

Dear Friends,

Have you ever stopped to think about what inspires you to be generous? Do you have a plan for how and where you donate your time and money?

A Philanthropic Autobiography can help us identify our passions and provide a meaningful guide for how we want to direct our generosity and engage in faithful stewardship. In fact, a Philanthropic Autobiography can be an engaging and fun group activity for adult education, either in-person or virtually.

Through this activity, we invite people to think consciously about their involvement with giving, volunteering and all charitable activities. People recall the ways in which they first came to experience and learn about giving and volunteering. Along the way, people rediscover what it is in their own story that motivates them to be generous on behalf of others.

We help people grow in their giving when we create opportunities to reflect on their life story. The experiences in our lives that have meaning and shape who we are inform our giving and generosity. Through reflecting on questions such as, “What is your earliest memory of giving or receiving?” or “To what people and places do you feel a sense of gratitude?” and then sharing responses with a conversation partner, people begin the process of creating their Philanthropic Autobiography.

Please use the resource below to organize an in-person or virtual Philanthropic Autobiography in your congregation.

Yours in Faith,

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Wisconsin Conference

ACM for Faith Formation and Justice Ministries

THE PHILANTHROPIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Socrates’ most famous philosophical maxim was “know yourself.” The Philanthropic Autobiography is an opportunity for you to reflect on **who you are** and to think consciously about your involvement in giving, generosity and volunteering. It is also an opportunity to recall how you came to experience and learn about charitable giving, generosity, and what in your story motivates you to volunteer your time and give your money. It also shares through story your expertise for the benefit of others.

Take a few moments to reflect on the following questions and share your story with one another. What does your story say to you about generosity and giving?

Online (Zoom) sharing method: Read the question to participants and type it in the chat. Then put participants random breakout rooms with two people per room. Allow 4 minutes per question. Each participant should spend 2 minutes sharing their answer with their partner. (The facilitator/host can broadcast a reminder to all breakout rooms when it is time to switch storytellers.) When participants return to the main room, provide the next question and recreate the breakout rooms so that pairs are random. Repeat process for each question.

In-person sharing method: With a group of persons form an outer and inner circle with participants facing each other. Share question (1-8). Give 30 seconds to think of a response. Give 1-2 minute to each participant to tell their story while other “listens.” Switch to second person. After both have shared rotate inner (or outer) circle one person. Repeat process with each question.

Example Questions:

1. What is your earliest memory of giving or receiving? (Money or service/volunteering)
2. Did your family talk about money in your home? What did you learn from your family about giving and volunteering? Did they teach this by doing, by telling, or both?
3. What are some of the practices of faith and giving that you remember from your childhood?
4. Who has most deeply touched your life, or influenced your family as a giver? What makes this mentor memorable?
5. To what people and places do you feel a sense of gratitude?
6. What is the most meaningful or memorable gift you have ever received? What is the most meaningful or memorable gift you have ever given?
7. What values/things do you hold most dear?
8. How do you want to be remembered by your family and friends?

Debrief:

After all questions have been discussed, you may choose to come together to debrief on what the experience was like. How did it feel to reflect on these questions? Were they surprised by anything? Did they discover anything about themselves?

Follow up activity:

Participants can be given a list of the questions and encouraged to spend time reflecting on the questions and journaling their responses. Additionally, encourage people to share their philanthropic story with their family and close friends.

Ideas for going more in-depth:

Meet in small groups to discuss the questions and share stories. Each session can focus on a different question, or a couple of questions. Either provide the questions in advance or allow a few minutes for participants to reflect on the questions before beginning to share with each

other. Encourage participants to continue reflecting and to journal between sessions. (The number of sessions will depend on how many questions you want to reflect on.)

Additional questions you may want to reflect on:

- Reflect on a gift you've given: How did it come about? How did you feel?
- Was there a time in your life when you or your family needed help? Who provided that help, and what did you take away from that experience?
- In what ways have you benefited from larger-scale institutional philanthropy?
- Think about the giving and volunteering you do currently. Where did you learn how to do philanthropy in that way?
- What is your earliest family memory of giving and volunteering with the congregation you were part of as a child?
- What are some of the practices of faith and giving that are memorable to you?
- List some of the ways your family practiced their faith through giving and volunteering.
- Did your family talk about money in front of you as a child?
- Did you know how much your family earned and how much they gave to charity?
- Who are some of the philanthropic role models that have influenced you?
- List one or two of the major disappointments or challenges in your life that have shaped who you are today.
- What is the most meaningful charitable gift that you have received and/or given to date?
- When did you “wake up” to the desire to be generous?