to consider the joy that generosity brings us. First we will think about the connection between generosity and joy in our personal lives. Then we will celebrate the joy we experience through living in community. Finally, we will reflect on the joy we experience and the joy we give when we as a congregation do God’s work in the world.

As this unfolds, we encourage you to pay extra attention to material that comes your way from the church. Please join in worship, where we will focus on these three aspects of joyful generosity. Finally, we will ask you to reflect on your own life. How have you found generosity and joy to be related?

At the end of these three weeks, we will ask you to consider your giving to **[church name]** for the coming year. You can be confident that your gifts to our congregation will bring joy to others, both inside and outside our community. You can also be confident that your generous gifts will bring you joy. Of that you have Jesus’ promise.



SECTION 2

PROGRAM MATERIALS

WEEK ONE

THE JOY OF GENEROSITY



Generous
lives.

FOR LEADERS AND PREACHERS

The Bible makes a claim that may be striking for those living in a consumerist society: there is more joy to be found in generosity than in accumulating goods. As Paul quotes Jesus in Acts 20:35, “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving” (Good News Translation).

Our world sends a different message: happiness lies in striving for more wealth and accumulating things that more money can buy. Lives can be dedicated to the pursuit of *more* — which, of course, is an endless pursuit. When “more” is the goal, we can never have enough. Like a mouse on an exercise wheel, we run and run, striving to reach a goal that, by definition, is unreachable.

**“Generosity is
what God wants for us,
not from us.”**

—Rev. Michael Binder

The language we use often reveals this constant striving for more. When we ask what a person is worth, we’re really asking how much money they have. When we drive by a large home with a well-manicured lawn and fancy cars in the driveway, we say, “They must be very successful.”

If we allow ourselves to be seduced by this message, then giving money away makes no sense. It moves us in the wrong direction. It leaves less for

ourselves, which directly contradicts the goal of “more.”

The Bible tells a different story, arguing that God provides enough and that pursuing more and more is what makes no sense. Think of the rich man in Luke 12. He would be considered successful by all worldly standards, yet God calls him a fool. Jesus explains, “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15). For followers of Jesus, the endless accumulation of “more” is a fool’s errand.

Because we trust that God has provided and will continue to provide, and because life does not consist of the abundance of possessions but rather of doing God’s work in the world, giving generously is what makes sense. And giving generously is what brings true joy.

As the Rev. Michael Binder, assistant professor at Luther Seminary, rightly notes, “Generosity is what God wants for us, not from us.”

Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson have written a provocative book entitled *The Paradox of Generosity*. The findings of their research can be summed up in this sentence: “Generous people tend to receive back goods that are even more valuable than those they gave: happiness, health, a sense of purpose in life, and personal growth.”¹ In *The Spirituality of Fundraising*, Henri Nouwen phrases it this way: “You won’t become poorer, you will become richer by giving. We can

confidently declare with the Apostle Paul, ‘You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.’ (2 Corinthians 9:11)”²

A striking contrast can be found in the stories of the rich ruler in Luke 18:18-25 and

**“You will be
enriched in
every way for
your great
generosity.”**

(2 Corinthians 9:11)

of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. The rich ruler comes to Jesus asking about inheriting eternal life. Jesus says, “Sell all you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” In the rather tragic words of the next sentence, we learn that “when [the ruler] heard this he became sad; for he was rich.” In Matthew’s telling of the story, the rich ruler “went away grieving, for he had many possessions” (Matthew 19:22).

Zacchaeus is wealthy too, yet Jesus picks him out of the crowd and invites himself to Zacchaeus’ house for dinner. Zacchaeus welcomes him and, sometime before dessert, promises to give away half of his

¹Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson, *The Paradox of Generosity* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 11.

²Henri Nouwen, *The Spirituality of Fundraising* (Estate of Henri J. M. Nouwen), 5.

possessions to the poor. Zacchaeus' story ends with a proclamation of salvation. Joy fills the air. Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving.

Along with Jesus and his followers for centuries, we boldly proclaim that there is a paradox of generosity. Contrary to what we hear every day, striving for more is an endless process that will ultimately end in failure and sadness. Living generously will bring happiness and meaning to life. Living generously will bring that which really is life (1 Timothy 6:18-19).

Consider Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. It recounts Ebenezer Scrooge's

**Living
generously will
bring that which
really is life.**

transformation from stinginess to generosity and from loneliness to happiness.

At the beginning of the story, Scrooge is rich, dedicated to becoming richer, and quite miserable: "Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster."³

If you know Scrooge's story, you know that he was visited by three Christmas ghosts — the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. By the time these visits are complete, Scrooge more clearly sees both his life and what awaits him if he continues his current course. He is changed. He is transformed.

Tight-fisted Scrooge becomes exceedingly generous Scrooge. He hires a boy to buy the largest turkey at the neighborhood market and deliver it to the family of his long-suffering clerk, Bob Cratchit. He must

³Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (Penguin Press, 1984), 31.

⁴*A Christmas Carol*, 133.

The sermon for this first Sunday could focus on the many biblical texts that connect generosity with joy. Acts 20:35, 1 Timothy 6:18-19 or the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 might all be considered. The work of Smith and Davidson in *The Paradox of Generosity* or Henri Nouwen in *The Spirituality of Fundraising* will provide helpful insight into the contrast between society's message, that giving leaves the giver with less, and the biblical message, that the giver actually has more as a result of giving. Ebenezer Scrooge might be an interesting case study.

also hire a cab because the turkey is too large for the lad to carry.

Dickens writes, “The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.”⁴

An amazing transformation — from “solitary as an oyster” to “chuckling till he cried.” That is what generosity can do.

Perhaps another example of this kind of generosity comes to mind, perhaps even from your own life or from your congregation. Feel free to adapt or use other stories as examples (with permission, of course). The more localized the stories, the more they will resonate.

MESSAGE BEFORE THE WEEKEND

WEEK ONE THE JOY OF GENEROSITY



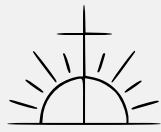
Greetings from **[church name]**. This weekend, we are excited to begin “The Joy of Generosity” in our congregation. As you prepare for worship, we encourage you to think about your own experiences with generosity.

Often we think that giving things away leaves us with less. The bold claim of the Bible is that just the opposite is true: when you give things away, you end up with more. In 2 Corinthians 9:11, Paul writes, “You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.” Sociologists Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson write, “Generous people tend to receive back goods that are even more valuable than those they gave away: happiness, health, a sense of purpose in life, and personal growth.”*

How has your life demonstrated Paul’s promise that we will be enriched through our generosity? How has generous giving of time or money increased your sense of purpose in life?

We will consider these thought-provoking questions in worship this weekend. We hope you will join us.

*Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson, *The Paradox of Generosity* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 11.



NAME LUTHERAN CHURCH LOGO

Have you ever heard someone say, “Give until it hurts”? This advice implies that a truly generous gift should be large enough to have a negative impact on the giver. Though sometimes heard in the church, “Give until it hurts” is not advice from the Bible.

The Bible says, “Give until it feels good.” Jesus says, “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving” (Acts 20:35 Good News Translation). Over and over, the Bible connects generosity with happiness. Stinginess is what leads to hurting.

Think about your own giving of money and time. Think of an instance when you made what, for you, was a very generous gift. How did it feel? Did it hurt, or did it bring a smile to your face? As you think back on that gift, do you still have happy feelings about it?

God invites us to live generously not only because other people have needs that we can help meet but also because God knows what is good for us — and generosity is good for us. Generosity brings us things far more valuable than whatever we have given away.

As the Rev. Michael Binder, assistant professor at Luther Seminary, rightly notes, “Generosity is what God wants for us, not from us.”



WEEK ONE

THE JOY OF GENEROSITY



**“There is more
happiness in
giving than in
receiving.”**

—Acts 20:35 GNT



WEEK ONE | THE JOY OF GENEROSITY
The Joy of Generosity

What motivates you to give?

During the first Sunday of “The Joy of Generosity,” there will be a talk in worship focusing on Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 9:7: “God loves a cheerful giver.” The person delivering this talk should be given the text of both this subsection and “For Leaders and Preachers,” above to help them prepare.

The person giving the talk in worship could focus on how they have experienced giving to be a cheerful act of faith. Two questions might be considered:

1. What motivates you to give? A sense of God’s purpose for your life? An awareness of the needs of others? A combination of these, or something else entirely? Stories from your personal experience will help strengthen your presentation.
2. What have your experiences been when you have given, especially when you have made a gift that you considered quite generous? Have you experienced a connection between generosity and cheerfulness? How did you feel? Again, specific personal stories are best.

There are a few ways this talk in worship could be delivered.



The person giving the talk might simply come to the front of the worship space and speak. In this case, the talk should be well prepared, perhaps even written out in advance. Lack of preparation often leads to a wandering, overlong, ineffective presentation, so practice is key! An effective talk will usually be 2 or 3 minutes long. It might be given as the offering is being collected.



A pastor or other worship leader might “interview” the person giving the talk. In this case, the questions might be some of the above or others agreed upon in advance. The person responding to the questions should know what will be asked, and have well-prepared answers.



If your congregation has video-projection capability, the talk or interview might be recorded in advance and played during worship. This decision should be made based on the congregation’s usual practice and the preference of the person giving the talk or being interviewed.

WEEK TWO THE JOY OF LIVING IN COMMUNITY



Joyful
Community

FOR LEADERS AND PREACHERS

Week Two of “The Joy of Generosity” focuses on the joy of living in a Christian community.

One of Jesus’ most famous directives to his followers is found in John 13:34-35: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This week will provide community members with the opportunity to consider how they are living out this commandment and how financial support given to the congregation is important in making this happen.

**“I give you a new
commandment,
that you love
one another.”**

(John 13:34)

Often congregation leaders find it easy to solicit giving for ministries outside the congregation but awkward to request financial support for the congregation and its ministry. This week, community members will be invited to consider how the congregation strengthens the lives and faith of all those in the community and how financial support of the congregation makes that possible.

There are two significant biblical stories of such support. Each comes at an especially important time in the lives of God’s people. The first is in Exodus 35-36. The Israelites are

wandering in the wilderness. The golden calf has been constructed while Moses is on the mountain, receiving the Ten Commandments. He has come down and, in a fury, smashed the two stone tablets and melted the golden calf. The people experience God's forgiveness, and the covenant is renewed. Moses informs the people of God's commandment that an offering is to be collected for the purpose of making "the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its clasps and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases ... the finely worked vestments for ministering in the holy place, the holy vestments for the priest Aaron, and the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests" (35:11, 19). When you look at all 10 verses, you will see a detailed list.

The people respond to God's command with incredible generosity. They bring offerings of gold, silver and bronze. Fine wood is brought, as is fine linen. Skilled women spin with their hands, and skilled workers begin construction. But there is a problem. The head of construction tells Moses, "The people are bringing much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do" (36:5). Moses then issues this command: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary" (36:7).

Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has written, "This is one of the most amazing and most successful stewardship campaigns in the history of the faith!"⁵

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 32.

Our circumstances are quite different from those of the Israelites. They were living with what they had been able to carry as they escaped from Egypt. We have so much more. God's people today might benefit from asking, "What would it look like if we contributed 'much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do'?" Can you remember a time when your congregation had to say to people, "Stop giving! Enough already!"

The second story is found in Acts 2-4, an account of the very beginning of the church. Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37 tell of members of the early church selling their personal possessions and giving the proceeds to the apostles, and of the money being used to support the community so that all had enough. "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need" (4:34-35).

Those in the early church saw in their new faith in Jesus a call to care for one another. Those who had much eagerly parted with

"This is one of the most successful stewardship campaigns in the history of the faith"

—Walter Brueggemann

their possessions so that those in need could have enough.

Early Christians clung to this practice. Writing approximately two centuries after Christ, the Christian leader Tertullian described the church this way: “We don’t take the gifts and spend them on feasts, drinking-bouts, or fancy restaurants. Instead we use them to support and bury poor people, to supply the needs of boys and girls who have no means and no parents. We support the elderly confined now to their homes. ... Primarily it is the acts of love that are so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. ‘See,’ they say, ‘how they love one another.’”⁶

Taken together, these two biblical stories offer great insight into the call for generous support of the life of the church. One tells of providing for the worship life of the congregation, the other of providing for the needs of the individual members of the community. Both describe a passionate

We have the privilege of worshiping God and caring for the needs of the members of the body of Christ. To do this well, our call is also to respond with a generosity patterned on the generosity of those wandering in the wilderness and those in the first days of the Christian church.

John 13:34-35 might be the text for this week’s sermon. The sermon might include several examples from the congregation’s life, describing how members of the congregation are loving one another. It might also use one or both of the generosity stories to explore ways in which generous giving enables the congregation to more fully live out Jesus’ command.

**“By this everyone
will know that you are
my disciples, if you have
love for one another”**

—John 13:35

generosity. Jesus says, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Our call is to continue this in the church today.

⁶ *The Apology of Tertullian*, chapter 39; tertullian.org.

**MESSAGE
BEFORE THE
WEEKEND**

WEEK TWO — THE JOY OF GENEROSITY

**THE JOY OF LIVING
IN COMMUNITY**



This week our stewardship emphasis will explore “The Joy of Living in Community.” We are called together in joy by a God who has a soft spot for community.

One of Jesus’ most famous commandments to his followers is **“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34).**

Living together as [church name], we strive to keep this commandment. **[At this point, insert several brief examples of ways in which the congregation helps people “love one another.” You could include an example from ministry with children, worship, support of people enduring difficult times, etc.]**

As you prepare for worship this weekend, think about how you have contributed to our congregation’s love for one another and benefited from this love. Think also about the important ways your gifts of money and time have made possible the ministries that help the congregation keep Jesus’ commandment.



NAME LUTHERAN CHURCH LOGO

Why is [church name] important to you?

Can you think of specific reasons?

Is it the worship life of the congregation? Does the preaching feed you and send you into the week challenged and inspired? Does the choir or the congregational singing send you out of the sanctuary happily humming a tune? Is it Holy Communion — meeting Christ at the altar and knowing your sins are forgiven?

Is it the people you meet that are most important? Perhaps you have had times of joy or sorrow that would have been much less significant without the love and care you received from others in the church. Perhaps you have worked side by side with the same people over and over. You know each other. You care for each other. You have had fun, and you have done God's work together.

Do significant life events connect you to the congregation? A wedding, a baptism, a confirmation, a funeral?

Why is **[church name]** important to you? We each have a different "why." What is yours?

Whatever your "why," know that it is possible only because of the generous gifts of time, talent and treasure from you and all the people around you.



WEEK TWO — THE JOY OF GENEROSITY

THE JOY OF LIVING IN COMMUNITY



“

**I give you a new
commandment,
that you love
one another.”**

—John 13:34



WEEK TWO | THE JOY OF GENEROSITY

The Joy of Living in Community

EXPERIENCE OF JOY IN THE CONGREGATION'S LIFE TOGETHER

TALK IN WORSHIP

How and why is the congregation important to you?

During the second Sunday of “The Joy of Generosity,” there will be a talk in worship focusing on the joy of living in a Christian community. Specifically, the person giving the talk is encouraged to talk very personally about why the congregation is important to them.

The person giving this talk in worship should be given the “Week Two Talk in Worship” document and “For Leaders and Preachers,” to help them prepare.

The person giving the talk in worship should focus on their personal experience in the congregation. Two questions might be considered:

1. How is the congregation important to you? What experiences have been especially significant and still connect you to the congregation? Perhaps you value the role the congregation played in the life of your children or the way you were loved and cared for as you went through a difficult time in life. Your own experience is what matters here!
2. How has being a part of the congregation shaped your life? How have you been changed by your involvement? How have your faith and life changed for the better as they were nurtured in the congregation?

There are a few ways this talk in worship could be delivered.



The person giving the talk might simply come to the front of the worship space and speak. In this case, the talk should be well prepared, perhaps even written out in advance. Lack of preparation often leads to a wandering, overlong, ineffective presentation, so practice is key! An effective talk will usually be 2 or 3 minutes long. It might be given as the offering is being collected.



A pastor or other worship leader might “interview” the person giving the talk. In this case, the questions might be some of the above or others agreed upon in advance. The person responding to the questions should know what will be asked, and have well-prepared answers.



If your congregation has video-projection capability, the talk or interview might be recorded in advance and played during worship. This decision should be made based on the congregation’s usual practice and the preference of the person giving the talk or being interviewed.

WEEK THREE THE JOY OF DOING GOD'S WORK TOGETHER



God's work
together

FOR LEADERS AND PREACHERS

Week Three of “The Joy of Generosity” focuses on the joy of doing God’s work together. Jesus’ well-known story of the Good Samaritan might serve to ground this week’s theme.

The Story of the Good Samaritan

The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is not usually considered a stewardship text. It is. In these verses, Jesus extends the definition of neighbor, commends the generous use of time and treasure to help those in need, and commands us to go and care for those whose circumstance we can play a part in improving.

The story begins when a lawyer tests Jesus by asking, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus and the lawyer quickly agree on the answer: love God and neighbor completely. This answer is right out of the Old Testament, from passages that Jesus, the lawyer and any spectators to the conversation would have known well.

As the story unfolds, it becomes obvious that the lawyer should have left well enough alone. However, Luke tells us he wants to justify himself. He wants to draw a circle around himself that he can use to limit who qualifies as his neighbor. He’s trying to find a loophole in the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. Surely it can’t mean everyone!

Attempts to create such a circle did not die with this lawyer. We all face the temptation to define “neighbor” as those who are like us or close to us, and to exclude from our responsibility those who don’t look like us or are farther away. We all try to find loopholes in this radical call to love.

Jesus will have none of this, so he tells the story of a man beaten and robbed, ignored by two religious leaders and then aided, rather extravagantly, by a Samaritan. Jewish people and the people of Samaria did not get along. People from the two groups were forbidden to speak to each other. For a fuller look at this issue, see Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42).

This would be a powerful story even if the beaten man were Samaritan and the helping neighbor were Jewish. The actual story is even more powerful. The priest and the Levite take a pass on the opportunity to fulfill God’s command and put love into action. The Samaritan, who would certainly have fallen outside the lawyer’s circle of compassion, is the one who crosses the dividing line and fulfills God’s command.

Not only does the Samaritan cross the line; he gives generously. First, this is a most inconvenient time; he is headed somewhere, so stopping means a change of plans. Second, those who had beaten and robbed the traveler might still be around, so the Samaritan risks being their next victim. Nevertheless he bandages the man’s wounds, pours oil and wine on them, brings the man to an inn and takes

care of him. At the inn, he stays with the man overnight, continuing to care for him. Whatever is going on in the Samaritan’s life, he puts it on hold. Caring for the beaten man is so important that it causes the Samaritan to rearrange his life.

He gives extravagantly of his time and money. “The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend’” (Luke 10:35). A denarius was a full day’s wage (see Matthew 20:2). The Samaritan gives two days’ wages for the man’s care. He also promises to stop by on his next trip and pay all the additional costs for the man’s care. He signs a blank check. (This insight comes from

**“Take care of him,
and when I come back
I will repay you whatever
more you spend.”**

(Luke 10:35)

presentations by Grace Duddy Pomroy.)

Time and money are two things God entrusts to each of us in finite quantities. The Samaritan gives generously of them both to care for a total stranger whom he isn’t supposed to like.

After telling the story, Jesus asks the lawyer a question very different from the one the lawyer asked at the beginning of the conversation. Then, it was “Who is my

neighbor?” Now, Jesus asks, who “was a neighbor?” Jesus turns “neighbor” from a category into an action. “Neighbor” isn’t a category; it’s how you act toward anyone who needs you.

Who was a neighbor?

In the recent op-ed “Why Minnesota Matters More Than Iran for America’s Future,” *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman writes about the reaction of Minnesotans to Operation Metro Surge, the large-scale immigration enforcement campaign staged by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the previous months: “It was one of the most courageous battles ever fought by American men and women not in uniform. It was led by moms ready to donate breast milk to strangers and dads ready to drive someone else’s kids to school because the parents, terrified of ICE agents, were too afraid to go outdoors.”

Friedman then writes, “They were all propelled by a verb I’d never heard before: ‘neighboring,’ as in, Today I will be neighboring — going out to protect the good people next door or down the block.”⁷ When “neighbor” becomes “neighboring,” when a noun becomes a

verb, then we have grasped some of what Jesus is doing when he turns the question into “Who was a neighbor?”

Henri Nouwen has written, “Those who need money and those who can give money meet on the common ground of God’s love.” We could also say, “Those who have needs and those who can help address those needs meet on the common ground of God’s love.”⁸ Or perhaps “Those who need a neighbor and those who are a neighbor meet on the common ground of God’s love.”

“Those who need money and those who can give money meet on the common ground of God’s love.”

—Henri Nouwen

The way Jesus turns the question to “Who was a neighbor?” is echoed in Fred Rogers’ famous question “Won’t you be my neighbor?” We can well imagine the beaten and robbed man, having watched the priest and Levite walk by, looking up at the Samaritan and pleading, “Won’t you be my neighbor?” Jesus’ question inverts

⁷Thomas Friedman, “Why Minnesota Matters More Than Iran for America’s Future,” *New York Times*, March 15, 2026.

⁸*The Spirituality of Fundraising*, 7

this dynamic. Now it is the Samaritan looking down at the beaten and robbed man and saying to him, “Won’t you be my neighbor?”

Can we imagine our congregations as a gathering of neighbors looking around our global neighborhood, finding people in need and asking, “Won’t you be our neighbor?”

Won’t you be our neighbor?

If you have a particular story of neighboring in your community, use that in this week’s sermon, articles and appeal materials. As long as they’re used with permission, local stories tell local truths better than anything else.

Luke 10:25-37 might be the text for this week’s sermon. Stories might be told of the congregation “neighboring” both in the community and around the world. Where might the congregation look next to people in need and ask, “Won’t you be our neighbor?”

MESSAGE BEFORE THE WEEKEND

WEEK THREE — THE JOY OF GENEROSITY

THE JOY OF DOING GOD'S WORK TOGETHER

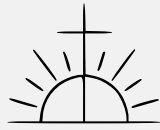


This week, our stewardship emphasis will be “The Joy of Doing God’s Work Together.” Our denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, regularly uses the phrase “God’s work. Our hands.” At **[church name]**, we strive to do God’s work. When our hands do this work together, more of it gets done and we are sustained by each other.

Our congregation is doing God’s work in our community. **[Insert a couple examples of the congregation’s work in the community, the more specific the better.]**

Our congregation is also doing God’s work across the country and around the world. **[Insert an example or two of the congregation’s efforts beyond the local community. ELCA World Hunger could help in providing some specific examples.]**

Think of your own involvement in doing God’s work. How have you joined with others in our congregation to do God’s work in our community? How have you joined with others to do God’s work farther from home?



NAME LUTHERAN CHURCH LOGO

The Good Samaritan was a neighbor to a stranger in need. He gave time and money to care for the victim of a roadside mugging. Can you think of a time when you helped a stranger in need? Be as specific as possible. What were the circumstances? Who was the person? What did you do?

Here at **[church name]**, we strive to work together to help people in need in our community and around the world. We may not know many of them closely, yet still we call them our neighbors. Jesus commends the Good Samaritan by saying he was a neighbor to the man by the side of the road. Being a neighbor is how we do God's work in the world.

Fred Rogers used to sing, "Won't you be my neighbor?" Imagine someone in need — maybe someone in our community, maybe someone around the world. Next, hear yourself say to that person, "Won't you be my neighbor?" Then see yourself being a neighbor to that person through your actions. Finally, see our congregation, together, being their neighbor.



WEEK THREE — THE JOY OF GENEROSITY

THE JOY OF DOING GOD'S WORK TOGETHER



The Joy of Doing God's Work Together



WEEK THREE | THE JOY OF GENEROSITY

The Joy of Doing God's Work Together

EXPERIENCE OF JOY IN THE CONGREGATION'S MINISTRY IN THE WORLD

TALK IN WORSHIP

Why are you involved in the congregation's ministry to others?

During the third Sunday of "The Joy of Generosity," there will be a talk in worship focusing on the joy of doing God's work together. Specifically, the person giving the talk is encouraged to talk very personally about the joy they experience through being part of the congregation's ministry in the community and around the world.

The person delivering this talk in worship should be given the "Week Three Talk in Worship" document and "For Leaders and Preachers," above, to help them prepare.

The person giving the talk might focus on their personal experience in the congregation. Two questions might be considered:

1. Why are you involved in the congregation's ministry to others? What motivates you? In which ministries have you been involved? How have you sensed that you were doing God's work in the world? Have you ever felt that you were being a neighbor to those in need?
2. How has being a part of the congregation's ministry shaped your life? How have you been changed by working with others in the congregation to serve those in need? How has the congregation helped you to better live out your faith?

There are a few ways this talk in worship could be delivered.



The person giving the talk might simply come to the front of the worship space and speak. In this case, the talk should be well prepared, perhaps even written out in advance. Lack of preparation often leads to a wandering, overlong, ineffective presentation, so practice is key! An effective talk will usually be 2 or 3 minutes long. It might be given as the offering is being collected.



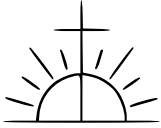
A pastor or other worship leader might "interview" the person giving the talk. In this case, the questions might be some of the above or others agreed upon in advance. The person responding to the questions should know what will be asked, and have well-prepared answers.



If your congregation has video-projection capability, the talk or interview might be recorded in advance and played during worship. This decision should be made based on the congregation's usual practice and the preference of the person giving the talk or being interviewed.

WEEK FOUR
**THE INVITATION
TO GIVE**





NAME LUTHERAN CHURCH/LOGO

COMMITMENT
[NAME]



We are so grateful to have you as a member of our community at **[church's name]**. Here's where we can experience joy in generosity toward our **[2026-2027] Mission Spending Plan**.

DONATION

I pledge to contribute a sum of \$ _____ according to the following payment plan:

☐ One-time contribution \$ _____

☐ Multiple contributions \$ _____

☐ Monthly ☐ Quarterly ☐ Annually ☐ Other _____

PAYMENT INFORMATION

I would like to pay by:

☐ Check attached ☐ Credit card:

Credit card # _____ Type _____

Exp. Date _____ Other _____

DONOR INFORMATION

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

YOUR IMPACT

Your contribution to our **[church's name]** community changes lives. Our work together does so much!

[Here name some of the mission priorities your church supports.]

Thank you so much for finding joy in generosity!

[Church's Name]

[Church Leader's Name]

[Church's Contact Information]



**THE JOY OF
GENEROSITY**

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING THIS REQUEST TO INCREASE YOUR GIVING BY 1% OF YOUR INCOME.



TO USE THIS TABLE:

- 1 Look down the left column to find your approximate household income.
- 2 Look across the row to find the column that matches your giving pattern — weekly, monthly or annually. The number in this column is the amount you are asked to consider for your increase for next year.
- 3 Add this increase to your current level of giving to arrive at next year's requested amount.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME	WEEKLY GIVERS	MONTHLY GIVERS	ANNUAL GIVERS
\$25,000	\$5	\$20	\$250
\$50,000	\$10	\$42	\$500
\$75,000	\$14	\$62	\$750
\$100,000	\$19	\$83	\$1,000
\$125,000	\$24	\$104	\$1,250
\$150,000	\$29	\$125	\$1,500
\$175,000	\$34	\$146	\$1,750
\$200,000	\$38	\$167	\$2,000
\$225,000	\$43	\$187	\$2,250
\$250,000	\$48	\$208	\$2,500
\$275,000	\$53	\$229	\$2,750
\$300,000	\$58	\$250	\$3,000

WEEK FOUR LETTER (With Commitment Card)



[Date]

Dear [name],

You make a difference. We are grateful to share life and faith together with you at [church name].

We invite you to consider how, next year, you can continue to make a difference for good in your own life, in the life of our congregation and in the life of the world. Your generous giving to [church name], combined with the generous giving of others, fuels God's work here and helps to fulfill our mission.

We ask that you prayerfully consider growing your giving to [church name] by 1% of your household income. For most people, this is a reasonable goal. When many of us take this step, it will lead to significant results for our congregation and its ministry.

Included with this letter is a table that makes it easy to calculate a 1% increase.

1. Look down the leftmost column to find your approximate household income.
2. Look across the row to find the column that matches how you give — weekly, monthly or annually. The number in this column is the amount you are asked to consider for your increase for next year.
3. Add this increase to your current level of giving to arrive at next year's requested amount.

There are several ways you can indicate your new giving plan to the congregation.

1. A commitment card and return envelope are enclosed in this mailing. You can complete the card and either mail it to the church office or place it in the offering plate during worship. We will be formally taking up commitments on [date].
2. If you are an electronic giver, you can simply change the amount of your gift by **[Instructions for your congregation; if a portal has been set up online via your website or online community, encourage people to indicate their commitment there]**.

Your past gifts of time and money have made possible all the important ministries of our congregation. We thank you for your prayerful consideration of this request to grow your generous support so that, together, we can do even more in Jesus' name.

Yours in Christ,

[signature]

WEEK FOUR LETTER (Without Commitment Card)



[Date]

Dear [name],

You make a difference. We are grateful to share life and faith together with you at [church name].

We invite you to consider how, next year, you can continue to make a difference for good in your own life, in the life of our congregation and in the life of the world. Your generous giving to [church name], combined with the generous giving of others, fuels God's work here and helps to fulfill our mission.

We ask that you prayerfully consider growing your giving to [church name] by 1% of your household income. For most people, this is a reasonable goal. When many of us take this step, it will lead to significant results for our congregation and its ministry.

Included with this letter is a table that makes it easy to calculate a 1% increase.

1. Look down the leftmost column to find your approximate household income.
2. Look across the row to find the column that matches how you give — weekly, monthly or annually. The number in this column is the amount you are asked to consider for your increase for next year.
3. Add this increase to your current level of giving to arrive at next year's requested amount.

Some people will wait until the beginning of the new year to change to this new level of giving. You are encouraged, if possible, to make the change right now. This will help you settle into your new level of giving, and it will help the congregation finish the current year in a stronger financial position. If you are an electronic giver, you can simply change the amount of your gift by [instructions for your congregation].

Thank you for your past giving to [church name], which has made possible all the important ministries of our congregation. Thank you also for your prayerful consideration of this request to grow your generous support so that, together, we can do even more in Jesus' name, in our congregation and in the world.

Yours in Christ,

[signature]

WEEK FOUR: THE INVITATION TO GIVE

TALK IN WORSHIP SCRIPT (With Commitment Card)

Good morning. Over the past few weeks, we have been considering “The Joy of Generosity.” We have now reached the time when you are asked to consider your giving to **[church name]** for the coming year.

In the mail this past week, most of you received a mailing from the church that included a letter, a giving table, a commitment card and a return envelope. Some of you have already returned your commitment card. Thank you so much for doing that so quickly. Others of you may still be considering your response. To make sure the table is clear, I would like to quickly go over the simple steps to use it.

[Project an image of the chart or direct community members to the copy in your bulletin.]

1. Look down the leftmost column to find your approximate household income.
2. Look across that row to one of the three columns. The first is for weekly givers, the second is for monthly givers, and the third is for those who make one annual gift.
3. The number you find is the amount that, when added to your current giving, represents a 1% increase. Let me repeat that: your current level of giving, plus the number in your column, represents a 1% increase, which is what you are being asked to consider for next year.
4. So that our congregation can plan our ministry for next year, we ask you to indicate your giving plan either on the commitment card or through the congregation’s website.

Finally, I thank you for every investment of time, energy and treasure in our congregation. I hope you’ll consider this next level of investment. Thank you for giving it prayer and thought. You can be certain that your giving to **[church name]**, both past and future, is doing and will do God’s work in our congregation and in the world.

If you did not receive an envelope from the church this past week, please know that I will be standing in the entry after worship with envelopes and will happily give you one.

WEEK FOUR: THE INVITATION TO GIVE

TALK IN WORSHIP SCRIPT (Without Commitment Card)

Good morning. Over the past few weeks, we have been considering “The Joy of Generosity.” We have now reached the time when you are asked to consider your giving to **[church name]** for the coming year.

In the mail this past week, most of you received a mailing from the church that included a letter and a giving table. Some of you have already looked at this and made a decision about your future giving to our congregation. Thank you so much for doing that so quickly. Others of you may still be considering your response. To make sure the table is clear, I would like to quickly go over the simple steps to use it.

[Project an image of the chart or direct community members to the copy in the bulletin.]

1. Look down the leftmost column to find your approximate household income.
2. Look across that row to one of the three columns. The first is for weekly givers, the second is for monthly givers, and the third is for those who make one annual gift.
3. The number you find is the amount that, when added to your current giving, represents a 1% increase. Let me repeat that: your current level of giving, plus the number in your column, equals a 1% increase, which is what you are being asked to consider for next year.

Finally, I thank you for your past giving to our congregation and for considering this new level of giving. You can be certain that your giving to **[church name]**, both past and future, is doing and will do God’s work in our congregation and in the world.

If you did not receive an envelope from the church this past week, please know that I will be standing in the entry after worship with envelopes and will happily give you one.

AFTER THE ASK



Thank-you Letter After Commitment Received

[Date]

Dear [name],

Thank you for indicating your updated generosity plan for next year. This faithful act on your part will help our congregation's leaders plan our ministry for the year. I assure you that **[church name]** will make good use of your gifts as together we do God's work in our congregation and in the world.

According to our records, your giving plan is \$_____ per _____. If this is correct, please hear my word of thanks. If this is not what you intended, please contact me at **[email address]** or **[phone number]** so we can make the necessary correction. In either case, your new level of giving will begin with the new year.

Next year promises to be an exciting one for us. One plan that I am very excited about is **[tell one short story of a congregational ministry plan for the coming year]**.

Again, thank you for your participation in the life of **[church name]** and for your generous financial support of our ministry together.

Sincerely,

[signature]

[name]

[title]

Most congregations find that even modest reporting and follow-up efforts in the weeks following a response program lead to an increase in the number of people who indicate their giving plans. Some possible activities:

1. For at least three weeks after the Week Four talk in worship, include a brief update and reminder in the worship announcements: “So far we have received **[number]** commitment cards. If one of those is yours, thank you! If not, please consider adding your commitment card to your to-do list for this week.”

For one of these weeks, go into more detail: “Our congregation’s commitment cards keep coming in. We have received **[number]** so far, and of these, **[number]** indicate an increase over this year’s giving.” Whoever tabulates the commitment cards should be able to provide the necessary numbers without too much effort.

2. Three or four weeks after the mailing has gone out, send out a reminder card, letter or email to those in the congregation who usually complete a commitment card but have not returned one yet.

Your communication could include this message: “In recent years, you have made a commitment indicating your giving plan for **[church name]**. Thank you for this! By doing this, you have enabled our council to more accurately plan our ministry. According to our records, we haven’t received your commitment for next year. If you have chosen not to return a card, we understand. If you still plan to complete one, we encourage you to do that soon so that planning for next year can include your giving plan.”

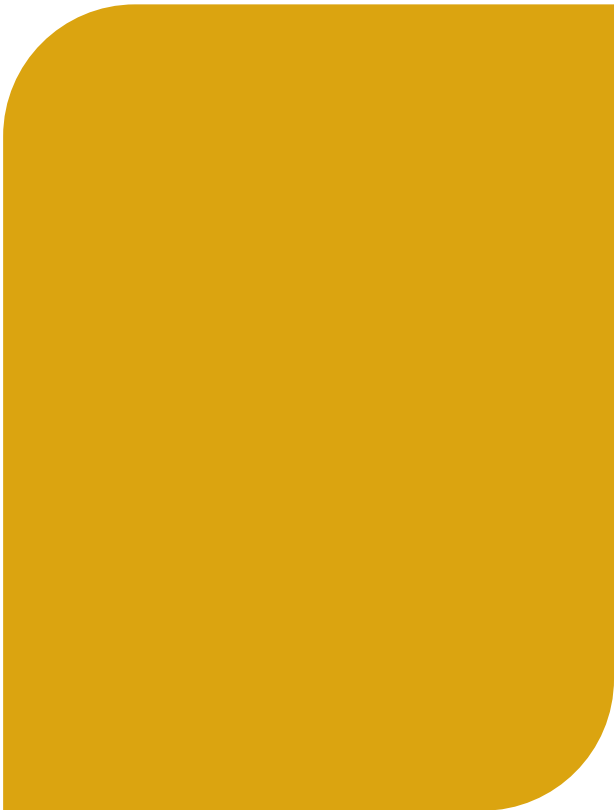
3. As the new year begins, the congregation will appreciate a more thorough report of the commitment results. You might include in this report the total number of cards returned, the number that indicate an increase in giving and the total amount of giving committed. This may require a bit of work: weekly gifts will need to be multiplied by 52 and monthly gifts by 12 before these totals are added to the annual gifts. Thank the congregation at least twice when reporting the numbers.

AFTER THE ASK | REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP

(Without Commitment Card)

Most congregations find that even modest follow-up efforts in the weeks following a response program lead to an increase in the number of people who plan their giving for the coming year.

For at least three weeks after the Week Four talk in worship, include a reminder in the worship announcements: “As a result of our recent ‘The Joy of Generosity’ program, many people in our congregation are making plans to increase their giving to **[church name]**. **[Report any increase in weekly offerings since the program.]** If you have already made your new giving plans, thank you! If not, we encourage you to do so in the days ahead.”



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America