

Dear friend in Christ,

If one of our highest aspirations for people is that they might live into a life of generosity and service, blessing both their lives and the world, how do we, as congregations and the church, model that kind of generosity? How might our life together regularly teach and encourage people to want to be part of something bigger than themselves, sacrificing self for the benefit of others?

I think the answer has everything to do with creating remarkable cultures in which hospitality is revered, emphasized and practiced. At the center of this culture is an awareness of what we want for people, not just what we want from them. Hospitality involves food, love, empathy, warmth and caring. It means helping people to feel that they belong, they matter, they are noticed and heard. It is the most reliable source of social capital within congregations and beyond for better lives and a better world. It also happens to be the way of Jesus.

Here are a few questions to consider. What are we giving to those who participate in our congregations that might help inspire them, in turn, to be generous? How are we practicing generosity beyond our congregations, as another kind of example to emulate? If our congregations can't do these things in obvious, authentic ways, how can we expect our people to do something different in their own lives? This issue of "stewardNet" looks at setting the table for generosity through a foundation of hospitality.

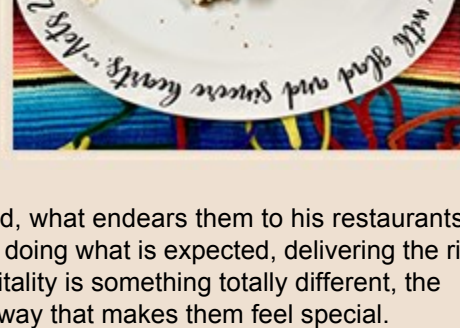
We are a church that is energized by lively engagement in our faith and life. Thank you for doing God's work with a faithful, generous heart!

Faithfully,

Steve Oelschlager  
Stewardship Program Coordinator  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Multiplying cultures of hospitality**  
Wisdom from a restaurateur

Soon after we are born, says acclaimed restaurateur Danny Meyer, most of us are blessed with the first gifts of life: a smile, a hug, eye contact and food. While simple, these gifts satisfy on many different levels. In some respects, we spend the rest of our lives yearning for these same basic things: belonging, heartfelt connection to others and unconditional affirmation of who we are.



Meyer says that, while his customers expect tasty food, what endears them to his restaurants is how his staff makes them feel. Good service is merely doing what is expected, delivering the right dish to the right person at the right temperature. Hospitality is something totally different, the enjoyment of serving and connecting with guests in a way that makes them feel special.

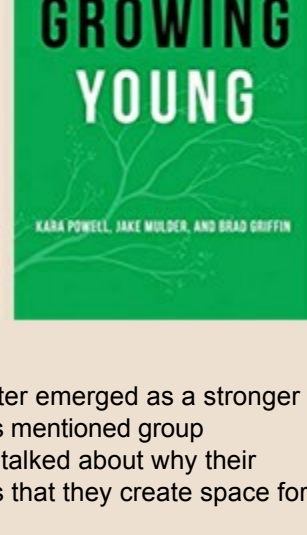
Within the restaurant industry, Meyer says, insiders are fascinated by the story of McDonald's, and how an operation could be expanded massively yet still make hamburgers taste the same from Boston to San Diego. Meyer himself is more interested in scaling a corporate culture in which customers quickly notice something different about how they are treated and cared for. Isn't this what Jesus was hoping for, a transformation of culture by his followers so that all might feel loved and accepted?

How does Meyer do it? First, he hires not just for technical competence but also for emotional intelligence and relational skills. When his staff operates at 100 percent, he says, it is 49 percent oriented toward task and 51 percent oriented toward feeling. Meyer also makes the point that customers cannot be treated well unless his staff first treat each other well. Is the customer always right? Meyer says no but adds that people want to be heard, which is ultimately more important than making clear to them that they are wrong.

I can't help but think that Meyer has some important things for the church to consider. "Business, like life, is all about how you make people feel," he says. "It's that simple, and it's that hard." [Watch an interview with Meyer here](#), or [read his book](#).

**Warm is the new cool**  
Congregations that are growing young

Most congregations are getting older on average, but believe it or not, some are growing young. The book [Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church](#) explores what those congregations are doing. It turns out that cool music and programs are not nearly as crucial as authentic relationships, warmth, and hospitality.

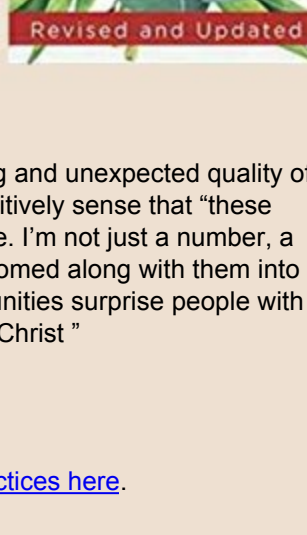


"In our analyses of the terms young people and adults use to describe their own churches or parishes, we noticed repeated words such as welcoming, accepting, belonging, authentic, hospitable, and caring. We began to call this the warmth cluster. Across the board in statistical analyses, the warmth cluster emerged as a stronger variable than any one program. And while 6 out of 10 interviewees mentioned group practices like small groups, youth group, and retreats when they talked about why their church is thriving, what seems important about those practices is that they create space for people to be together and nurture relationships."

Check out the [Growing Young website](#) for related materials, assessment tools, and resources. For connections to ELCA efforts to grow young, contact [Rachel Alley](#), ELCA Program program Director director for youth ministries.

**The practice of radical hospitality**  
What Fruitful Congregations do

An excerpt from the revised and updated version of [Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations](#) by Methodist Bishop Robert Schnase.



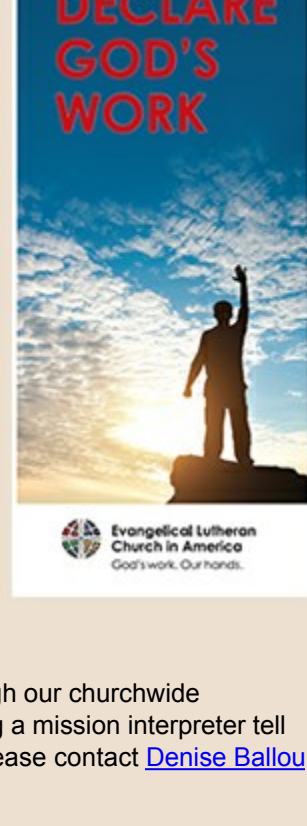
"Churches characterized by Radical Hospitality are not just friendly and courteous, passively receiving guests warmly. Instead, they exhibit a restlessness, an unsettling awareness of those who stand in need of grace. They are genuinely curious about and interested in forming relationships with people outside the faith community. They are eager to carry Christ's initiating love with them into their daily lives.

Faith communities practicing Radical Hospitality offer a surprising and unexpected quality of depth and authenticity in their caring for the stranger. People intuitively sense that "these people really care about me. They genuinely want the best for me. I'm not just a number, a customer, a target in their strategy to grow their church. I'm welcomed along with them into the body of Christ." This is Radical Hospitality. Such faith communities surprise people with a glimpse of the unmerited gracious love of God that they see in Christ "

[You can watch a presentation by Bishop Schnase about the five practices here.](#)

**Sharing stories of hospitality**  
The ministry of mission interpretation

Many of our congregational stories include beautiful examples of hospitality. They demonstrate how we welcome into our buildings those whom we might not know personally or who might not be part of our faith community... guests, visitors, and even strangers, encountered through ESL classes, job preparation opportunities, free meals, support groups, fellowship, daycare, meeting sites and clothing closets.



But how do we show hospitality to the stranger far away from our congregations, neighborhoods, and communities? Together as our ELCA, we can do this through our gifts of Mission Support dollars, which is the money your congregation shares with your synod, who in turn shares a percentage with our ELCA. Through your generosity we can show hospitality across the U.S. as we grow new congregations, and around the globe as we partner with Lutheran World Federation and provide missionaries and young adults in global mission. Through your generosity we can show hospitality across the U.S. as we grow new congregations, and around the globe as we partner with Lutheran World Federation and provide missionaries and young adults in global mission.

Hearing and sharing these stories of hospitality is important; it's the work we do together as the Church! Luckily, mission interpreters do just that. They are a network of storytellers who share stories about the hospitality and generosity of your congregation, of your synod and of God's mission in the world through our churchwide organization. If you think your congregation could benefit from having a mission interpreter tell these stories, or if you'd like more information about the ministry, please contact [Denise Ballou](#).

**Other items of interest**  
Resources, events and more

- Siebert Lutheran Foundation's annual "Change or Die" conference provides an opportunity for Lutheran ministry leaders to learn from thoughtful speakers and each other, to network, and to be encouraged. Many presentations from the 2018 event this past fall were captured on video, including this [inspiring presentation](#) by ELCA Rev. Dr. Lisa Bates-Froiland on how hospitality helped revive Redeemer Lutheran Church, in downtown Milwaukee.
- The Generosity Project (TGP) connects generations and equips households to be centers for the faith practice of generosity. Many new resources are available for download, "[Generosity Project Intro](#)" (a 36-slide overview with photos), "Foundation and Fundamentals" (for understanding the research and theology behind TGP), "TGP: 5G Planning Guide" (collecting all six 5G sessions) and "TGP: 5G Sessions I & II" (to get started planning). Consider using the six TGP sessions as your Lenten focus this year. [Join the Facebook Group](#) to download resources and learn more.
- Looking for ideas, resources and events concerning faith formation and youth ministry? Check out these great networks and websites that are part of our ELCA ecosystem: [ELCA Youth Gathering](#), [ELCA Youth Ministries Network](#), [the Lutheran Outdoor Ministry Network](#), [the Lutheran Campus Ministry Network](#), and [Ministry Links Online](#).
- stewardCast, a free webcast on Saturday, March 3, from 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. (CST), aims to thank, inform, teach, inspire and connect current and new steward leaders, offering fresh perspectives, practices and skills to address the challenges and issues we face in stewarding our congregations and communities. The intended audience includes individual rostered and lay leaders, congregational stewardship committees and teams, and synodical Mission Support and stewardship tables. Watch [elca.org/stewardship](#) for connection information, or register [here](#) to receive future details.
- A new essay at [HealthierChurch.org](#) offers an interesting perspective from Dr. Ed Kruse on the subject of hospitality. "Hospitality is caring for and welcoming every stranger, giving her or him warmth from the cold, comforting the needy, and providing much-needed food for the hungry," Kruse writes. "Hospitality is intimately connected to our relationship with God and His love for us and others. Hospitality is a spiritual gift. Hospitality fulfills the God-given need of the giver to give. Hospitality builds up the body of Christ and glorifies God. It is living into God's love on the ground." Click [here](#) to read the full essay.
- Maybe we should say, "God's work. Our hands ... and our money!" Church is not and should not be all about money, yet financial resources are necessary to accomplish the important work God calls us to do in our communities, our nation and the world. Mission Support flows from congregations to synods and to our churchwide organization, funding the ministries we all value so highly. For a better explanation of Mission Support, [download this PDF](#) with an article from the October issue of *Living Lutheran* and a related study guide.
- Thrivent denominations has just published a 31-page study on the basic biblical pillars (or principles) that larger denominations, stewardship organizations and megachurches use to guide their financial stewardship practices. [Download "Stewardship as Discipleship" here.](#)
- The latest issue of [Currents in Theology and Mission](#) includes a selection of fresh articles exploring the ELCA's Life of Faith Initiative. This movement insists on a radical paradigm shift, making the service of the baptized in daily life the primary focus.
- More Lutheran congregations make giving easier by offering online giving tools from ELCA-preferred vendors. Review ELCA testimonials about giving solutions from [Tithely](#) and [GivePlus](#).

**Sayings, quotes, thoughts**  
Maya Angelou

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

**Biblical foundations**  
John 21: 12-17

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

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

Jan. 31 – Feb. 3  
[ALDE annual conference](#)  
Grapevine, Texas

Feb. 14  
stewardTalk  
3 p.m. CST at 877-820-7831, participant code 6314685#  
Contact [Neil.Bullock@elca.org](mailto:Neil.Bullock@elca.org) for more information.

March 9  
stewardTalk  
10:30 a.m. CST, watch [elca.org/stewardship](#) for connection instructions.  
Contact [Neil.Bullock@elca.org](mailto:Neil.Bullock@elca.org) for more information.

April 30 – May 2  
"Generosity Transformed" conference  
Ecumenical Stewardship Center, Indianapolis, Ind.  
Contact [Neil.Bullock@elca.org](mailto:Neil.Bullock@elca.org) for more information.

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

[Find ELCA stewardship resources online](#)

