# Introduction to the Generous Life Project: Study Guide

## How is *this* a Stewardship program?

Generosity is certainly not a synonym for all that the word “Stewardship” is meant to describe. Yet, we chose this word for this project because generosity is at the heart of an effective response to what God has done. And responding to what God has done is stewardship. Preaching and teaching stewardship usually involves telling people that God counts on us to take care of each other and the earth. But is that truly enough to motivate generosity? What more is needed for us as we encourage people to have generous hearts?

Maybe we can’t force it.

Maybe people are born with their generosity or lack thereof.

But...maybe not.

Maybe it’s just a matter of renewed imagination.

Maybe people haven’t been helped to envision what the reign of God could look like here and now.

Maybe people feel overwhelmed by the needs they see and don’t know where to begin.

This resource begins with Biblical images of the abundance and generosity of the Kingdom of God. It then features stories of particular communities in our synod that have responded to God’s good gifts with generosity. Finally, it asks us to include our own stories of life in this Kingdom and further yet, to imagine what it could be.

It is my prayer that this resource will touch the hearts of your congregation and that touch might spark imagination and possibility. May the conversations inspired by these lessons and videos reveal God’s vision for the Kingdom of God here and now, in your own place, and by the endeavors of your congregation. May your congregation come to appreciate the scope and breadth of work their sister congregations are doing, and may they develop a commitment to partner with others for the good of the mission of God.

May your congregation experience a larger sense of what the church is doing, and a deeper understanding of what it means to be the ELCA in the Southwest California Synod.

May all of this translate into a generous response of time, skill and financial resources offered for the mission of God through your congregation, our synod, and our ELCA.

## Themes

A detailed overview is provided on the page titled: Overview: Outline of All Sessions.

# **How to use this study guide**:

# As a Bible Study:

Sessions are thought to take about an hour each – plus or minus chatting. Obviously some groups are chattier than others. Session 7 is considerably longer, so please read ahead and decide how you’d like to use this material.

This study is fully downloadable from our synod website [www.socalsynod.org](http://www.socalsynod.org). Modify it to fit your context. Use the pieces that work best for you in a way that will reach your people. Select the “Conversation Starters” and “Learning Activities” that support the conversation and insight you want to share with your congregation. You may want to rearrange the materials and then print copies for your group. It often increases participation if group members can read through the questions and see the flow of the lesson before they start the session.

**Welcome**: because we want to start out well!

**Hook:** designed to give the learner a reason to engage – to peak interest. Write it on whatever large surface you have!

**Theme:** offers an overall understanding of what to expect in this session

**Opening Prayer:** thematic to the texts, and appropriate to use if this becomes a sermon series.

**Video**

**Relevant Quotes:** these are shared so that you – the facilitator – know what I thought was important. They aren’t really important for the viewer. They may help you when you ask the group to respond to the video. The DVD contains all six videos. They are also posted on our synod youtube channel.

**Biblical Foundation** (because there is no better place to begin!)

The texts printed in each session are from the New Revised Standard Version.

There are questions sprinkled between the sections of text. They are meant to engage the learner in the text. Use or modify them as you see fit.

**Commentary**

I’ve cited several scholars in each session. This is not meant to be an exhaustive academic summary, just a starting point. Please don’t read these comments to your group. They are intended to spark interesting thoughts in your head that you can share with your group. See the footnote at the end of each session to find the referenced books.

**Conversation Starters**

Maximize group participation in a conversation that will celebrate and inspire generosity.

**Biblical Foundation, Commentary and Conversation Starters**

These aids rotate back and forth to facilitate dialogue with the text.

**Going Deeper**

Occasionally you’ll find an idea or question that challenges for a more nuanced and complex response.

**Conversation Starters** and **Learning Activities**

These include instructions on techniques designed to enhance participation in dialogue.

**Large Group**: Whole group.

**Elbow Buddies**: Talk to the person at your elbow – may be 2 or 3 people.

**Small Group**: Two sets of Elbow buddies.

**Think, Pair, Share**: Starts with personal reflection. After a couple of minutes, invite individuals to share with elbow buddies. After sufficient time for conversation, ask for volunteers to share insights gained with the whole group.

**Think, Pair, Pray**: Similar to above, except instead of sharing with the large group, each person offers a prayer for their partners, just between the two of them.

**Learning Activities**

You will notice that the “Learning Activity” of most sessions includes a chart of to organize the learning. These are meant to provide scaffolding for ideas.

**“T” Chart**: just a great way to support a compare and contrast conversation.

**Whip It**: a fun and simple way for folks to summarize their learning for the day. Can be fast – as in “offer the first word that comes to mind regarding your learning today” or more reflective as in – “offer a phrase or idea that is going round and round in your head.” Other opening questions stems include: “Offer an idea that supports something you already believe,” or “Offer an idea that challenged you.”

**The following two “Learning Activities” are added to every session:**

Track images of the **Kingdom of God** on the same piece of newsprint for all six lessons. The final session will provide an opportunity to integrate your collected images of the Kingdom of God with the work you’ve done analyzing your congregation and neighborhood.

**Congregation and Neighborhood Analysis** is introduced in Session 1. Every session you will be asked to add data to this analysis. At the end of the process, you should have a good understanding of where the resources of your congregation intersect the needs of your neighborhood. This is a potential sweet spot for increasing generosity. If your congregation discovers a specific need AND they have the gifts, passion and skills (resources) to help meet the need – there’s a good chance they’ll want to reach out. You will also uncover the obstacles which may threaten your ability to reach out to meet the needs of the neighborhood.

The Session 6 includes an opportunity to discern how to use the information your analysis has uncovered and to decide on next steps for your congregation. Session 7 has options for incorporating this work as well.

**Sending**

This is designed to liturgically remind participants of the discoveries of the day and bring some closure to the session**.**

## As a Sermon Series:

Each session has three scripture lessons, and an opening prayer. You could elect to show the video and create a sermon from the material found in the session. The opening prayer could serve to open worship or as an offertory prayer**.** Each session also includes a dismissal which could be used to conclude worship. There is a final document titled: Celebrating Generosity Sunday, which can support the receiving of pledges, called “Personal Letters of Intent” in this study.

## As material for a “Stewardship Sunday” Luncheon or special meeting”

Session 7, titled “Celebrating Generosity: Your Offering Plate,” is specifically designed to support a pledge drive, Celebration Sunday, or however your congregation lifts up its annual appeal. This session includes conversation on how your congregation will fill out the “Letter of Intent” for your contribution to the work and life of the synod.

Session 7 requires preparation. You may wish to involve your finance or budget team. Please consider meeting a couple weeks ahead of when you plan to offer the session to give ample time to prepare. See the document called “Preparations for Session 7.”

This Session is long. You might want to read through it and decide when and how you’d like to use it. You can do it as a luncheon after worship, using the Bible study texts as the basis of the sermon and then begin with the exercises, you can do it as a retreat style event, or you can do it as two shorter sessions. You choose.

# Andragogy

This course is designed for adults and acknowledges that adults learn differently than children (or perhaps, are just not as tolerant of bad teaching techniques). As you are well aware, adults already know many things. We learn by integrating the new with what we already know. To encourage that integration, good andragogy taps into what the adult brings to the table. Beyond what is written in the guide, you, as facilitator can begin reflections with such sentence stems as:

What does this remind you of?

What comes to mind when you hear this?

What do you already know about…?

Where have you seen this… in your life?

## Handouts:

Feel free to copy the handouts, and to create handouts out of other session materials.

## Downloadable resources:

This guide, including handouts, is available to download at: [www.socalsynod.org](http://www.socalsynod.org)

May God bless you and your congregation as you respond to divine Grace with human Generosity!

Yours in the mission of God with your congregation, your conference, our synod, our church and the world!

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