

Greater Milwaukee Synod

Stewardship as Congregational Cohesion

On crumb cakes

the world took so many bites of me that
my life looked like an empty plate

eventually there was just one last
morsel of myself left on the floor

and now I believe
in the miracle of how

a single crumb can become a cake again

~ john roedel





Stewarding Life in Relationship

Give and Get

Market Swap for the Masses



Give and Get REdux

-What was your goal as you played the game?

-What were the rules?

-What are the rules in the marketplace of existence?

-What are the rules in God's ecology?

-How are you participating, Beloved? Under what assumptions?



Introduction to Poetry
By Billy Collins
I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide
or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Introduction to (Scripture)
By Billy Collins (edited by Tim Brown)
I ask them to take (Scripture)
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide
or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into (Scripture)
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the (Verses) room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of (Scripture)
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie (Scripture) to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Introduction to (Stewardship)
By Billy Collins (Edited by Tim Brown)
I ask them to take (Stewardship)
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide
or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into (Generosity)
and watch (her) probe (her) way out,

or walk inside the (Generousity's) room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of (A Gift)
waving at the (Giver's) name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie (Fundraising) to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

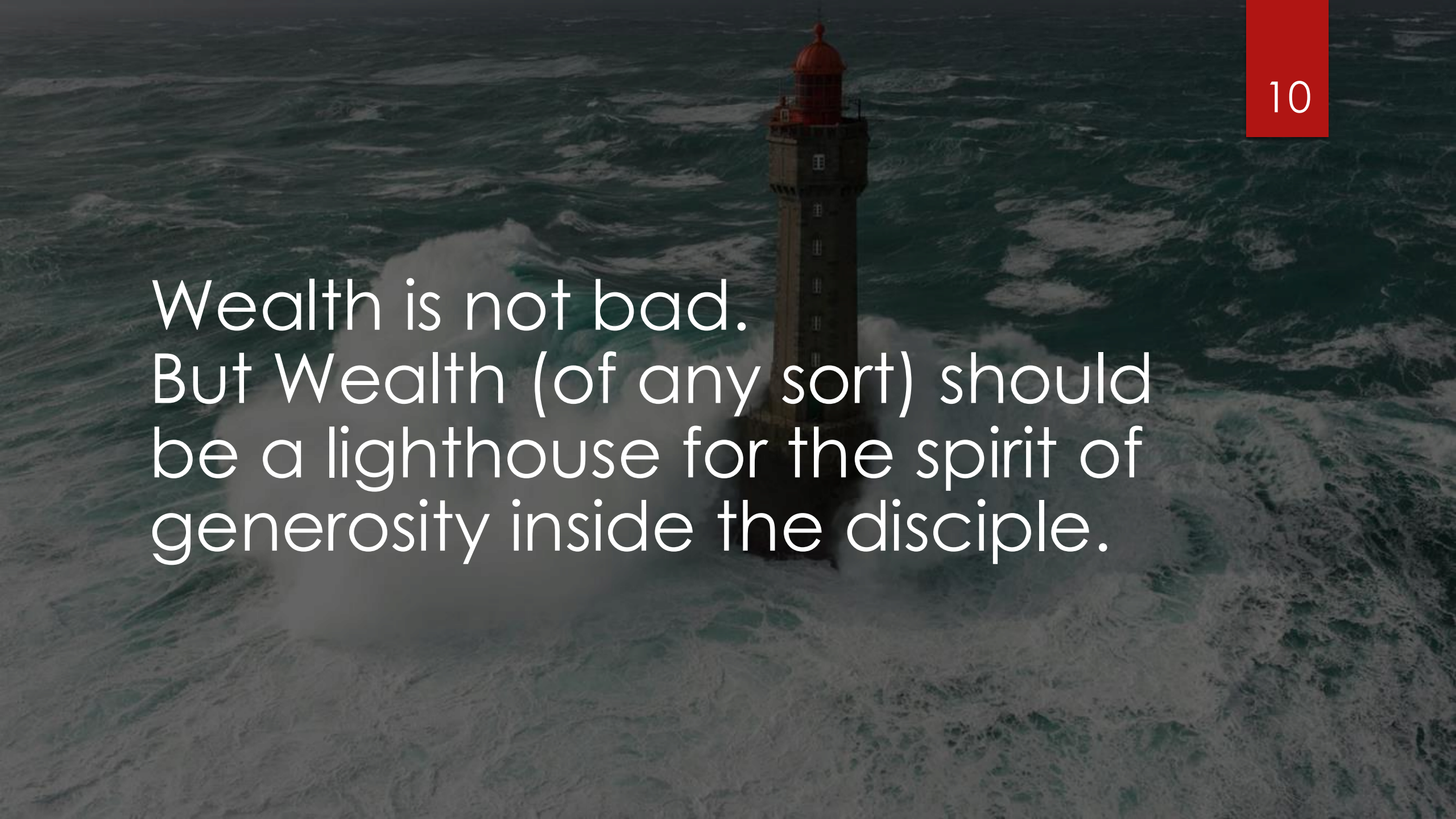
They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what really (Works).



The Situation

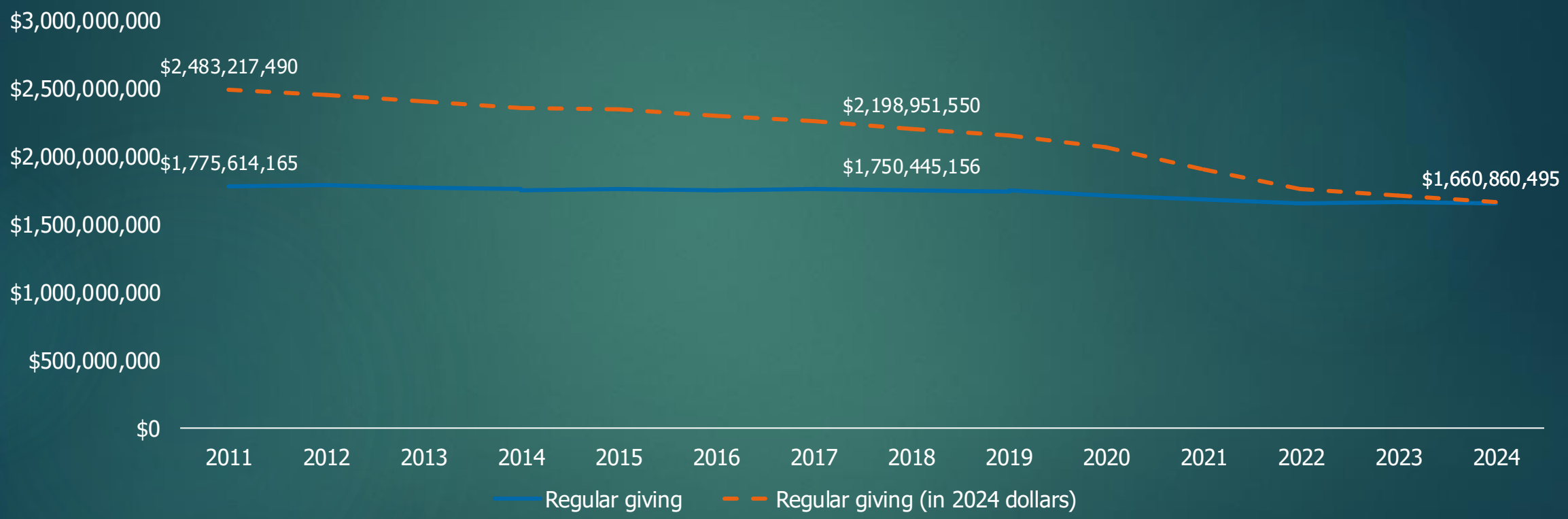
- *America's top 10% added $5T (yeah, trillion) to their wealth in the second quarter of this year alone (a record breaking $113T)*
- *All wealth brackets grew some, even the lower half of Americans (6%) in the last year*
- *But even that has not kept up with inflation on cost of living in the US*
- *The number of Americans worth $30million+ grew 6.5% in the first half of the year (208k)*
- *A Christianity obsessed with sex has, it seems, abandoned any guardrails on greed…*

(-info from Axios



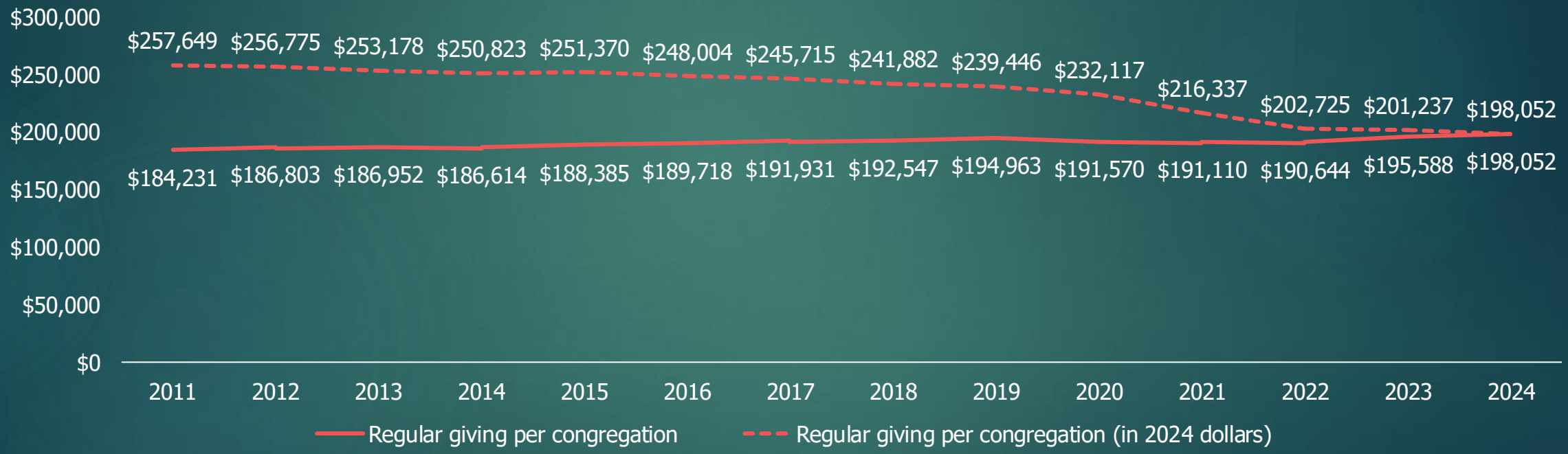
Wealth is not bad.
But Wealth (of any sort) should be a lighthouse for the spirit of generosity inside the disciple.

Overall, giving to ELCA congregations has declined.



(Source: Regular income; 2011-2024 ELCA Annual Congregation Reports)

Average giving per congregation has increased but declined relative to inflation.



(Source: Regular income and congregational counts; 2011-2024 ELCA Annual Congregation Reports)

Average giving per member is complicated.



(Source: Regular income and confirmed membership; 2011-2024 ELCA Annual Congregation Reports)

GUT REACTIONS ONLY, PLEASE…

What Is the Offering For, Today?

Pay the Bills

(NUMBER ONE ANSWER ON FAMILY FEUD)



Stewardship in Ancient Judaism

- Karbanot (pre-Second Temple Judaism) Functioned in three primary ways:
  - A giving and renunciation
  - A substitution or repentance
  - A means of drawing close

Congregational Stewardship

oikonomos = Steward or manager

oikonomia = Stewardship or management

Stewardship moves at the speed of relationship.

Relationship to God
Relationship to Mission
Relationship to Leaders
Relationship to Themselves

Scripture and Stewardship



Genesis 1:1-2:4

The first creation story is an interesting story when seen through the lens of stewardship.

"(26) Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in ***our image***, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping creeper (tjb translation) on the earth." So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God they were created; male and female they were created. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and ***subdue*** it; and have ***dominion*** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth and has life. I have given every green plant for food." and it was so..



Scripture and Stewardship

- What was entrusted?
- What permissions (and guardrails)?
- What words come to mind when reading this story?
- "Our image" a nod to the Trinitarian nature of God (ala Luther) and the communal stewardship of the Divine?
- "Subdue" or *kabash* – tame, as in a wild field for farming
- "Dominion" or *radah* –rule or subjugate…what is the interpretive stewardship lens? (Canipe reference)
- Any interpretation that places humans only as consumers is not an interpretation with God's divine nature at the core!

Uncaring stewards are bad…lazy…wasteful…unfaithful stewards, Beloved



Letter to the Person Who Carved His Initials into the Oldest Living Longleaf Pine in North America
by Matthew Olzmann, Southern Pines, NC

Tell me what it's like to live without
curiosity, without awe. To sail
on clear water, rolling your eyes
at the kelp reefs swaying
beneath you, ignoring the flicker
of mermaid scales in the mists,
looking at the world and feeling
only boredom. To stand
on the precipice of some wild valley,
the eagles circling, a herd of caribou
booming below, and to yawn
with indifference. To discover
something primordial and holy.
To have the smell of the earth
welcome you to everywhere.

To take it all in, and then,
to reach for your knife.



Scripture and Generosity

- Matthew 2:1-12
- (1b) Magi from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Judeans? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage…" (9) When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they rejoiced with joy, very much! (David Jacobsen awkward translation). On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road."
- -art by Fernan Mora

Scripture and Generosity

- What were they doing?
- Why were they doing it?
- What words come to mind when reading this story?
- Magi or *magoi* –astrologers (and definitely Gentiles)
- It's both cosmic and international and there is humility in noticing the changes in the world
- Like John, this is a "re-Genesis" (hence the genealogy) but instead of a created order, it's a social reordering (and a theological one, too!)
- Oddness of the gifts cannot be overlooked!
- What, Beloved, are we willing to give up to honor a God who reorders the world with the margins at the center? Practices? Things? What does it mean to live in wonder?





Scripture and Stewardship

- Matthew 21:15-22

Jesus and the Coin

- 15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. 17 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax[a] to Caesar or not?"
- 18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? 19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"
- 21 "Caesar's," they replied.
- Then he said to them, "**So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.**"
- 22 When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Scripture and Stewardship

- What do you notice?
- What is confusing?
- What comes to mind when you think of this story?
- "Asked to comment on Jesus' saying 'Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's' Dorothy Day took a moment or two and then replied, 'If we were to render unto God all the things which are God's, there would be nothing left for Caesar…" (William Sloane Coffin)
- Who has the coin?
- Notice the non-answer Jesus gives

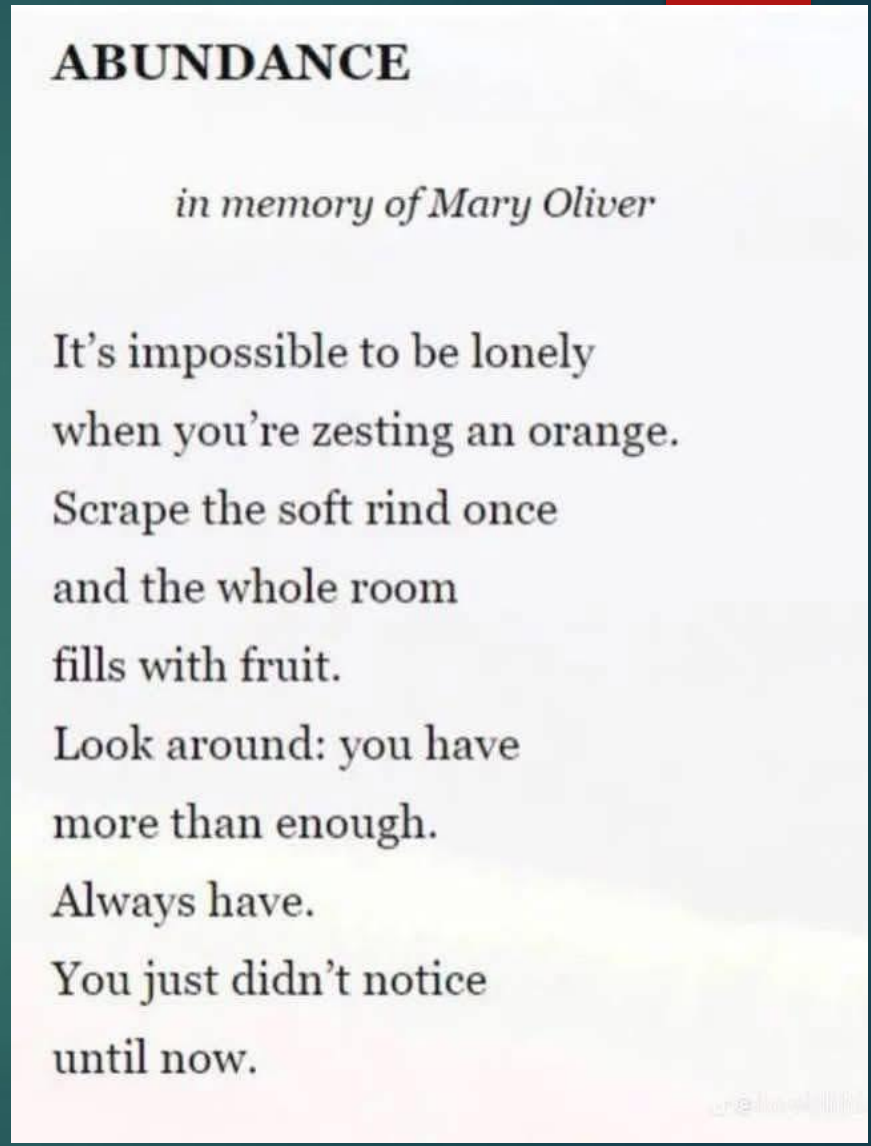



What is your favorite story of generosity in scripture?

Generosity is Deeply contextual

-poem by Amy Schmidt

Curiosity is the friend here…



ABUNDANCE

in memory of Mary Oliver

It's impossible to be lonely
when you're zesting an orange.
Scrape the soft rind once
and the whole room
fills with fruit.
Look around: you have
more than enough.
Always have.
You just didn't notice
until now.



Short Story Time:

The Grind

What Unique Thing Does Your Church Do to Change Lives?

What would be missing in your town/city/neighborhood if your community was gone tomorrow?

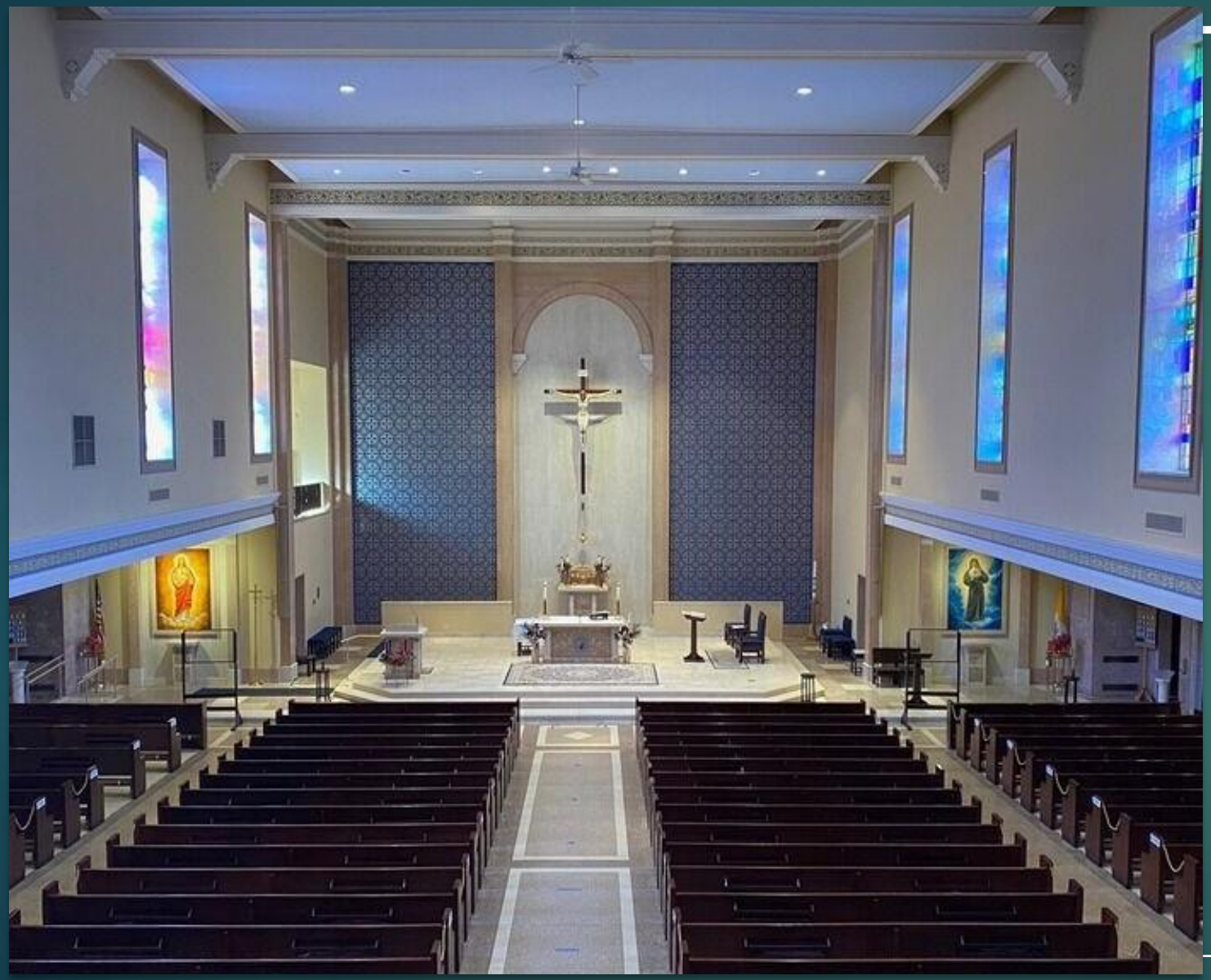
What stories of life-change through Christ are alive in your church?

How are those in your community uniquely generous and how can you tell these stories?

Story

some people
when they hear
your story.
contract.
others
upon hearing
your story.
expand.
and this is how
you
know.

-Nayyirah Waheed



Stewarding Specifically in Communities of Faith

Top 10 Next Practical Steps

Some Stats on US Churches:

- NEARLY HALF OF US CONGREGATIONS ARE IN RURAL AREAS (25%) OR SMALL TOWNS (22%)
- ONLY 6% OF AMERICANS LIVE IN RURAL AREAS
- ONLY 8% OF AMERICANS LIVE IN SMALL TOWNS
- SIZE IS NOT IMPORTANT…FAITHFULNESS IS
- VITALITY IS NOT MEASURED IN NUMBERS



Remember: Vital ≠ Large

#1: Realize that you don't need "young families" to be vital

#2: Realize that you don't need to be "everything to everyone" to be vital

#3 Become crystal clear about your mission as a community.

Practical Application

#4 Offering is not optional

Use real examples

Talk about how you're changing lives.

Make a direct connection between what's happening in the plate and what's happening in the community

It must be a time of giving thanks…it's not a "may" rubric

#5 Invest in Paper

Say "thank you" a lot

Become friends with your local card monger

Take notes on what works and what doesn't

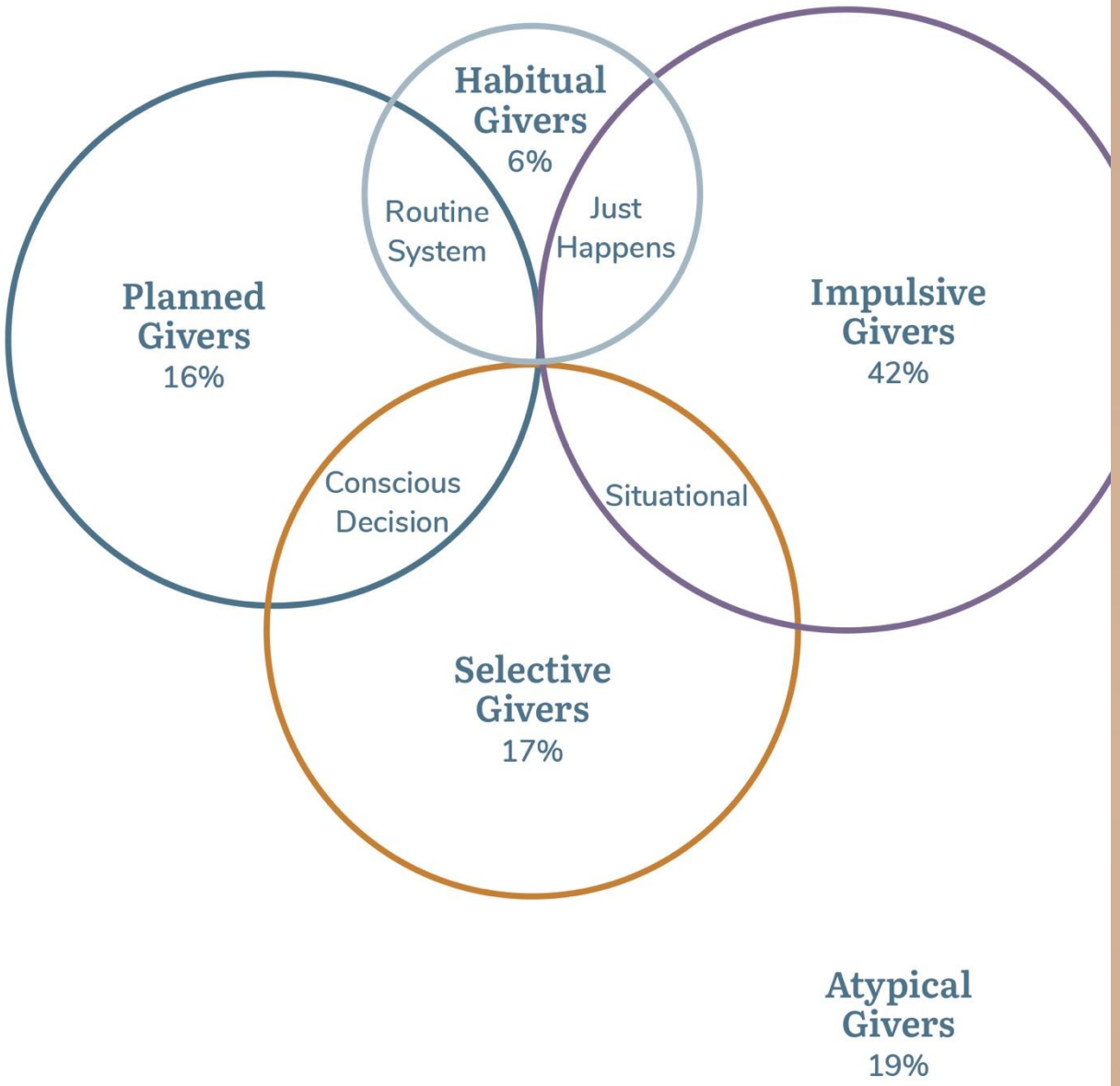
#6 Invest in Stories

Emotions move others, not logic or numbers…do a narrative budget

Inspiration more than information

Quotes, quotes, quotes

WHY PEOPLE GIVE



age = 0.839; Solution Consistency = 0.905

e 3.2: Giver Type Participation Rates[39]

- Lake Institute on Faith and Giving

- Adapted from Herzog, P. and Price, H. (2016). American Generosity: Who Gives and Why. Oxford Univ. Press. p. 121.







The Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center

Pastor Dan Johnson

The ministry at the Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center has many different faces. We work with a partner to run the only homeless shelter on the Pine Ridge Reservation—giving 30 to 50 people each night a warm place to stay, often in freezing temperatures. The center is used as a day shelter; the only place in town for unhoused people to do laundry, take a shower, and be cared for.

After school there is a successful kid's program. We are a lifeline for hot meals, activities, and love. Each week we provide our kids with a snack bag full of food to have for the weekend. For many kids, the only hot meal they get outside of school may be at our place. Our goal is to make sure every kid feels wanted and special. We work with more than 50 kids every week.

We are making a difference in the lives of the Lakota people in Pine Ridge 365 days a year.

This work happens because of the support of the South Dakota Synod, congregations, partners, and individuals. Your support of the Synod supports the work we do in Pine Ridge.

God bless you.

Ministry Highlights

- Awarding $21,447 in Storm Micro Grants to help members and congregations recover from severe weather events and $10,500 in Micro Grants to the feeding ministries of our congregations and worshiping
- Hosted "I've Been Elected to Council, Now What?" to support congregational lay leaders and supported rostered lay leaders with regular in-person and virtual meetings, such as monthly rostered minister virtual check-ins, Synod Authorized Minister, Senior Pastor, and Interim Pastor check-

Mission Plan
$248,447.90



#7 Narrative Mission Spending Plans

NOT AS HARD AS YOU THINK

#8 Discipleship

How are we forming one another?

Every opportunity you have to mention generosity as part of the discipleship story, do it.

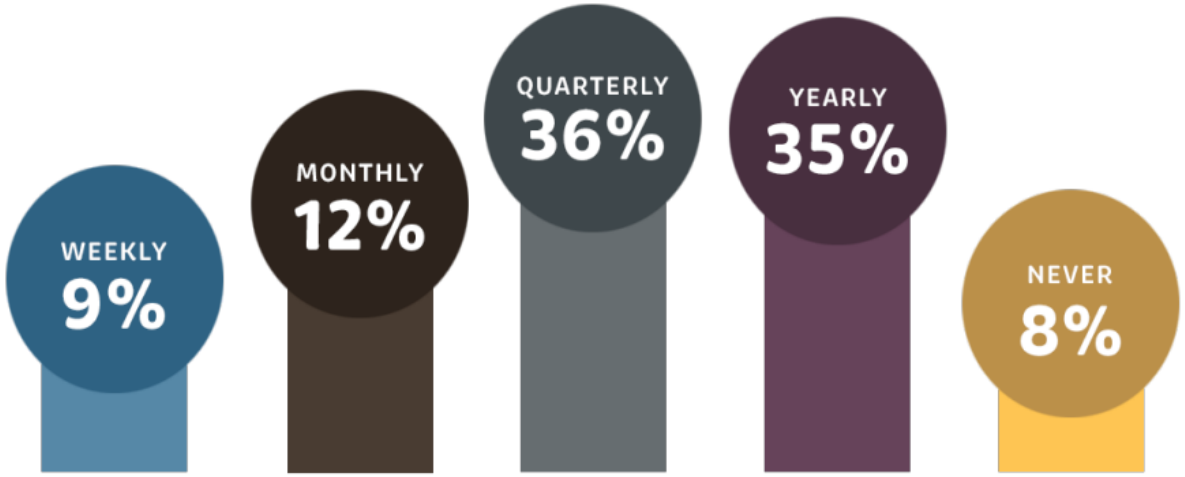
Are you offering stewardship education in the community?
-Bible Study?
-Book Study?
-Financial Literacy Courses?



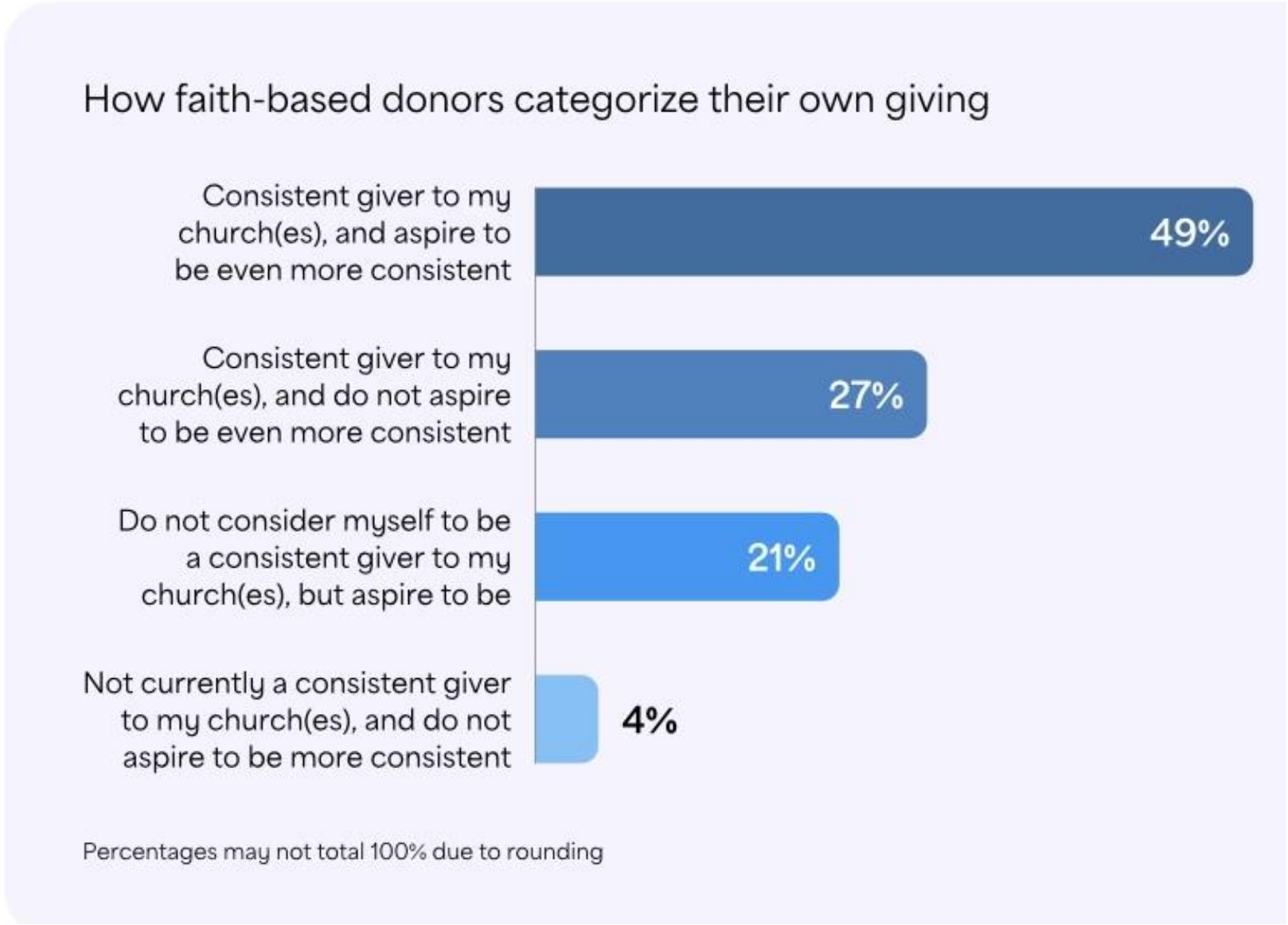
National Study of Congregations' Economic Practices

Sou
NSC

FREQUENCY OF TEACHING ABOUT GIVING

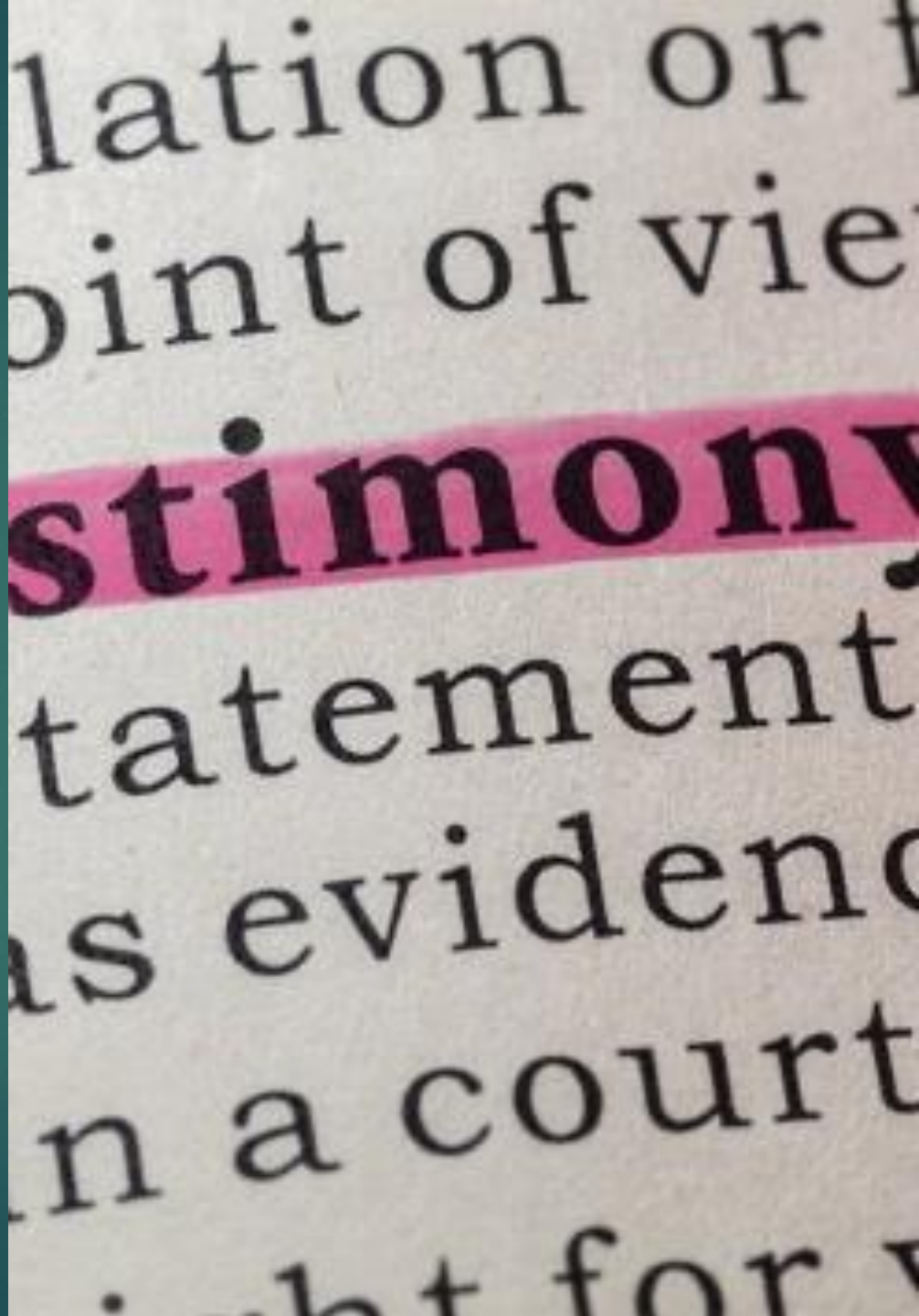


LAKE INSTITUTE
on Faith & Giving

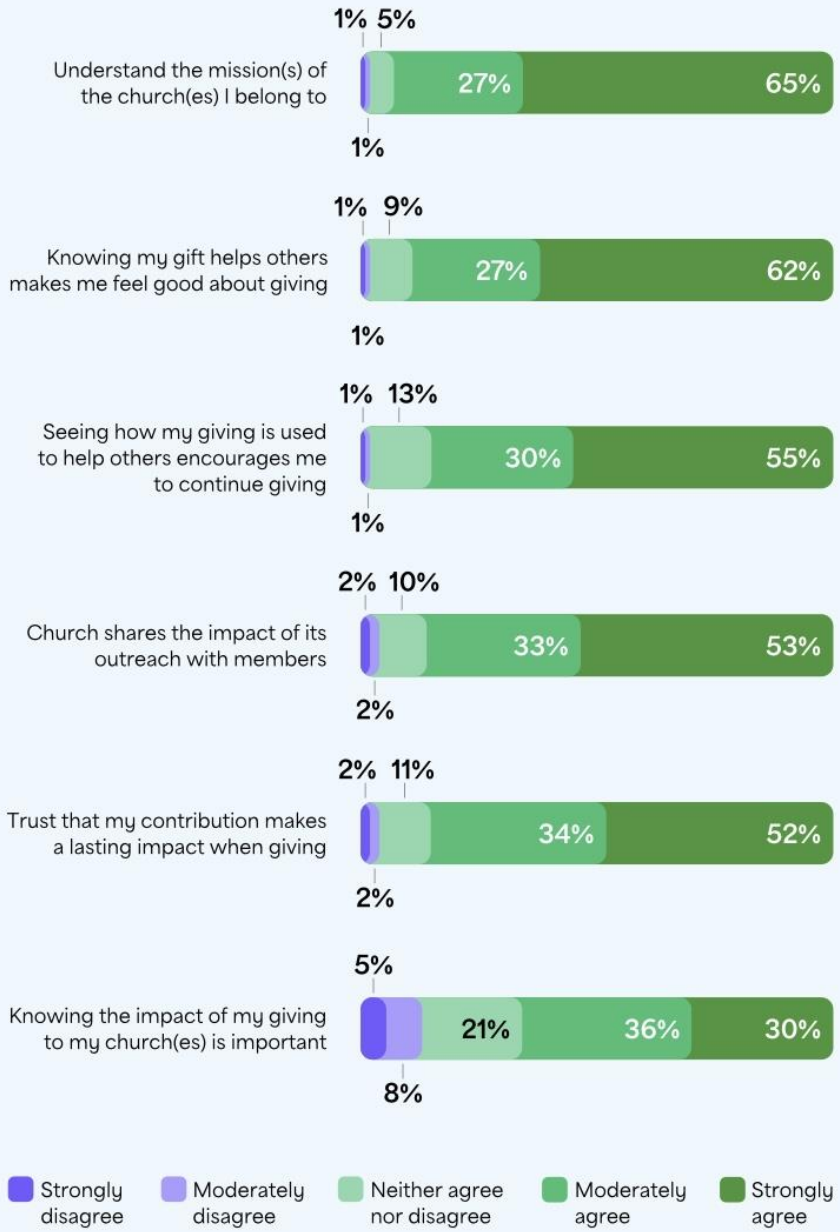

How faith-based donors categorize their own giving
Consistent giver to my church(es), and aspire to be even more consistent
49%
Consistent giver to my church(es), and do not aspire to be even more consistent
27%
Do not consider myself to be a consistent giver to my church(es), but aspire to be
21%
Not currently a consistent giver to my church(es), and do not aspire to be more consistent
4%
Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

#9 Retake Testimony

Why do you respond to God's word with your gifts?



Faith-based donors' sentiments on their church's mission and the impact of their giving



#10 Consider possible third income streams

How can we imagine fueling ministry past the offering plate?



Introductions of Church Property resource hub







The CPRH is the place to find…

- **Practical tools:** Template rental agreements, zoning and legal guidance, and step-by-step guides.
- **Learning that empowers:** On-demand courses, webinars and resources to strengthen your property management and vision.
- **Real-world encouragement:** Success stories from faith communities using their spaces in creative and faithful ways.
- **Peer support:** A discussion forum hosted on the ELCA's LeadNet platform where you can learn from leaders with property transition experience.

Resources Available Now

- Space Sharing
- Community Engagement
- Legal Information
- Mission Exploration
- Property Management
- Property Development
- Property Transition/Holy Closure





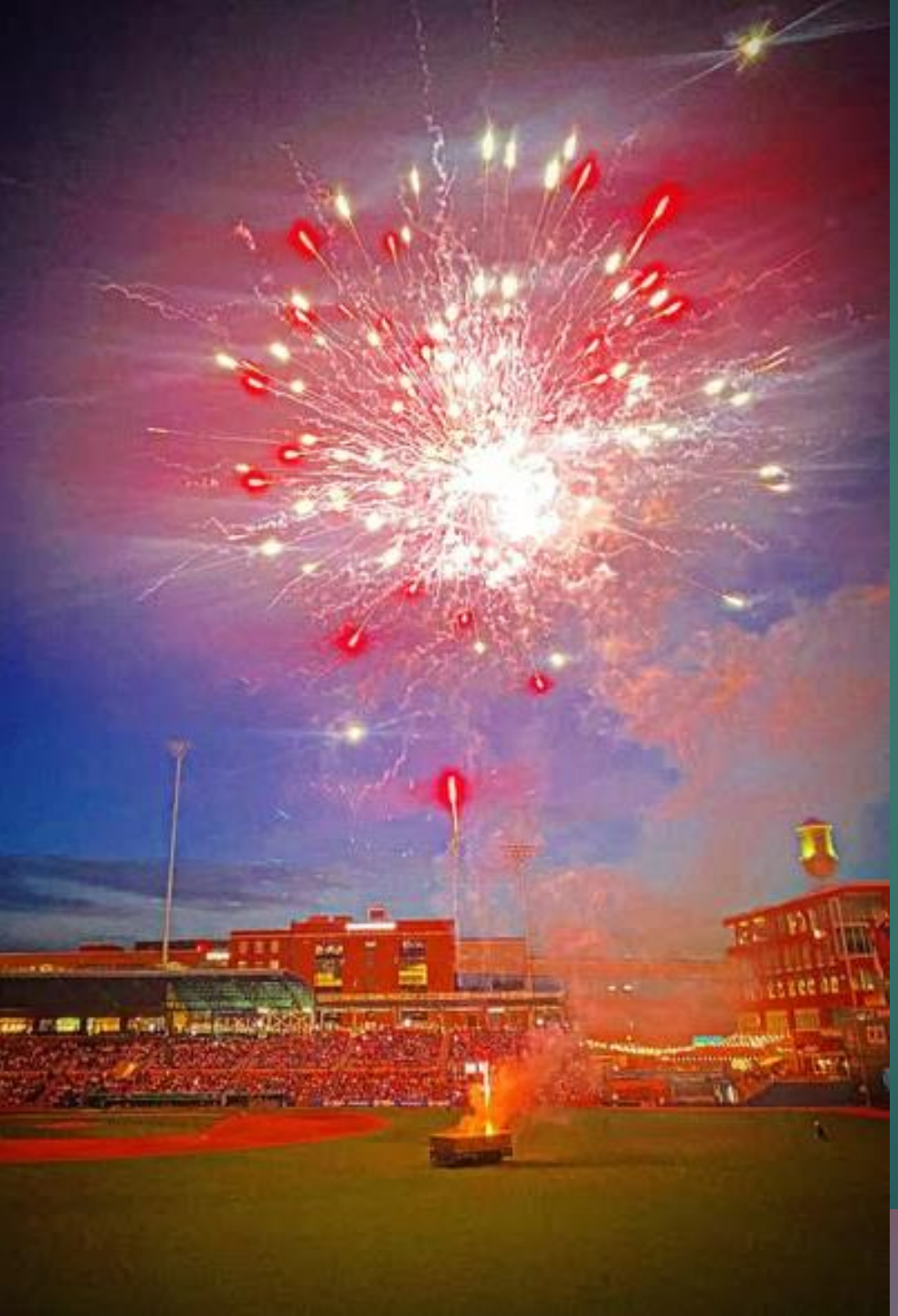
Planned Giving as Planned Future

- Required Minimum Distribution
- QCD's
- Bequest Celebrations
- Endowment Advantages



Rethink that Stewardship Team

THEY AREN'T THE "FUNDRAISERS" FOR THE CHURCH, BUT THE "DISCIPLESHIP ENCOURAGERS" FOR THE COMMUNITY.



Mission-Oriented imagination

- You can starve in a pantry if you just look at the floor, beloved…

Re-Imagine that Offering Time…

- PASS THE PLATE?
- VOLUNTEER SIGN-UP?
- ADVOCACY MOMENT?
- PRAYER BOARD?



Cultivate Within Yourself the Diamond of a Spiritual Practice

HOW ARE YOU INTENTIONALLY PRACTICING STEWARDSHIP IN YOUR LIFE?



What Generosity Practice Do You Want to Lean Into in This Next Season of Life?

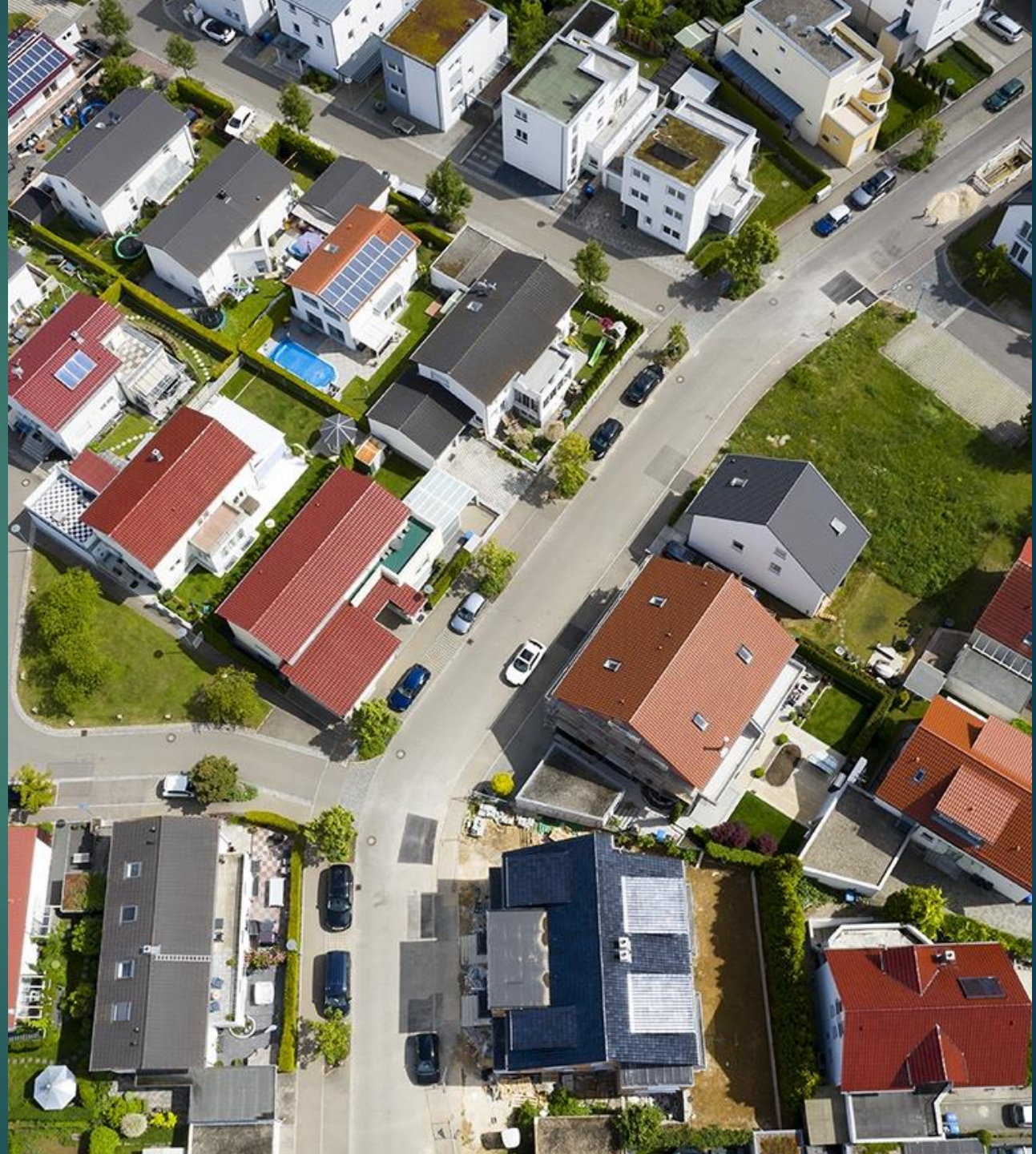
Time for a truth-telling thought experiment



What is this?

Now?

I WANT THE ONE WITH THE POOL




Here's
the
Truth
KA-CRAK
STRANGER
THINGS



WHAT ARE YOU WALKING AWAY WITH HERE?



WHAT DO YOU WISH THERE WAS MORE OF?



WHAT IS MISSING ALTOGETHER?

Aha!? Take Away? Note?

Don't Give Up On Community, Beloved…

oh, but that's the irony.
broken people
are not fragile.

-Clinton Sassy Jr.