

Study 4: Growth in Generosity

When we have received much, we have much to give. In this session we examine how the growth of faith leads to a growing desire to share our blessings with others. We will also look at those things that can stifle generosity.

Getting started

Try to recall a time when you were on the receiving end of an act of generosity – financial or otherwise. Try to recall how it felt and what it meant to you. Take it in turns to share your reflections in the group.

View from the world church

One sign of a healthy church is a growing sense of generosity, as seen in North East India and South Africa.

NORTH EAST INDIA: St John on the Mount is so-named because it sits on top of a hill. It is a small church, with a poor congregation, in the rural village of Jarain, in the Diocese of North East India. Despite financial hardships, the church decided to open as a school during the week, providing education for 70 local children whose parents are subsistence rice farmers.

Inspired by this venture, St John's was offered financial support by St Michael and All Angels, a neighbouring church in Jowai. St Michael's – being itself a poor church – devised an ingenious method for giving. Each week, church members endeavoured to donate a handful of rice. When they had gathered a sack-full, the rice was sold and the money donated to St John's.

The Revd Jessie Anand, of USPG, said: 'Many villages in this part of India are under-developed. So the church has taken on the challenge of reaching out with a Christian presence. Education is not only about learning skills and training the mind, it can also provide the children with interpersonal skills and self-esteem. This is especially important for marginalised communities in today's multi-cultural and multi-faith context: people need to understand one another.'

USPG is helping the school to provide uniforms, books and dinners. Jessie said: 'The children all wore huge smiles. They told me they wanted to become good citizens.'

SOUTH AFRICA: Another example of church generosity comes from South Africa. A community gardening programme, set up by the Diocese of Zululand, is bringing neighbours together. The programme is providing employment and food security and generating a small income for families and orphans affected by HIV. In addition, by converting waste land into a community garden, this USPG-supported programme is helping to revitalise the environment.

The Revd Dr Archford Musodza, of USPG, said: 'This is an inspiring piece of work. The diocese is employing orphans and others who have lost relatives to AIDS. So families and communities are being supported. Of course, many of these families belong to the church. It is beautiful to see the church pooling resources and giving out of a generous heart.'

For discussion

1. What is your response to these stories? What do they tell us about the nature of generosity?

2. Tithing seems to have fallen out of favour – but now the church is struggling through a recession and there are so many demands on our money. What criteria do you have for how you make use of your money? Consider in particular the need to support the church, locally and internationally.

Looking at the Bible: Acts 6.1-15

Sometimes we can feel that Acts presents an impossible ideal age: if only the church could be like that today! Acts 6 however makes it clear that the church had its difficulties too: after all, it was made up of human beings. Yet it discovered how to grow through such problems. We can learn from the church's determination to ensure that generosity and sharing were integral to mission and ministry.

1. In verses 1 to 7, the administration of the church is out of necessity becoming more sophisticated. Discuss: a) the problem; b) the solution; c) the outcome. What lessons does this passage contain regarding the differing needs of our fellow believers?
2. In verses 8-15, Stephen is put on trial after proclaiming a gospel of inclusivity. What does Stephen's message tell us about generosity of spirit over a narrow religious exclusiveness?
3. What does this passage teach us about the source of generosity – and how people grow in generosity? Conclude your discussion by considering new ways of embracing 'generosity' in your life, work and worship.

Prayer

Gracious God, Spirit shared
and sharing among us,
You enrich us with your calling
to wisdom and service.
Grow our generosity, and
strengthen our mutual communion,
That precious gift rooted and
grounded in you.

Action: Support USPG

One of USPG's key objectives is to provide opportunities for you to directly support Anglican Churches around the world. You could make a donation to our general fund or support a specific piece of work. Have a discussion with your PCC regarding how your church can best support world mission.