

Generosity Stories

Personal Reflections on the Power of Giving



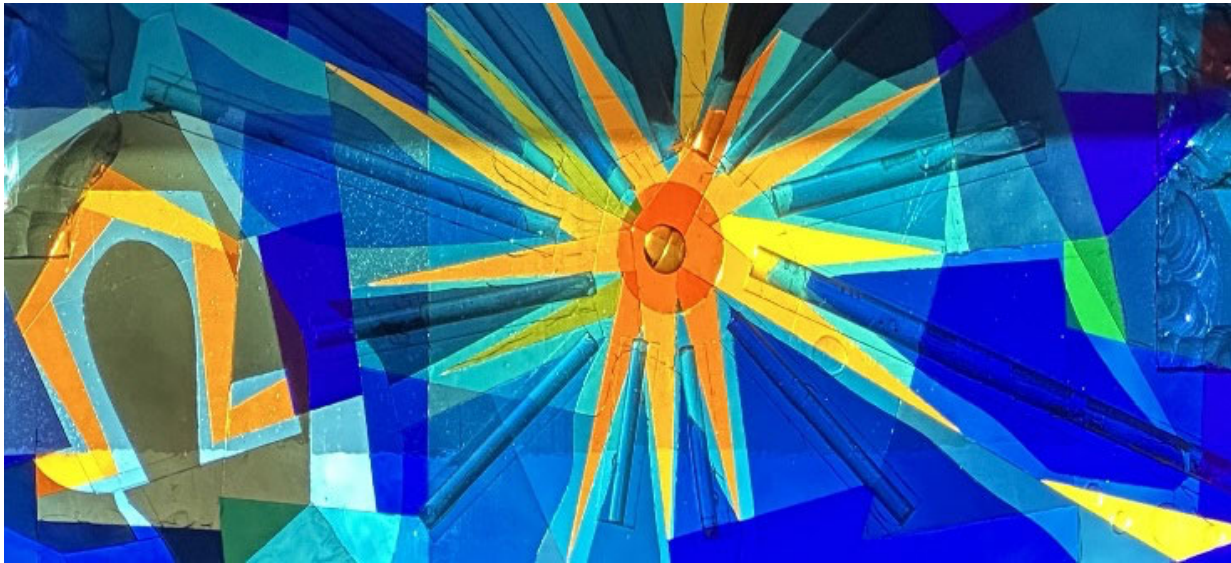
These are personal reflections on the power of giving from Augustana members.

For the Lord Jesus said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" – Acts 20:35.

However, sometimes simply being a witness to generosity can have a powerful impact.

We are all witnesses to God's glory among us. May these reflections serve as a reminder of the glory of God at work within our lives.

.....



Inclusion is an Act of Generosity

I was reflecting on the word “welcome” recently and how Augustana generously reflects a sense of welcome. Being in communion—figuratively and literally—with my community is the epitome of my church experience.

I was raised Catholic, and my parents still attend the local Catholic church in my Nebraska hometown. We three Kings attended the Christmas Eve service last December with my parents, and when the time came for communion, the message from the priest was that only baptized Catholics who are in good standing with the Catholic Church are invited to commune together. Being denied a seat at the table felt crummy. It was a stark juxtaposition to the message I

hear every Sunday at Augustana: we are all welcome to communion. Then there’s the Latter-Day Saints (LDS). They won’t even let me into their church (aka temple) let alone dine with them!

Do I say this to bash other faiths? Absolutely not! Obviously, I love my Catholic family and my LDS friends. In a world that leans further and further toward divisiveness, how blessed we are at Augustana to not have rules and regulations around who is invited to or allowed at our table. We are called to build a longer table, not a higher fence. To quote the title of a picture book by Alexandra Penfold and Suzanne Kaufman that I use with my students each year, *All Are Welcome*. That’s what Augustana is all about!

Amy King

I am not Generous

But I have witnessed and experienced abundant generosity.

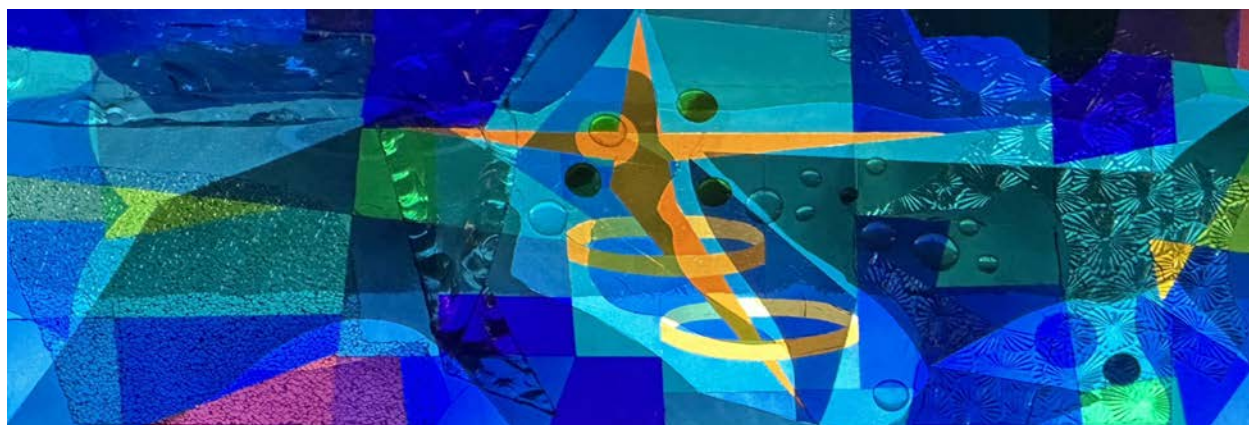
Fifty years ago I started my first real job after graduating from a Scandinavian Lutheran College in Nebraska. I was a research technician at the University of Nebraska's Department of Food Science and Technology. I didn't hunt for this job. I don't recall even interviewing. This job, by my reckoning, was generously arranged for me by my undergraduate professor of genetics. That professor, Dr. Larrie Stone, figured my interest in genetics, microbiology, and chemistry might find good application in the field of Food Technology. Dr. Stone gifted this job to me through a research colleague he knew at Nebraska's Ag campus. From this technician job, my graduate education, my entire 50-year career in Food Technology, and many of my most dear relationships generously sprouted.

If I could ask Dr. Stone a question today, I loved to ask questions then and I still do, it might be "why were you so generous to me?" I'm pretty sure he would kindly respond "Have you not paid attention?" Dr. Stone would likely clarify by asserting that all generous gifts come from God. He was merely one of many stewards.

Almost 150 years ago the congregation of Augustana Lutheran Church was founded by Scandinavian Lutherans in Colorado. From that beginning there has been witness to an abundance of God's generous gifts shared within and outside the congregation. If I could ask one of those original members of Augustana if they could have possibly foreseen the results of their generosity, they too might reply "We were not generous; and were you not paying attention in Sunday School and during your Confirmation classes?"

Today as I think about generosity in the sharing of stories and consider the future hopes and dreams not just for our congregation, but Christ's Church, it is helpful for me to stay grounded in the Doxology that apart from God there are no blessings, there is no generosity. Like Dr. Stone 50 years ago, or congregational founders 150 years ago, I and all of us have been called to be a steward of God's generosity.

Larry Rasmussen Class of 1974 (still trying to pay attention and learn more about God's love)



Be Generous with Your Time and Other Resources

I grew up in Los Angeles at a time when cars were just not very reliable. Rolling down the freeway you would frequently see a car overheating or have some other random problem and there was no such thing as "roadside assistance" or even cell phones.

I learned about generosity first from my dad, who would never fail to stop and help anyone whose car was broken down on the side of the road. Sure, he knew enough about cars to help fix it, but I always believed he was really stopping to help a friend in need at a time when they had no one else and they were stranded. I'm not sure how many cars he actually fixed, but I know that 100% of those folks were grateful he stopped. It did not cost him a dime, all it cost was time. He was going somewhere, but he was going to be late because someone needed help.

I'm an adult now, and time is more valuable to me than anything. Dad and I have never really discussed this, he probably doesn't even know this was my takeaway from those freeway stops. But that's who he is, and that's what I think all Christians have the capacity to

be. When you see a need you give what you can—it's just the right thing to do. These days it is easier for me to be generous with my money than it is with my time, but my dad showed me—without ever telling me—that both are important.

At church you often hear requests to donate "time and talent", and while Augustana provides a lot of opportunity for front-stage talent (like our amazing choirs, bells, reading, etc.), I always marvel at Augustana's backstage talent. There are many people who are rarely in the spotlight but keep the whole place running. People like Seki, our livestream technicians, our building and property committee members, the folks who stock the soup shelf, and those folks with a word of welcome to new faces on Sunday—all these people and more are the living and breathing testimony of God to me and the beating heart of Augustana. I'm sure if you were driving down the freeway in the early 80s and your car broke down, one of these generous souls would stop. Thanks for being generous with your time finding ways to be God's kingdom on Earth.

Sean-Casey King

Generosity: *The voluntary, unselfish giving of your time, attention, money or other resources to others, freely and abundantly.*

I had just started a new job. My wife was pregnant. Our car had broken down, and I was taking the bus to work. When I arrived home one evening, I noticed a car parked in front of our house. I asked my wife whose car it was. She told me it belonged to my senior partner's wife who had driven it over that morning. When my wife opened the door to greet her, she handed my wife the keys and said "keep it as long as you need it" then turned around and walked back to her house without saying another word.

Jim Dierker

God's Kingdom is the place of abundance where every generous act overflows its original bounds and becomes part of the unbounded grace of God at work in the world.

See 2 Corinthians 9:10-15

From A Spirituality of Fundraising by Henri J.M. Nouwen

God Calls us to be Generous

One of my most lasting examples of generosity is from my parents during segregation in the 50's/60's. I was in middle school when we moved to a small Texas town where the black and white families literally lived on the "other side of the tracks." My parents opened a general store that sold everything from auto parts to TVs, appliances, sporting equipment and toys. While white folks often drove to Dallas to purchase those items, many of the black community did not have the means to do that.

My parents made the decision to extend to all local customers (black and white) the option to buy large items "on time" without requiring a credit report to prove they had the income or collateral to pay. All they needed was to sign the contract and shake my dad's hand. Many also kept an "open account" where they would simply sign for small purchases and come in at the end of the month (or whenever they could) to pay the bill with no interest. For

many black folks this was the first time a white merchant had trusted them this way.

Most of my dad's fellow Deacons at our local church thought my parents were naive, at best, but they never wavered. Over the next 45 years the business flourished with only a handful failing to live up to the deal they had made. And the added blessing for my parents was they made wonderful friends on both sides of the tracks!

I believe I could not have had a better example of generosity to help guide me and my siblings. As we enter the season of stewardship and the Welcome 150 Campaign, I am reminded that generosity starts with the understanding that all we are and have is a gift from God. Generosity is simply the act of sharing those blessings in response to God's grace. I thank God that we are blessed with an abundance of generosity here at Augustana.

Dale Penny



Generosity is Sharing

To me, generosity means sharing what you have, be it time, supplies, money or love.

I have been lucky in my life to witness so many acts of generosity. My mother used to cook for her friends who had fallen ill and would spend many hours on the phone keeping them company and cheering them up. My father, as a doctor, took care of many

children new to this country whose parents were not in a position to afford medical coverage or rates at the time.

My favorite play is called "You Can't Take it With You". It is about a family living life to the fullest. I will not go into a huge explanation because the title says it all. Use what you need now, and if you have extra—share it!

Nancy Nyhus



Generosity Is Trust

I believe generosity equals trust. When we trust God's bounty, when we trust there will be plenty, we are more easily able to share God with others.

Long-time friends have been generous with me throughout our friendship, especially when I was a young music student in Boston. They not only shared their meals and home they opened their table to conversation that included everyone.

The most generous act I have encountered was the welcome we received in Bethlehem

while the Palestinian families were locked behind barriers, preventing them from working for weeks. They were gracious in sharing their meals and Christmas gifts, and their stories of hope in the midst of despair.

Augustana is generous in so many ways. Most important to me is the willingness members have to share their stories of joy and grief. I have been able to grow in my own openness through their hospitality. The trust we have in ourselves to embark on a capital campaign will serve the community well.

Pastor Karen Ullestad

Generosity Reflects our Inner Being

In addition to the traditional sources of learning about generosity, some of the most profound lessons came during my teenage years from the pastor and youth sponsors at my small-town Baptist Church. The youth fellowship program was very progressive for its time and was fueled by the time, resources and commitment from these unforgettable people. They all opened their homes (and refrigerators) to us for Sunday night fellowship.

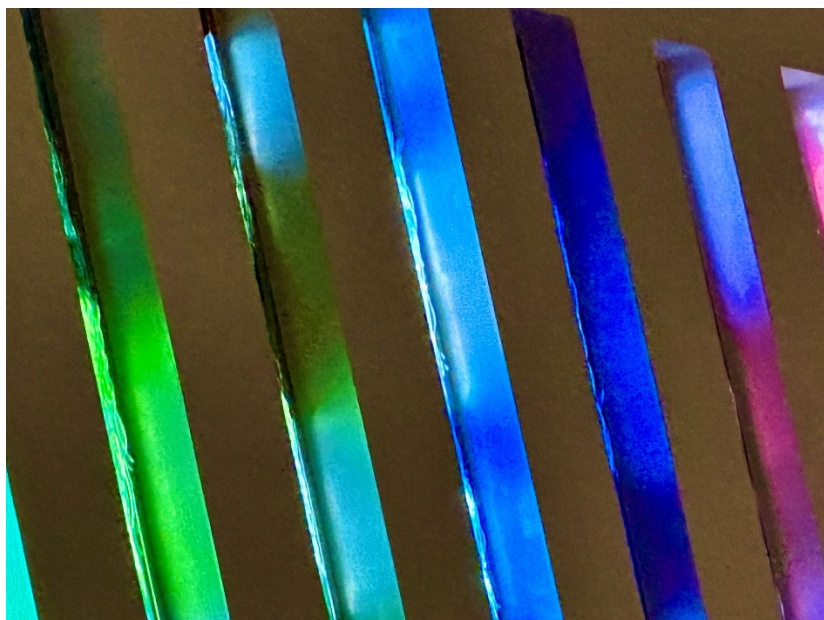
In the pre-driving days, they would cheerfully provide transportation to out-of-town events. As this was a rural community, many of them owned farms in the surrounding area. Those folks would host our Easter Sunrise services and provide breakfast afterward. They'd also welcome us to their properties for bonfires and hay rack rides. They helped direct, finance and provide logistics for our

production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* which we performed locally and at a couple of out-of-town venues.

When it came time for matters of faith, they patiently and graciously dealt with our adolescent skepticism and pushback (It was the 70's-no shortage of that). They provided us with copies of *Good News for Modern Man*, the first (and quite controversial for the times) translation of the Scriptures into contemporary, everyday English.

Several of them opened their doors to kids in town who were dealing with a family crisis. And they gave of themselves despite loud criticism from members of the congregation who felt this was no way to run a proper youth ministry. As a result, I learned that generosity is not merely "random acts of kindness", but a reflection of who and what we truly are in our inner being.

Brad Uyemura



A Quiet Gift of Generosity

I witnessed a very generous act when I was the school secretary at Samuels Elementary in southeast Denver several years ago. It was towards the end of the school year and there had been quite a bit of reporting on the local news channels that many of the students in Denver owed quite a bit of money on their school lunch accounts. This unpaid balance would follow the students to the next school year if not paid. Samuels was not immune to this problem.

One day in May, an older gentleman from the neighborhood came into the school and announced that he wished to pay off all student lunch debt at Samuels for the year! He did not want this debt obligation to follow the students and their families to the next school year. This amounted to several thousand dollars. He pulled out his checkbook, wrote the check and handed it to the principal. What a loving act of generosity!

Pam Uyemura

Growing in Generosity

My really good friend MZ taught me about generosity and acts of generosity and gives great advice and helps me with my choir songs when I'm getting mixed up. Kev, Sandi Blake and MZ help me a lot when I'm getting mixed up with the songs/singing the wrong note and helping me get the right pitch. I continue to grow in generosity by being kind, helpful and supportive.

Max Johnson

Blessed by the Generosity of a Stranger

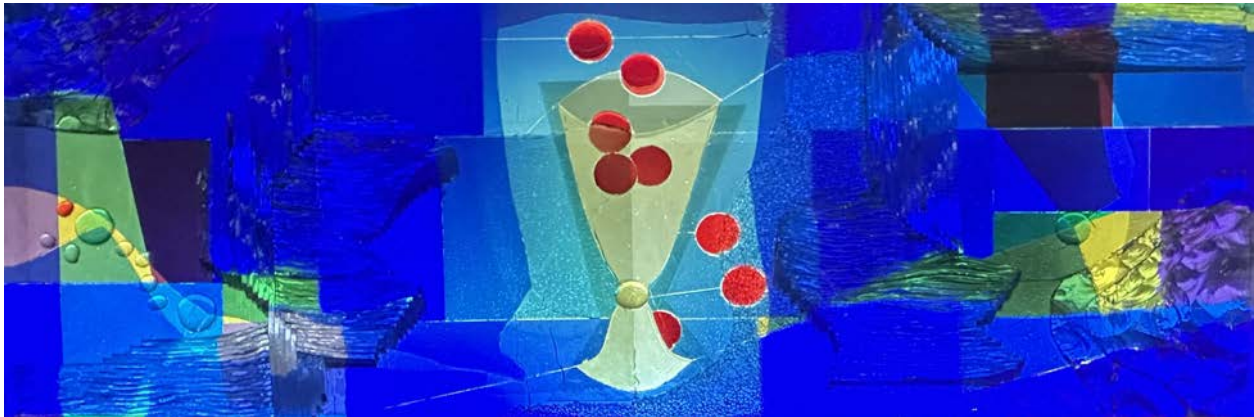
This story comes from my dear friend, Dana. Tragedy struck the young family on October 2, 2023, when her two 11-year-old daughters came home from school and found their dad deceased on the couch from an accidental fentanyl overdose. He had broken his foot and became addicted to Percocet and believed he was buying Percocet on the black market. Their 2-year-old sister was running around the house crying for her dad.

Dana was left on her own with 3 young children and her beloved Joe gone. Her neighbors got a meal train together giving the family warm home-cooked meals for three

months. On two different occasions friends filled her refrigerator and pantry.

An organization called "Castle Rock Dads" came to her house and removed the couch (where Joe died) and put money in Dana's account for a new one. They also took the two 11-year-olds to Walmart and gave each girl \$800.00 for Christmas. The police that came to the house to investigate the death donated gift cards and food for the family's Christmas. The transmission went out on Dana's truck shortly after Joe's death and the son of the repair shop owner read Dana's story on Go Fund Me and donated all the labor. She felt truly blessed by strangers' generosity.

Jayne Howard



Giving with a Generous Heart

I don't drink coffee although I really, really like it.

When my children were very young, we lived in Camelot, known to Rand McNally as Grove City, Minnesota, population 504. During this time, five mothers of ten preschoolers got together every Wednesday for coffee and Bible Study while the children played. One of these women was Audrey Holms, a divorced mom and Grove City's beautician, who worked out of her home.

Audrey was diagnosed with cancer and started a round of chemotherapy which made her unable to enjoy our community's favorite beverage, coffee. In support of Audrey, the Bible Study moms switched to not tea but to plain hot water on Wednesday mornings.

As Audrey began her medical quest for wholeness, she sought out the pastor for advice. Not advice about why this was happening to her or how to help her children

with her illness, rather, Audrey asked if God wanted her to tithe on her gross or net income! Caring for her children on a minimal income and in a health crisis, Audrey's faith concern was giving back to God what was God's.

As my husband and I talked about her sincere questioning and wanting to give with a generous heart, we made the decision to always tithe on our gross income, including Social Security, pension and health benefits. This meant, of course, tithing on these again when we started receiving Social Security and other retirement benefits.

In honor of and in memory of Audrey, I also chose to continue to drink hot water rather than coffee to remind myself to give generously back to God in all circumstances. Each morning and each social occasion when I indulge in my cup of hot water, I am reminded of Audrey and to be generous in all things, in all circumstances.

Deacon Elaine Malzahn

Generous Thinking, Planning, and Giving

Generosity means letting go of what I think of as my own—time, money, ideas, things, skills—to improve someone else's situation or moment.

On Senior Ditch Day in high school, I went out to breakfast with a friend. It was the first time I'd been to a sit-down restaurant without an adult. Kelly and I enjoyed our pancakes, and the special kind of chatter shared between teens. Our server was kind and helpful. It was a great morning. When I got home, Pops asked me how much I tipped the server. My heart sank. I was embarrassed to report that I had forgotten to tip. Pops said, "You don't get

rich by tipping cheap." He was born in Arkansas and had a million pithy words of wisdom like that one.

My parents made me drive back to the restaurant the next morning to tip the server. I walked up to her and said, "I'm really sorry that I forgot to tip you yesterday." She thanked me with eyes widened in surprise and I walked away as fast as I could with my face blushing. Lesson learned. More than that, Pops gave me the gift of freeing me into generous thinking, planning, and action when it comes to giving money.

Pastor Caitlin Trussell



Overflowing Donations of Generosity

What a joyous, heart filled activity twice a year when Augustana members and friends gather to package beans and rice for Metro Caring. Joy and enthusiasm are never lacking as people of all ages engage in this activity. Later, seeing the beans and rice on the shelves at Metro Caring I feel such gratification that my house of worship contributed to this vital mission of feeding our neighbors. When Augustana and Augustana Early Learning Center collect cans of chili for Metro Caring and George Washington High

School it is staggering the volume of cans that are collected. The generous donations overflow the altar area.

This generosity goes beyond donations and continues when the cans are counted and set aside for GW High School and additional drivers are recruited to deliver to Metro Caring. Until we can address food insecurity at its root, these efforts will need to continue. I am grateful to be a part of Augustana and the generosity to provide to our neighbors.

Katy Lunsford

Living Every Day with Gratitude

The text of the hymn, "Earth and All Stars!" is all about how we along with all of creation sing to the Lord a new song! Loud rushing planets, loud boiling test tubes, loud humming cellos, and loud praying members all sing to the Lord a new song! For God has so abundantly and generously, breathed life into the earth. Thus, we sing our praises of gratitude.

The author of that hymn, Herbert Brokering, also wrote a book of 80 brief parables that he called *Openers*. I've had that book on my shelf since my college days, with a bookmark specifically on page 31. In gratitude to God for all of the gifts God has bestowed upon US, this parable opened my own eyes to what it means to live each day with gratitude, thanksgiving, and generosity:

Once there was a church
where the people took the offering
back home with them.
First it was collected
and brought to the altar.
After they asked God to bless it,
they took it
and put it back in their pockets.
They mixed it up
with all of their other money,
so that they couldn't tell
which was blessed and which was not.
Then they left.
All week they spent as though each piece was
blessed
and was to be used lovingly.
—Herbert Brokering

Pastor Kent Mueller

What I Learned from My Dad

I first learned the meaning of good stewardship from my dad. Dad was a rural pastor in North Dakota and Iowa and his office was often in our home. The upper right drawer of his desk contained a box— actually an Old Spice box. It was the "Tithing Box" and we children knew that with each check dad received, 10% of it would go into the Tithing Box. It made a lasting impression on my young mind.

I have always loved the biblical story of the "widows' mite." We generally think of money when the word "steward" is mentioned. It involves so much more. Growing up in the rural areas of the Midwest, I remember how often farmers would reach out to one another when a need occurred. It might be a sudden illness, or a late crop that

needed a larger crew to harvest it. Often a farmer would use his/her machinery and time to help a neighbor. I have carried that example of good stewardship with me.

My own view of stewardship was heavily influenced by Dr. Douglas John-Hall in his book, *The Steward – a Biblical Symbol Come Alive*. Stewardship is a gift given to me in my Baptism, a gift from the Chief Steward, Jesus Christ. Stewardship is not just managing or giving of my money. Steward is a lifestyle. It has to do with the way I make decisions about my time, my possessions, the way I structure my time each waking hour of each day. Generosity is not a single act or even a series of actions. Generosity is a word that describes a life of faithfulness.

Rev. Paul Gilbertson

Collective Generosity

Growing up at Augustana, I've been blessed to be surrounded by family who also call this church home. One of the greatest lessons I've learned here is the true meaning of generosity. It's not always found in grand gestures—though we see those, too. Instead, I've witnessed it in the daily, heartfelt actions of our leaders and congregants.

Generosity shines through in those who clean and prepare linens, bake bread, serve communion, sing in the choirs, teach the Gospel to our children, handle mailings, and say “yes” to various committees and councils. Our ushers not only ensure the offering plate is passed but also take often unseen extra steps to keep us safe as we worship. There are those who restock the library, maintain our grounds, prepare meals, and so much more. It's collective generosity!

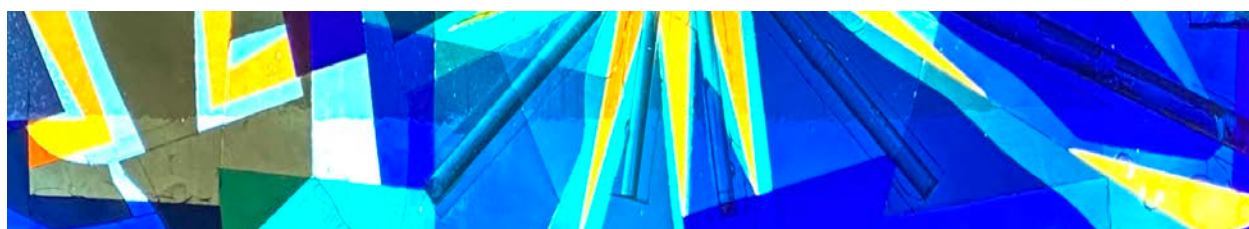
The ability of our church to come together and create something meaningful is truly astounding. Recently, I've seen this in action with the Welcome 150 Steering Team and Work Team. However, my first memory of our church's collective generosity dates back to my childhood.

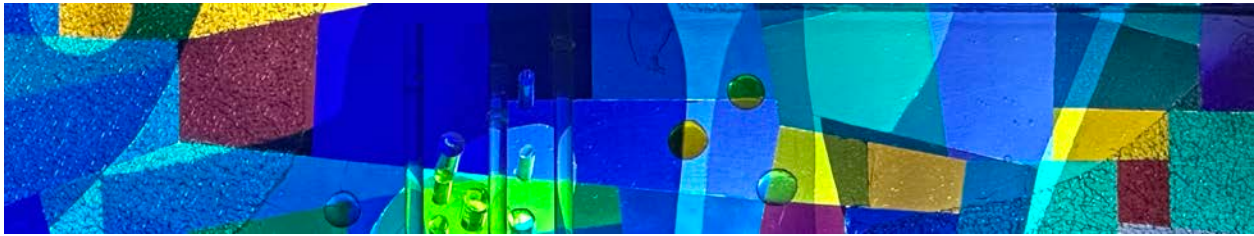
It was a Monday evening and I was in the 1st grade. My family had just experienced the loss of a loved one the Tuesday before and

was beginning the grieving process. Both my father and grandfather were at a church Council meeting and I was home with my mother and siblings when a call came that my grandmother had been rushed to the hospital. My memory is a bit blurry around the specifics but I know that my mother, father and grandfather were all able to get to my grandmother's side quickly that evening, very much thanks to church family stepping in. My grandmother passed away the following day. It was sudden and very unexpected. I will never forget the multitude of feelings I felt standing in the Memorial Garden two Tuesdays in a row with the adults in my life in tears.

What stands out to me now, however, as I reflect on that experience, was how our church family gathered around us in those dark days. They brought casseroles, offered childcare, shared warm hugs, and provided kind counsel. Through the collective generosity of the church, my family found healing and comfort, and despite the tragedy of losing two loved ones in such a short time, this generosity left an enduring mark on my heart. I strive to be a part of the collective generosity of the church and ensure others in our congregation receive the care and love they need when they are unable to stand on their own.

Katrina Tamminga Crook





Generosity is Generational

I learned generosity from my parents and it was largely based on their interaction with their church. My father volunteered for parish council, to run the time clock at school basketball games (they may have let him do it to avoid having him yell at game officials) and as a member of a do-gooder group of men at our church who would help those who needed projects done around their homes or to complete projects at the church and the school which it sponsored. Similarly, my mother was active in the parent-teacher association for as long as I can remember and volunteered several days each week in the school library. When I first began to receive a weekly allowance, they were adamant that 10% of it should go to the church; they even worked with the church to procure envelopes for us so that we could participate, with our parents, in the weekly collection.

In high school, I was part of a parish youth group. We did many things together but among the most memorable were the many Sunday afternoons during our summers that we spent completing projects for members of the church and others who needed assistance. Many walls were painted, weeds pulled, furniture moved and other tasks completed by that group. I don't remember it being a ton of work and Lord knows that

much of the time spent was social but I do remember how much the people who benefited from those projects appreciated our efforts – sometimes to the point of tears.

I am in a unique position as the Finance Administrator at Augustana. I get to see the money that comes in from the many members of the congregation who are able to give or that sacrifice to make a financial gift so our ministry can continue. As important, I get to see all of the people who volunteer their time and talent to keep the property looking good, to help members who need help and to step up to meet a need whenever one is identified. It is remarkable to experience and I have been blessed in this role.

My family and I have enjoyed good health and good jobs. As a result, we are able to make financial gifts to Augustana and other organizations; I firmly believe we have an obligation to do that. However, the most meaningful gifts to me continue to be the times when I can work a shift at Metro Caring or climb the stairs in the Republic Plaza for the benefit of the American Lung Association or volunteer for an activity at church and know that my labor is making a difference for somebody.

Bill Crossen

Generosity is a Lifetime Habit and its Partner is Gratitude

I have loved the Lutheran church all my life. I spent four years at a Lutheran College. I've been through two transitions and mergers at six congregations in four synods. I've held leadership positions in all three expressions of the church – congregation, synod and churchwide. I've served as an advocacy staff member and as a lay leader.

I am grateful to God for all of these wonderful experiences in which I witnessed generosity.

But today, as an eight-year member of Augustana, I am especially grateful for this congregation. Generosity is shown here through fabulous music and worship programs, community outreach programs and social justice programs. I am especially grateful for a wonderful cadre of supportive women friends in Sarah Circle.

Over the years, I've seen generosity generate gratitude on so many levels.

Betty Boyd



Our Gardens are a Blessing

Generosity generally brings about gratitude. Recently, most of our Augustana gardeners visited the SAME Café for lunch where we were able to visit with the staff and director who run the place.

For those who don't know, we take much of our harvest during the summer to the SAME Café on East Colfax where no one is turned away if they cannot pay. Each year we generously donate hundreds of pounds of produce that SAME Café then turns into salads, soups and other menu items. If the cooks can't use what we bring right away, they freeze it and use it later in the year.

The day we visited we were able to see scores of patrons full of gratitude for a free or low-cost nutritious meal. In fact, as the director of SAME Café sat with us, she couldn't say enough how gratified she and her staff were for the generosity of Augustana Community Gardens.

Our gardens next to Quist Park are a program of Augustana's Health Ministry and are a real blessing to those less fortunate than we are. As one who gardens there, I, too, am exceedingly grateful for the opportunity this Augustana ministry provides so we can serve those who might otherwise go hungry.

Roger Lipker

Generosity is Worldwide

One of the most amazing acts of generosity I have been privileged to witness happened when I was in Tembisa, South Africa. It was 1990, in the final year of apartheid. Tembisa was one of the townships, walled with barbed wire, where Black citizens had been herded together in unimaginable conditions of poverty and discrimination, to serve as a work force for nearby Pretoria.

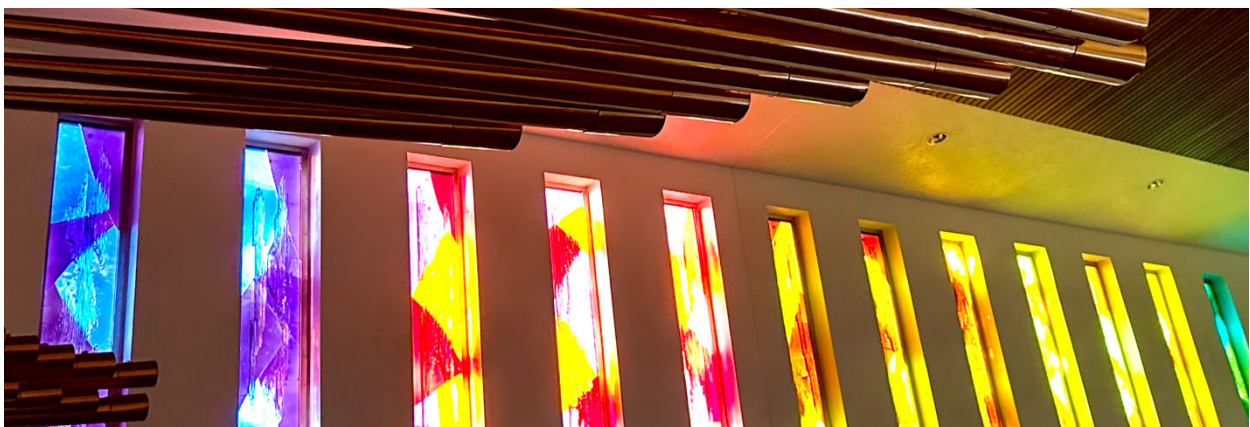
I was in South Africa as part of a study group on global theological education involving seminaries from the Chicago area. As part of that program, we spent a weekend there in the township as guests of families. I was the first White person to have eaten and slept in my hosts' home. Our study group worshiped together with them at their church in Tembisa on Sunday morning. In defiance of the terrible conditions of poverty that surrounded them, the congregation's worship was an explosive celebration of joy and hope.

At the end of the service, the pastor expressed the congregation's excitement in having us in their midst and worshiping

together that day. He asked us to stay seated because the congregation had a surprise for us. During a hymn, the congregation members (probably numbering around 200) all came forward for a second offering. It was counted by the elders totaling around \$200. However, in terms of the standard of living and the economics of Tembisa in 1990, that \$200 represented what would have easily amount to a five-figure offering from a White American congregation at that time. The elders presented the offering to us because they were so happy we were there. "We know it is not much," the pastor said, "but maybe you can use it to buy some Cokes or snacks at the airport." We received it with shock, amazement, and humility, and we told them we would use it to care for the poor in the United States so that our ministries might be joined.

Perhaps the greatest gifts of all occur when we are in solidarity, gathered around the love of God who knows no bounds in caring for us. What might such joy do through the gifts that God has showered upon us?

Rev. Ron Roschke





*You will be enriched
in every way so that
you can be generous
on every occasion,
and through us
your generosity will result
in thanksgiving to God.*

2 Corinthians 9:11


Augustana
LUTHERAN CHURCH

5000 East Alameda Avenue | PHONE: 303-388-4678
Denver, Colorado 80246 | WEB: augustanadenver.org