

Dear friend in Christ,

Whenever we talk about stewardship, it doesn't take long before the topic of gratitude enters the conversation. The two are commonly linked, possibly because giving thanks and being generous are naturally understood as appropriate responses to God's abundant blessings.

Perhaps it's a surprise then that the Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast implies that gratitude can be a disposition that precedes goodness, instead of just a logical response that follows. Quite provocatively he says, "In daily life, we must see that it is not happiness that makes us grateful, but gratefulness that makes us happy." Or, said another way, being grateful is a perspective we can cultivate that helps us see that God is good and our lives are blessed, as opposed to a quid pro quo acknowledgment after the fact.

Independently, the professor and researcher Brené Brown writes that grateful people don't just have an inclination or "attitude of gratitude," but instead, these people engage in specific practices that fuel their sense of gratefulness. Saying grace before a meal, offering a prayer of thanks at the beginning or end of the day, or taking time to worship God are disciplines that exercise our trust in God's very nature of goodness. These practices don't just focus on blessings that have already materialized. Similarly, generosity and stewardship are faith practices that increase our confidence, our faith in God and God's ability to provide for our well-being in the present and future.

As we continue to learn more about gratitude, it seems to me there is a need to better understand its relevance to a life of faith and living life as stewards. This issue of stewardNet is about some of those nuances and complexities and interdependencies.

We are a church that is energized by lively engagement in our faith and life. Thank you for doing God's work with a faithful, generous heart!

Faithfully,

Steve Oelschlager
Stewardship Program Coordinator
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The transformative power of giving thanks

"Grateful" by Diana Butler Bass

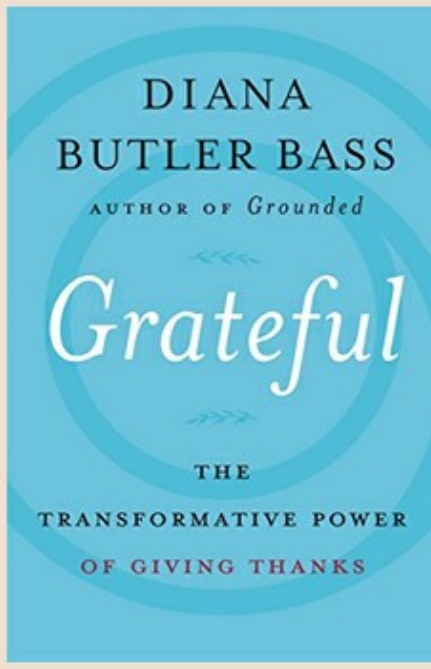
In her recent book, "[Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks](#)," Diana Butler Bass explores the topic of gratitude in a comprehensive and insightful way. She looks at distinctions between personal and public gratitude, how gratitude makes us feel emotionally versus what it inspires us to do in our ethics, and the challenge of being grateful even when our personal stories are not all upbeat and rosy.

Bass contrasts gratitude that is driven by a sense of compulsion and duty (reciprocity to discharge a debt) against gratitude for life's many tailwinds, grace, gifts that are freely given and impossible to repay. It turns out that the transactional model of gratitude was integral to hierarchical patronage systems of ancient Egypt and Rome, where people were expected to return taxes to Pharaoh and Caesar or be ingrates deserving punishment. Who would have thought that something as honorable as gratitude could have a history of control and domination?

As far as transformation is concerned, Bass writes:

"Gratitude, at its deepest and perhaps most transformative level, is not warm feelings about what we have. Instead, gratitude is the deep ability to embrace the gift of who we are, that we are, that in the multibillion-year history of the universe each one of us has been born, can love, grows in awareness, and has a story. Life is the gift. When that mystery fills our hearts, it overwhelms us and a deep river of emotions flows forth — feelings we barely knew we were capable of holding."

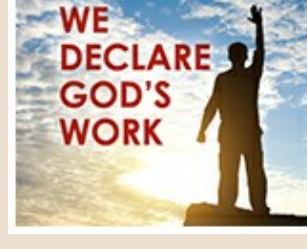
The book "Grateful" is an excellent resource for personal contemplation or group discussions. Watch Bass in a recent presentation on gratitude that parallels her book, [part I](#) and [part II](#). Use this [small group discussion guide](#) as a source of questions for conversation.



Mission Interpretation ministry

Telling stories of gratitude

In the glass of life do you see your glass as half full? Are you able to find the goodness in the everyday-ness of life? Are you thankful even when life is difficult and scary? If you answered, "Yes," to any of these questions, you probably have a strong sense of gratitude. The quality of being thankful; that readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness.



Historically, philosophers have suggested that gratitude is one of the most important human emotions for the success of the society. Modern psychology research confirms that gratitude is an essential social emotion that can benefit the lives of people who practice gratitude. And, in the Bible, thankfulness is recognizing who God is and what God has done. God's word is filled with many reminders of how powerful and vital a thankful heart can be in this world.

We have so much to be grateful for in this life. Each and every day. But reality is that sometimes constant life demands, struggles and worries give more room to defeat than to a heart of thanks. Or we forget, in the midst of busyness and pressures, just to pause and give thanks for all that God has done and continues to do in our lives.

Mission Interpreters in congregations tell gratitude stories from both the giver's and receiver's perspective. They tell stories filled with joy in the opportunity to give to others. Mission Interpreters give thanks to members in congregations on a regular basis for all we are and all we do as the church together. If you would like to hear more about the Mission Interpretation ministry of our ELCA, please contact [Denise Ballou](#).

Ultimately, living gratefully is about more than merely appreciating what you have. True gratitude ignites compassion, inspiring us to share our blessings with others.

Other items of interest

Resources, events and more

- For interesting new research on vital congregations that includes not just the ELCA but also ecumenical and interfaith data, [read the new Congregational Vitality report](#) funded by Faith Communities Today and researched by the ELCA's Linda Bobbitt. Wondering where the church might be headed? The Lutheran Campus Ministry Network has recently published [a summary of major findings](#) from its research on young adult ministry on college campuses today. Both of these brief reports are worth reading and contemplating.
- The Generosity Project connects generations and equips households as centers for the faith practice of generosity. Resources include an outline for an introductory workshop, five sessions plus worship with a detailed Planning Guide, Live It Out take-home activities, Foundation and Fundamentals that offer an overview of the project, and an extensive curated Resource List. Follow the ELCA Generosity Project Network through its [Facebook group here](#).
- ELCA Coaching exists to serve our church and its purpose is to create a coaching culture in the ELCA that will empower and multiply leaders at every expression. Join the [Facebook group here](#), or watch one of these videos ([video one](#), [video two](#)) to learn more.
- The new issue of Stories of Faith in Action, inspiring stories of how our church makes a difference together, is now available. Click [here](#) for an electronic copy and related resources.
- Rethinking Stewardship is a conference held every few years at Luther Seminary to consider new thoughts, ideas and practices around stewardship. Videos of the 2018 presentations are now online, along with talks from previous years. Check out Dr. Martha Moore-Keish's 20-minute presentation, "What are We 'Offering' at the Offering?" [here](#), or read her related article [here](#).
- Interested in knowing more about Tithe.ly, the ELCA's preferred vendor for online giving? Read about the agreement [here](#), or [watch this online stewardCast webinar](#).
- Virginia Theological Seminary has a section of its website dedicated to stewardship with articles on foundational issues, fresh thinking, and teaching kids. [You can visit those webpages here](#).

Sayings, quotes, thoughts

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."

Biblical foundations

Psalm 118:28, 24

"You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you.
This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Upcoming events (watch the [calendar file](#) for details)

Nov. 4–5 (also Jan. 13–14, 2019)

[Preaching Stewardship Workshop](#)

Nov. 15

StewardTalk

3 p.m. Central at 877-820-7831, participant code 6314685#

Nov. 27–29

Tampa, Fla.

[ESC Generosity NEXT Conference](#)

Sept. 30–Oct. 2, 2019

San Diego, Calif.

[Stewardship Kaleidoscope](#)

[Full calendar](#) | [Subscribe to Our Calendar File](#)

[Find ELCA stewardship resources online](#)



We'd love to hear from you! Have a link or idea you want to share in our next issue? Email stewardnet@elca.org.

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