

# Giving

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Stewardship & Relationships

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# Cross+ Generational Stewardship

Linda Staats

“When can we do this again?” is the phrase I hear repeatedly from ninety-year olds, seven-year olds, and all ages in between following their participation in a four-hour Generosity Project workshop. Engaging every age as a steward leader is core to an intergenerational, cross+generational<sup>1</sup> approach to stewardship.

Congregations are vast, untapped resources for bringing all generations together to practice and model Christian faith as God’s stewards. Because the norm has been age-segregated learning for so long, many of even our most experienced leaders and teachers are nervous about facilitating interaction among people aged two to 102 gathered in the same space.

Leaders often ask, “Where does one begin when incorporating a cross+generational approach to stewardship into one’s ministry? The foundation for stewardship and discipleship is

<sup>1</sup> *cross+generational* refers to an image of all generations gathered around the cross of Jesus Christ.



strengthened when the gifts and perspectives of every generation are woven into the very fabric and witness of the faith community. It is more than a program, a budget item, or a committee—it is a lens, a language, and a way of being in community.

The time and effort invested in engaging all generations as God’s stewards and practitioners of God’s generosity are well worth the effort!

**1. It’s all about the DOTS!** Recognize and honor the wisdom of the elder and wonder of the child.

- Visually identify the generations in the group’s midst every time they gather. For example, colored dots on name tags can indicate one’s generation.
- Intentionally and personally invite all ages to participate. People often think *intergenerational* does not mean them.



- Name and celebrate each generation's unique gifts and contributions related to time, treasure and talents.

**2. Create safe space:** honor *all* abilities, capabilities, and learning styles across the age spectrum.

- Offer extraordinary hospitality that considers the needs of each age, stage, and generation. Consider childcare and mobility issues—those in wheelchairs, rocking chairs, folding chairs, and high chairs.
- Establish guidelines for group interaction and conversation.

- From the time people arrive until they depart, engage all the senses and incorporate all learning styles into each all-age activity. Be cognizant of attention spans, and balance between sitting and moving.

**3. Holy number 5** is how the Holy Spirit's best work is accomplished! Five is the most effective number of people for small-group, mixed age interaction.

- A small group of five (No more!) offers the best possibility of at least three or more decades to engage with one another. If a group is larger than five, it is difficult for people to hear, and it takes too much time to share.

- Triads representing three generations work for brief exchanges.

**4. No tables!** Let the Holy Spirit loose:

- Move away from tables and ask people to pull their chairs together, knee-to-knee, in small groups of five, allowing them to truly see and hear one another.
- When using tables, use smaller, round tables or create a group of five at each end of a long table.

**5. Teach and live God’s story:** reconcile the world’s message of endless marketing to consume with God’s invitation to share:

- Storybook Bibles offer the opportunity for everyone, regardless of biblical knowledge, to engage in and embrace God’s story of generosity and abundance.
- Utilize digital technology and social media to connect God’s story to the lives of busy families in our 24/7 connected culture.

**6. No such thing as crafts:** there are only reminders of God’s story:

- Creating reminders of God’s story connects church and home and helps households retell and live God’s story in daily life.
- The hands, hearts, minds, and bodies of all ages engaged in creative activities create community and a sense of identity across generations while having fun!

**7. Rituals and traditions** shape community identity where *all* are recognized as children of a gracious and generous God:

- Meaningful rituals and traditions (games, intentional conversations, singing, storytelling, eating together, praying, blessing, sending) bring generations together and create a shared identity.
- A dynamic intergenerational ministry modeled within the walls of the church equips households to be God’s stewards and Christ’s disciples in the domestic church called home (Acts 2:22-27).

**8. Equip households:** when we gather, we practice for living grateful lives when we scatter:

- When our children and grandchildren are bombarded 24/7 with messages urging them to spend, it takes the voice and support of the entire faith community all year long, inviting everyone to share, save, and distinguish wants vs. needs.
- Equipping individuals of every age, and households in every stage of life to live as God’s grateful stewards and committed, followers of Jesus offers endless, creative possibilities fifty-two weeks a year.

**9. Be prepared to be surprised!**

- “And a little child shall lead them” Isa. 11:6-9 (The Message).

May we view one another through God’s eyes in a cross+formed, grace-filled, generous way of life that goes beyond any boundary of age or stage and is shared with heart-felt joy in households and communities of faith into all the world.

One may join The Generosity Project network of leaders and download samples of The Generosity Project from its Facebook page The Generosity Project ELCA (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/thegenerosityproject/>).

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