

**November 15, 2016**  
**Rev. Dennis H. Kelly**

This morning, I would like to continue to explore the concept of Extravagant Generosity. That term, Extravagant Generosity is taken from series of resources titled *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, written by Robert Schnase. The other practices are; Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development; and Risk-Taking Mission and Service.

I have learned in the past when I have talked about Extravagant Generosity is that some of you are not comfortable with some of those phrases. The problem is not the second half of each phrase: hospitality, worship, faith development, mission and service and generosity. It's the descriptors that some take issue with; words like "radical", "passionate", "intentional", "risk-taking", and "extravagant". They tend to take us out of our conservative Lutheran comfort zone. However, they are appropriate when we begin to look three things:

1. The radical, passionate, intentional, risk-taking and extravagant nature of God's love as shown to us through Jesus Christ.
2. The radical, passionate, intentional, risk-taking and extravagant nature of the disciples of Jesus Christ, as shown to us in the stories of the early Christian Church.
3. Those congregations today that might be described as vibrant and growing are congregations that practice these things.

In fact, "these are the fundamental activities that are so critical to fulfilling the mission of the church", says Schnase, "that failure to practice them in exemplary ways leads to congregational decline." He further states that:

These five are interconnected and all are essential. By repeating, improving, and deepening these practices, congregations fulfill their mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Congregations invite and welcome people, allow God to shape hearts and minds in worship, offer opportunities for people to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God, provide channels for service to relieve suffering, and help people grow in the grace of giving. (7)

Two Sundays ago, we asked the question: "What does the Bible Say?" and discovered that the scriptures are filled with examples of *Extravagant Generosity*. Last Sunday, we asked the question: "What Is Extravagant Generosity?" and we reflected upon the following definition: "Extravagant Generosity describes the practices of sharing and giving that exceed all expectations and extend to unexpected measures. It describes lavish sharing, sacrifice, and giving in service to God and neighbor." (17)

This morning we take a look at the third and final question in relationship to Extravagant Generosity: "What Can We Do?" Here I want to move the focus from the individual giver and on to the congregation as a whole. What does it look like when congregations as a whole practice *Extravagant Generosity*? Schnase offer the following description of such congregations:

- The practice extraordinary generosity as a congregation, demonstrating exemplary support for denominational connectional ministries, special projects, and missions in their community and throughout the world.
- They take the lead in responding to disasters and unexpected emergencies. Lay and pastoral leadership view “giving beyond the walls” as indispensable to Christian discipleship and to congregational mission and vitality.
- They look for more and better opportunities to make a positive difference in the lives of people through congregational support and outreach.
- They make the mission of the church real, tangible, and meaningful.
- Their reputation for generosity extends beyond the congregation into the community.

As I reflect upon my experience here at Grace I see the many things ways that this congregation demonstrates generosity both inside and outside these walls. This generosity is expressed in terms of financial commitment and offering your skills and talents.

Inside these walls we have people who help to lead worship, who teach the faith to children and adults, who care for some of the more vulnerable members of Grace’s family, who volunteer in so many ways behind the scenes.

Outside of these walls members of Grace make regular commitments to Feed My Starving Children, PADS, Teen Mom’s, Sagrado Corazon, COOL food pantry and transitional housing, Habitat for Humanity and more. Members also make contributions in times of emergency and disasters through Lutheran World Relief and the ELCA Disaster Relief Fund.

Could we be doing more? Absolutely! One of the suggestions that we heard many times in the cottage meetings was to further explore ways that we can help those in need in our own community. That tells me that you want to a congregation that has a reputation for generosity. But let us not forget to celebrate what we have done and are doing through the generous contributions of our members.

Grace is a congregation that is going through a transition. That transition began with the resignation of Pastor Gordon. It is a transition that looks to the future and asks the question: What does God want Grace to be in the future? The next question is: who is the right pastor to lead Grace into God’s vision.

In this time between yesterday and tomorrow, you and I have been living in the interim space. And in this interim we have taken a journey together that has involved five tasks.

1. We have taken a look at the history of Grace and remembered those things that have made Grace the congregation it is today.
2. We have undergone a process to look at what Grace’s future might look like and identified areas that can help to share the congregation that Grace will be in the future.

3. We have discussed how things might change during an interim period – especially when it comes to staff members and leaders.
4. We have lifted up the partnerships that we share in ministry, especially the ministry we share with our Synod and the ELCA.
5. You have made a commitment to a new direction in Ministry by identifying a call committee and identifying the characteristics needed in the future pastor.

None of these things would be possible without your gifts, your commitment to stewardship, your commitment of time, your commitment to offering your skills and talents. That is what it looks like when members of a congregation practice Extravagant Generosity.