

## THE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF GENEROSITY

There is much to be learned from the theories of human moral, social-emotional and faith development when it comes to understanding one's capacity for generous behavior. In particular, there are parallels found between James Fowler's Stages of Faith and the development of generosity.

Assumptions regarding developmental stages of generosity:

- ❑ Human beings have a natural impulse to be generous, but this impulse must be nurtured and developed to its full expression as a part of one's character. It is a lifelong process.
- ❑ Charitable giving and philanthropy is learned behavior, reflecting one's values, attitudes, and beliefs.
- ❑ The teachings of one's faith community around giving and generosity are highly influential in instilling the value and practice of generous behaviors (sharing, charitable giving, voluntarism).

James Fowler identified ages and stages of faith development:

- ❑ Stage I—Intuitive-Projective Faith (ages 3-7 years)
  - Fantasy-filled, imitative
  - Child influenced by examples, moods, actions, and stories of the visible faith of their caregivers.

*Generosity Implications:* Magical thinking about money, what it is, where it comes from and how it is used. Activities that mimic modeled behavior: pretend shopping, play house and taking care of others (pets & belongings), learning to share.

- ❑ Stage 2—Mythic-Literal Faith (school age children)
  - Adopting the stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to one's community.
  - Literal interpretations; more linear construction of meaning.
  - Fairness is reciprocal and based on the rules and practices of the community.

*Generosity Implications:* Learning the teachings of the faith community regarding giving and stewardship practices, through stories, rituals, and traditions. Rules about money: don't steal, equitable distribution vs. hoarding, understanding its value. Reciprocity is expected.

□ **Stage 3—Synthetic-Conventional Faith** (Adolescence, but also adults)

- World view now extends beyond the family.
- Experience and environments are more complex and faith requires synthesis of a variety of values and information.
- Basis for identity, judgment and action.

*Generosity Implications:* Gaining understanding the complexities of money and resource distribution that does not always seem fair or just. Making choices about giving one's own money and time to causes of interest. Seeing how one can make a difference in the world through giving and helping.

□ **Stage 4—Individuative-Reflective Faith** (Young adults; middle-adulthood)

- Accepting the burden of responsibilities, commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes.
- Experience the tensions: Individuality vs. being defined by group identity.
- Self-fulfillment and self-actualization vs. service and commitment to others.
- Critical reflection on identity (self) and outlook (ideology) to discern one's own truth and reality.

*Generosity Implications:* Struggling with choices and attitudes around values and money—one's own needs vs. concern for others/causes.

□ **Stage 5—Conjunctive Faith** (middle-adulthood, if ever)

- Appreciation and integration of past and new understandings that come from self awareness and identity transformation.
- Able to live with ambiguity and paradoxical nature of faith.
- Trust in the transcendent and divine.
- Willing to sacrifice of oneself for the sake of others.

*Generosity Implications:* Sacrificial giving based on other's needs; compassionate response to needs and justice causes.

□ **Stage 6—Universalizing Faith** (Mature adults; very rare)

- Incarnating and actualizing the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community.
- Devote their lives to a larger cause without regard for personal cost to themselves.
- Often honored and revered after their death, rather than during.
- Feeling at one with God or the source of all creation.

*Generosity Implications:* Willing to sacrifice one's life for the cause.

Research indicates that children learn the value of philanthropic behavior through the following means:

- MODELING*—By observing voluntary behavior intended to help others modeled by their primary caregiver, teacher, or religious leader.
- COGNITIVE LEARNING*—When explicitly informed by a knowledgeable adult about philanthropy, its benefits, and the causes and effects of philanthropic behavior.
- EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING*—Opportunities to engage in giving and serving activities.

*Recommended practices based on current understanding of young people and philanthropic learning and development include the following:*

- Sharing the stories and visual resources that clearly communicate and exemplify the value of helping, sharing, and altruistic behavior. This practice can begin in preschool years.
- Linking the stories and examples of philanthropic behavior to the teachings, values, and the people of the faith. These can be introduced in elementary school years through giving and services activities related to the holiday celebrations and traditions.
- Service-learning activities, particularly effective when introduced during the middle school years.
- Teaching effective interpersonal skills and reflective thinking necessary to develop qualities necessary for mature relationships: empathy, caring, and responsible behavior toward others. This is of particular value to older youth.
- Hands-on activities and structured learning experiences in safe and supportive environment.

#### Developmental Steps to Generosity

- Awareness—introduced to stewardship concepts, but lacking a connection with daily living.
- Learning—Openness to learning more about stewardship and connecting with daily living.
- Practicing—Uses one or more aspects of stewardship in daily life; develops an enthusiasm.
- Teaching—Seeks to impact others through teaching; personal values are reflected in teaching and behaviors.
- Coaching—Developing confidence and expertise in teaching and guiding others in stewardship practices.
- Leading—Learnings and practices are integrated in daily life and all decision-making.

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#### Sources:

*Money Leadership for Thriving Congregations*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

*Creating Tomorrow's Philanthropists: Curriculum Development for Youth*, Patricia O. Bjorhovde, Editor, New Directions for Philanthropic Fundraising, No. 36, Summer 2002, Wiley Periodicals.

*Learning to Give* (<http://Learningtogive.org>) is a program designed for use in K-12 public school classrooms.

*Stages of Faith*, James Fowler. Harper & Row. 1981.

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July 2008**