



Lake Institute
ON FAITH & GIVING

CULTIVATING THRIVING COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

THE PROMISE OF STRATEGIC RELIGIOUS PHILANTHROPY

C R A I G D Y K S T R A , P h D

Cultivating Thriving Communities of Faith: The Promise of Strategic Religious Philanthropy

Craig Dykstra, PhD

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**LAKE INSTITUTE
ON FAITH & GIVING**

LILLY FAMILY SCHOOL OF PHILANTHROPY

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FOREWORD

For more than a decade, Lake Institute on Faith & Giving has been privileged to host annually a distinguished scholar to present a public lecture that engages our community in reflection and understanding of the ways in which faith inspires and informs giving.

Cultivating Thriving Communities of Faith: The Promise of Strategic Religious Philanthropy, the 11th Annual Thomas H. Lake Lecture on Faith & Giving offered by Dr. Craig Dykstra, former Senior Vice President for Religion at Lilly Endowment Inc. and now Senior Fellow and Research Professor at Duke Divinity School, has special meaning.

Tom Lake's leadership of Lilly Endowment and mentorship of Dr. Dykstra, coupled with the vision of Dr. Robert Wood Lynn and Dr. Bill Enright, created Lake Institute on Faith & Giving in honor of Tom & Marjorie Lake. We benefit immensely from Dr. Enright's leadership of the institute's first decade and creation of a dissertation fellowship that has brought us Dr. David King who now leads the Lake Institute. Together, they have created a thriving community of thought and practice at the intersection of faith and philanthropy.

It is a special honor to have Dr. Dykstra, my colleague and friend for more than a quarter of a century, share his experiences and lessons on this topic. An extraordinary scholar, thought leader and grant maker and an outstanding role model, he is a man of vision, faith, generosity and integrity. He is both a builder of communities of faith and a grateful and gracious participant.

In these remarks reflecting on his 23 years of religious grant making on behalf of the largest religious grantor in the United States, Dr. Dykstra noted that two questions shaped his approach to his work: (1) What does it mean to be a community of faith? (2) Under what conditions are local congregations likely to thrive?

Pivotal to answering both questions is the interplay between what Dykstra calls the *pastoral* and the *ecclesial imagination*. He described this as the capacity to look with eyes of faith beneath the surface of things to see what is really going on both in the congregation and the surrounding world—the hidden truths, gifts and possibilities—and then to respond faithfully and imaginatively. This practice helps you to understand who you are, to see your work and mission in the context of the larger community in which you live as it places you in the vast ecology of faith that nourishes and sustains us all.

Dr. Dykstra concluded his insightful presentation by outlining five principles that shape the path to wise grant making and a strategic religious philanthropy that is life-changing for both donor and grantee.

1. Clarity of purpose is indispensable. The philanthropist, giver or grantor needs to have a vision of the ultimate ends toward which grants and gifts are given. Here theology and religious values are crucial. So too are deliberate efforts to listen to, learn about and discuss the hopes of grantees of diverse faith traditions and perspectives.

2. A coherent strategy requires a basic understanding of the conditions under which faith communities are likely to thrive. The philanthropist needs to have a sense of what a grant or a particular gift can do to help faith communities become most fully what they are called to be. What will enable them to realize a worthy vision? What can help them make a difference in the life of the world? Good answers to these questions open the path to fruitful ministry.

3. Be innovative; take into account both the long and broad view of religious life. In what ways are particular communities of faith part of something bigger than themselves? How can and do they relate to the larger whole of which they are an essential part and in which they can play a critical role?

4. Strategic philanthropy requires a profound sense of abundance. Abundance has to do with much more than the economic capacity of the grantor; it has to do primarily with the abundance of the grantee. What are the “gifts already resident” in the leaders and people of their congregations, neighborhoods, communities? How can their creative capacities be put to their best use?

5. Strategic philanthropy cultivates a shared community of faith. Effective philanthropy provides opportunities for “sustained conversations” among grantees engaged in a common endeavor. As grantors and grantees learn and share wisdom together, a larger, better informed and more vital community of faith emerges as a living legacy.

Dr. Dykstra concludes: “When the kind of philanthropy I have been describing stirs the lives of grantees and the communities and persons they touch, these strategic principles gradually begin to shape the purposes and self-understandings of the institutions involved, [enabling] them to engage more creatively and fruitfully in their own work.”

Cultivating Thriving Communities of Faith: The Promise of Strategic Religious Philanthropy is an insightful reflection that masterfully conveys invaluable lessons learned through a lifetime of philanthropic thought and practice. It captures the synergy of Dr. Dykstra’s work as a conversation partner, thought leader, philanthropic steward, scholar and person of faith, as well as the spirit of collaboration, community and shared learning that Lake Institute on Faith & Giving strives to achieve in all of its endeavors.

Gene Tempel, Ed.D.

Founding Dean

Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy

Cultivating Thriving Communities of Faith: The Promise of Strategic Religious Philanthropy

The 11th Annual Thomas H. Lake Lecture
Lake Institute on Faith & Giving
Indiana University
Lilly Family School of Philanthropy

Craig Dykstra, PhD
March 27, 2014

Twenty-five years ago, I received a phone call from Tom Lake inviting me to become the next Vice President for Religion at Lilly Endowment. Tom's invitation changed my life in profound and deeply gratifying ways. It gave me a distinctive and fulfilling kind of work to do as well as an extraordinary community within which to do it. It felt from the beginning like a true calling to me, and for that gift I am more grateful than I will ever be able to express.

I worked closely with Tom Lake for ten years. The encouragement, trust, support and wise counsel he provided were of inestimable value to me. I learned from him a great deal about the connection between faith and giving, in no small part because he was himself a person of vibrant faith and generosity. I also experienced Tom's devotion to the legacy he inherited from the founders of Lilly Endowment—their values and fundamental philanthropic purposes. I saw how he sustained them throughout his leadership, and then passed them on to succeeding generations. I am particularly grateful, of course, that Lilly Endowment's efforts in the field of religion have continued unabated—and have, under Tom Lofton's and Clay Robbins' leadership, been significantly enlarged. This is both unique and remarkable in the history of philanthropy.

Because of my personal relationship with Tom Lake and my many years of work at Lilly Endowment, I bring a distinctive perspective to the Lake Lectureship.

Unlike all my forebears in this lecture series, I knew well the person for whom it is named. I also enjoyed the friendship of his daughter, Karen Lake Buttrey, and her husband, Don, whose gift made the Lake Institute possible. It was my privilege to be the program officer who for many years worked most closely with the Center on Philanthropy and its leadership. For 25 years, I have had a pastor and dear friend in Bill Enright, with whom my life and work have been intertwined.

So I come to this lecture not as a scholar in the field, but as a practitioner. I come not as a stranger, but as a member of the community that surrounds, supports and benefits from the Lake Institute and the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. I come also, like Tom Lake, as a person of Christian faith, one who believes that faith matters, that communities of faith matter, and that the work of cultivating thriving communities of faith is an entirely worthy and important philanthropic endeavor.

I

One day, not too long after I arrived at Lilly Endowment, Tom Lake and Tom Lofton asked me to join them for a conversation about the work of the Religion Division. It was at a time when the Endowment's assets were increasing significantly, and they wanted us to do what we could to have a significant impact on the religious lives of American Christians, particularly by helping local congregations thrive as communities of faith and by providing their ministers opportunities to be renewed and strengthened in their pastoral leadership.

That was the challenge. The practical question was: How should we approach this challenge? To whom should we make grants? And for what purposes? But behind these immediate practical concerns were two prior and more fundamental questions:

- What does it mean to be a community of faith? and
- Under what conditions is it most likely that local congregations might thrive?

Our theme is “Cultivating Thriving Communities of Faith: The Promise of Strategic Religious Philanthropy.” What I hope to do is describe some of the ways my understanding has been enriched and how some of the responses to these questions have emerged as I helped Lilly Endowment wrestle with this challenge.

Along the way, I will tell you a few stories about congregations and people whose experiences have informed our work and describe some of the initiatives we undertook. My hope is that my elucidation of this on-the-ground interplay of fundamental reflection and strategic practice will be useful to you as you engage in your own practices of faith and giving.

One of the most remarkable discoveries I made through my work at the Endowment is that, despite the well-publicized so-called decline in American Christianity and the often gloomy prognoses of many critics, there are in fact thousands and thousands of vibrant and faithful congregations with gifted and able ministers spread all over this country in every imaginable place—in small towns and big cities, in poor neighborhoods and others of significant means, across a wide range of faith traditions, involving people of every race and ethnic background. What a gift it is to be a part of such a congregation, and what a beautiful thing it is to see a good pastor at work. It is quite stunning to behold, and something for which to be profoundly grateful.

These communities of faith—these local congregations—are cultivated, day in and day out, year by year, by their own people and their pastoral leaders as they together draw upon each other's gifts and strengths in response to the presence and summons of a gracious and loving God. Moreover, they participate in and connect with a still larger community of communities that together constitute a living ecology of institutions and organizations that nurture increasing strength, vitality and fruitfulness in the whole.

Observing these congregations and these pastors over the years, I have come to the conviction that at the very heart of the life of a strong, faithful, vital congregation is the interplay of what I have come to call pastoral and ecclesial imagination. "Pastoral imagination" is the capacity good pastors have to enter many diverse situations, whether joyous or full of misery and conflict, and see what is going on there through eyes of faith. This way of seeing and interpreting shapes what the pastor thinks and does and how she or he responds to people in gestures, words, and actions. It functions as a kind of internal gyroscope, guiding pastoral leaders in and through every crevice of their life and work.

Something similar in character can emerge within whole communities of faith as well. Many, many local congregations are places where people of all ages learn to live lives that truly do reflect God’s grace for themselves and for others. Through their worship and their immersion in Scripture, through their care for one another and for those in need—particularly as they reach out not only to their friends and neighbors, but also to strangers and even to enemies, to be with them in their needs and struggles—these congregations learn together to experience and to trust the love and mercy of God. In their common life and in their local settings, they come alive in ways that accord with the promises of God. They come to see through eyes of faith, and the world—especially that part of the world that is their own local context—looks different. This is what I mean by “ecclesial imagination.”¹

II

Let me illustrate. Broadway United Methodist Church, located right here in Indianapolis, is an integral part of a low-income community, one in which its people often struggle with the difficulties its economic challenges bring. So it comes as quite a surprise when you find on the church’s website the following statements of conviction:

We believe in extravagant grace: We believe that God loves us all, and nothing we do—or don’t do—can change that; [and]

We see abundance. We believe everybody is a child of God with gifts to offer the world. . . . [So] we strive to focus on the many diverse gifts of our neighbors and members, not their deficiencies.²

Broadway UMC takes these convictions very seriously. The congregation has deliberately structured its whole life and ministry in a way that enables it to live out

¹ For an extended discussion of these two terms, see Craig Dykstra, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination,” *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 41-61.

² Broadway United Methodist Church’s website address is: broadwayumc.org. Click on “Who We Are” to see the congregation’s self-description, which includes the two paragraphs quoted from here. The story of Broadway United Methodist Church that follows is my composition based on several interviews with the congregation’s senior pastor, the Rev. Michael Mather. Mather has read and approved what I have written here. He is currently writing a book regarding the ministry of this congregation.

these convictions about extravagant grace and abundance in very practical ways.

De'Amon Harges' ministry at Broadway, for example, is to be the congregation's "Roving Listener"—that's his actual job title. His task is to go out into the community and roam about—to knock on doors, sit with people where they live, listen to their stories, learn what they are dealing with, and, above all, to see who has what kinds of gifts and how they are being employed for the good of the community.

But de'Amon is not the only one who does that. Michael Mather, the church's senior pastor, says it is what the congregation as a whole does. Once a month, for example, members of the congregation and church staff organize dinner gatherings for small groups of six or eight people from the wider community, preferably in somebody's home. At these dinners, the people come from across all kinds of boundaries—religious, racial, economic, educational, age, you name it. What's the agenda? Just to talk, just to listen—to listen, as Mather says, "for where the Holy Spirit is active in people's lives"—and then to come back and inform the congregation about what they have heard. They don't do this in order to get people in the community involved in the church; no, they do it so they can figure out how the congregation can best support and bless what the people of the larger neighborhood are already doing that is "of the Spirit of God."

Mia lived near Broadway Church for 45 years, but she had never been in the building. Somebody met her at one of these dinners and found out that she had been running a tutoring program for children in the neighborhood for a long time. "What do you teach?" "Anything from phonics to Sophocles," she answered. Several times a year, the congregation has a "Celebration of Ministry Sunday," and most of the time it focuses on the ministries of people in the neighborhood—people like Mia. On these occasions, the congregation conducts what they call a "Liturgy of the Animators of the Spirit." The liturgy includes a testimony about the ministry of the person being honored, a blessing and a laying-on of hands, and then this. The congregation as a whole is asked a covenantal question, one stolen in part from the wedding liturgy. "Will you do everything in your power to care for and uphold this person in her ministry? If so, please answer 'We will!'"

On the day Mia was invited, she was sitting in the front row looking forward toward the chancel. So when this sacred question was asked about support for her tutoring program, she had no idea that, behind her, the whole congregation was standing and ready to respond. When they all shouted in one voice a thunderous “WE WILL!” Mia spun around and saw, to her great astonishment, that she was surrounded by a community of people who honored and blessed what she was doing and were willing to support her ministry with their money, their time, their talents and their prayers.

By virtue of the pastoral imagination of its ministers and the ecclesial imagination of the whole congregation, this church and its surrounding parish are entering ever more fully into a way of life in communion with one another that truly is life-giving. Congregations that learn to live this way do so by drawing upon the astonishing riches of a centuries-long tradition of faith and practice developed throughout the history of the church. At the same time, they innovate. They take their inheritance and they put it into play in surprising new ways.

Seeing the vitality of Broadway United Methodist Church, and so many other faithful congregations, raises another question: How do pastors learn the kind of pastoral imagination it takes to guide churches in the paths of ecclesial imagination? Mather himself learned it by being deeply engaged in a number of other powerfully formative communities of faith over the course of many years. He learned it in his family and in the small rural communities and congregations of southern Indiana in which he grew up. He learned it by participating in a campus ministry during college. He learned it in seminary. He learned it from the people and the pastor-mentors he had in two parishes where he served early on in his career. He learned it while living for a time in India and Bangladesh, “places,” Mather told me, “where people truly had nothing—and thus I could see the abundance back at home so much clearer.” He learned it in South Africa, where he gained “the confidence and courage to live out the faithfulness that the people there embodied.” They talked about the miracle of “sitting down and talking with their enemies,” Mather recalls. “If they could do that as a nation, why couldn’t we live out our faith boldly where we are?”

The practice of ministry is learned over a long arc of time and in many

diverse contexts. Ministers learn ministry through extended involvement in and formation by multiple communities that together constitute an encompassing ecology of grace and gratitude. It takes families, congregations, colleges and universities, seminaries, denominational agencies and judicatories as well as a wide range of other ministries, movements, programs, projects and people who, in collaboration with one another, seek and learn to live this way of life. It takes the church world-wide and the church close at hand. It takes the whole church and sustained engagement in the world it serves.

III

Now, if pastoral and ecclesial imagination of a rich and robust kind is key to cultivating communities of faith, what are the implications for shaping a grant-making strategy? The first step is to take seriously the long arc of time and experience required if pastors are to learn pastoral imagination and sustain excellence in ministry. At the same time, it is crucial to ensure that the ecology of institutions necessary to nurture, educate and support each new generation of pastors are in place and functioning effectively.

Strategic religious philanthropy that seeks to cultivate thriving communities of faith thus must be built on the basis of a careful, ongoing diagnosis of these conditions. As assessments are made, the questions become clearer. Where are there gaps? Where are there weaknesses? Where is real strength? Can that strength somehow be increased, expanded and built upon? What valuable resources need to be supported and sustained, or redeployed? What innovations might be needed? By asking these questions, we at Lilly Endowment were able to discern some ways to enrich the ecology at crucial points. Let me offer you a few specific examples.

Because the formation of pastoral and ecclesial imagination begins much earlier than any of us might expect, we thought it would be important to encourage some new experiments that would provide teenagers a real taste of serious theological education. So we asked several theological schools whether they might consider bringing high school age young people onto their campuses during the summer, where they could be given a chance to study the Bible and read theology

under the tutelage of outstanding seminary and divinity school faculty for several weeks. At first, some thought this kind of program fell outside their mandate and mission. But Emory University's Candler School of Theology agreed to undertake the initial experiment and did so with stunning results. Ultimately, forty-eight theological schools received grants to create a variety of programs of this kind.

A recent study found that these programs have profoundly shaped the lives, faith and vocations of many of the 20,000 young people who have been involved during the last 15 years or so. One survey discovered that 25% of its respondents said “that they have graduated from seminary, are currently enrolled, or plan to attend.”³

The early successes of the youth theology programs raised the question of whether and how church-related colleges and universities might help their students think through their vocational decisions in the light of their faith and, in the process, identify those with gifts for ministry and help them explore that path. When the Endowment launched its “Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation” initiative, we were not sure if these collegiate institutions would be at all interested. But many college presidents and other senior leaders quickly grasped how this initiative could enhance the fundamental educational mission of their schools. Surprising numbers of faculty and staff were very eager to support their students in exploring vocation theologically, and the students responded eagerly. The schools asked good questions and answered them well: How might their programs involve academic study? Could faculty members create new resources that would give their programs real intellectual and theological substance? What might be the roles of worship, campus religious groups, relationships with congregations, internships in ministry, visits to seminaries, and engagement in service and mission? How could students and faculty of the multiple religions represented on campus be well served and supported in their explorations of faith and vocation? Because they asked these

³ Barbara G. Wheeler, “On Our Way: A Study of Students’ Paths to Seminary,” *Auburn Studies*, No. 17 (January 2014), p.31. This report provides an excellent overview of the multiple influences that lead young people on a path toward ministry. The *Auburn Studies* series is published by The Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City. This report and all the others in this series are available at www.auburnseminary.org. See also, Barbara G. Wheeler, “Pathways to Seminary: Where the Best Students Come From,” *In Trust* (Autumn 2013), 5-9 [available at www.intrust.org]. For an in-depth study that describes a number of these youth theology programs, see Kenda Kreasy Dean, ed., *A More Excellent Way: How Youth Ministry Is Changing the Way Christian Leaders Are Formed* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming 2015).

questions widely and well, the “culture of silence” regarding faith, religion and vocation that had prevailed on many campuses was overturned and replaced by a wide and rich conversation. To sustain the momentum, a national “Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education” has been established, which welcomes and provides support to any independent college in the country that wants to develop a program of this kind. Currently, more than 170 colleges and universities are involved. Many of their alumni/ae have gone on to graduate theological education and become pastors and religious leaders in a wide range of faith communities and institutions.⁴

Pastoral imagination is not fully formed when a person graduates from seminary. Indeed, it is just getting started. The first years of ministry are absolutely crucial, fraught with both promise and peril. This period of time, when one must learn what it takes to practice ministry well in all its aspects in a real congregation and with real people, can be overwhelming. The first three to five years are when most ministers have the deepest doubts about their calling; and when those years go poorly, many simply leave. At the same time, these years can provide amazing opportunities for growth and learning in the midst of real-life practice—*if and when* new pastors are enabled to live and work in community with other pastoral colleagues, including both mentors and peers.

Because these first few years are so important, Lilly Endowment has invested heavily in supporting a variety of Transition-Into-Ministry programs. The initial experiment, however, was funded by another donor—Tom Lake. He made the gift that enabled Second Presbyterian Church to launch a new effort that brings recent seminary graduates to the church to spend two years learning the full range

⁴ For more information about the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE), visit www.cic.edu/NetVUE. A splendid overview of Lilly Endowment’s Programs for Theological Exploration of Vocation Initiative (PTEV) is provided in Shirley J. Roels, “An Education for Life Abundant,” *Liberal Education*, Vol. 100, No. 1 (Winter 2014), 6- 13. This issue of the journal, which is published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, features the PTEV initiative and also includes essays by three authors who have done extensive evaluation studies of these programs: Tim Clydesdale, “Holy Grit!: The Effects of Purpose Exploration Programming on Undergraduate Engagement and Life Trajectories”; William M. Sullivan, “Renewing Liberal Education as Vocational Discernment”; and Molly Sutphen, “Practicing a Good Life: Three Case Studies from the Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation.” Clydesdale’s full-length study, *Calling on Purpose: The Conversation Every Campus Must Have With Students*, is forthcoming from The University of Chicago Press (2015). Sullivan and Sutphen are completing a book of case studies of PTEV programs hosted by a diverse sampling of colleges and universities throughout the U.S.

of the practice of ministry. They form a community of pastors with one another and receive sustained mentoring from the church's staff—particularly its Senior Minister (who was Bill Enright at the time and is now Lewis Galloway). The members of the congregation surround them with hospitality, friendship and encouragement. Over the years, scores of other programs built on this model (and variations on it) have come into being with Lilly Endowment support.⁵

It is clear that pastoral imagination is best formed and sustained in community. To flourish in ministry, pastors need creative and supportive peers throughout their careers. So the Endowment's next step was to launch its "Sustaining Pastoral Excellence" initiative. Theological schools, regional and national denominational judicatories, retreat and conference centers, and other clergy-serving organizations were invited to apply. We asked them to propose ways of gathering ministers into peer groups that would nurture sustained spiritual growth through prayer, ongoing biblical and theological study and supportive friendships. We hoped these communities of pastors would have opportunities to reflect together on and improve their competence in the fundamental practices of ministry. Above all, we encouraged the institutions to find ways to enable the pastors themselves to play the leading role in determining how they would structure their own time and activities, so as to learn and grow in the ways most important to them at that point in their lives.

A national study was commissioned to describe the various formats these groups had adopted and what kinds of differences the pastors' participation in them had made. That study was published last year in a book entitled *So Much Better: How Thousands of Pastors Help Each Other Thrive*. It turns out that pastors' participation in peer groups of this kind "makes a big difference for the health and well-being of pastors and their congregations."⁶ These pastors tend to use much more facilitative styles of leadership in their congregations and foster a much richer

⁵ For a comprehensive report on the variety of types of Transition-Into-Ministry programs, see James P. Wind and David J. Wood, "Becoming a Pastor: Reflections on the Transition into Ministry—An Alban Institute Special Report." See also, "Transition into Ministry," *Congregations* (Fall 2006), published by Alban Institute. (Call Lilly Endowment's Religion Division for information about how to obtain copies.)

⁶ Penny Long Marler, D. Bruce Roberts et al., *So Much Better: How Thousand of Pastors Help Each Other Thrive: The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) Peer Learning Project* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), p.6. Pages 6-8 describe the other benefits summarized in this paragraph. See also Holly Miller, *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: A Progress Report on a Lilly Endowment Initiative* (Lilly Endowment, 2011), available at www.pastoralexcellence.com/pdfs/Final_Report20.pdf.

participatory life among their members, including not only adults but also children and youth. These pastors and the members of their churches tend to be more active in the larger community than those in other congregations, and their congregations are significantly more likely to grow. Encouraging pastors to be in community with other pastors, it turns out, is essential to cultivating both thriving pastors and thriving congregations.⁷

Over the years, many other key issues have emerged that have needed to be addressed. For example, could we provide extended opportunities for pastors and their families to travel, re-connect with the things that sustain them most deeply, and experience renewal of mind, spirit and body?⁸ Could we support seminary faculty in their efforts to teach in ways that really do prepare pastors to cultivate thriving communities of faith?⁹ Could we help denominational judicatories and theological seminaries develop new ways of addressing some of the economic burdens that fall on many pastors because of high student debt and low compensation packages?¹⁰ Could congregations in Indianapolis and throughout the state be connected to larger communities of learning in ways that would help each local church, synagogue, mosque or temple thrive more fully?¹¹ Could we help the church as a whole imagine more effective ways to educate and form its people (children, youth, adults and families) in the practice of a truly life-shaping, life-changing Christian faith and life?¹²

⁷ Recently a new “Pastoral Excellence Network” has been established at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, which “seeks to harvest the learning and share the feast of resources and practices” that have emerged from both the Transition Into Ministry and the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence initiatives. “Our aim [they say] is to help the church surround every pastor with opportunities for support and learning.” Visit www.cpx.cts.edu and click on Pastoral Excellence Network.

⁸ Visit www.cpx.cts.edu and click on Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Programs for information about sabbatical programs for pastors and their families.

⁹ Visit www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu for information about the programs and resources provided by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. Also visit www.louisville-institute.org for information about the Louisville Institute, its “Vocation of the Theological Educator” program and other programs to support theological educators and scholars as well as pastors.

¹⁰ See *Economic Challenges Facing Indiana Pastors: A Progress Report on a Lilly Endowment Initiative* (2014), available from Lilly Endowment Inc.

¹¹ Visit www.centerforcongregations.org to learn about and access the resources made available through the Center for Congregations. Headquartered in Indianapolis with four additional sites throughout the state of Indiana, the Center works with congregations of all faiths, “helping them find and use the best resources to address their challenges and opportunities.”

¹² For a primary example of extended work in this area, visit www.practicingourfaith.org for information about the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith. Also, see Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Search People*, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), the key introductory volume to a large body of research and writing in this field. Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd edition (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005), is also a contribution to this effort.

These and other pressing questions have been taken up and responded to in a wide range of projects and programs.¹³

All in all, these initiatives have touched thousands of people at virtually every point along the long arc of learning and sustaining excellence in ministry and have strengthened specific congregations all across the country. They have also influenced many—perhaps most—of the institutions that together comprise the ecology that sustains and supports communities of faith and those who lead them. Along the way, they have sparked countless conversations and disclosed rich practical wisdom about what it takes to cultivate thriving communities of faith.

IV

As I look back on what has happened since the day Mr. Lake and Mr. Lofton called me in to talk about how the Endowment could make a real difference in cultivating thriving communities of faith, I see some patterns that I now propose as basic principles of strategic religious philanthropy. Here are five:

First: Clarity about the fundamental purpose of a philanthropic endeavor is indispensable to its coherence and excellence. We who have been the grant-makers have ourselves long been deeply immersed in thriving Christian communities of faith. We know in our bones the difference they can make, because such communities have nurtured and nourished us. At the same time, we know that thriving communities of faith exist in many different kinds of settings, take multiple forms, and are shaped by diverse traditions. Acting on this first principle of clarity thus also requires philanthropists to listen to, learn about, seek out, and serve a variety of specific and particular cases.

For us, the fundamental reality in which all our efforts are rooted and oriented is the life of Christian faith as it is cultivated, made possible, and strengthened in actual, on-the-ground communities. Over time, we came to articulate this life of faith primarily as a way of life abundant lived in community in grateful

¹³ For a comprehensive overview of projects and programs funded by Lilly Endowment in the field of religion, visit the website *Insights Into Religion* at www.religioninsights.org.

response to an inexhaustibly generous God. Given this core understanding, shared theological inquiry and rigorous conversation was vital—not only in the vocational exploration programs, but across all the initiatives. When we gathered leaders, often from very diverse ecumenical backgrounds, we worshipped together in ways that expressed core shared commitments. In conversations about pastoral excellence, we focused not only on skills and outcomes but also on the “cruciform excellence” that characterizes those who follow Christ into ministry. Not all philanthropists think of their work theologically. However, certain norms and purposes, whether implicit or explicit, guide all philanthropy—and for us those have been theological and Christian.

Religious philanthropy undertaken by people of other faiths will likewise draw on their own religious traditions and convictions. A good deal of Jewish and Muslim philanthropy, for example, seeks to strengthen their communities of faith as well as their wider religious ecologies. And increasingly today philanthropic support is being provided to help communities of faith of diverse religions work together across the lines of their specific traditions. Lilly Endowment has been involved in this in several ways. One includes support for Interfaith Youth Core,¹⁴ which is led by Dr. Eboo Patel, who has spoken at the Lake Institute. IYC facilitates interfaith conversation, friendship and community as well as shared service among college students on campuses throughout the U.S. The Endowment’s support of this kind of interfaith activity is not only consistent with but draws directly upon Christian understandings of what abundant life truly means in what is now and has always been an interfaith world.

Second: A coherent strategy requires a basic understanding of (or hypothesis regarding) the conditions under which faith communities are most likely to thrive.

In this case, it required a sense of the conditions under which communities of faith are likely to thrive. The key terms in the vocabulary that came to dominate our efforts to describe this work (including in this lecture), as well as some of the initiatives I have described, will have given you a sense of what I mean.

¹⁴ For information about Interfaith Youth Core and the work and writings of Eboo Patel, visit www.ifyc.org.

- Pastoral imagination.
- Ecclesial imagination.
- The long arc of learning ministry.
- Theological exploration of vocation.
- Sustaining pastoral excellence.
- A flourishing ecology of communities of faith and the organizations and institutions that sustains them.

Some of these terms were with us early on, and all are at least consistent with the hunches we brought to this work as it began. But as the various actual initiatives developed and matured over the course of many years, the conceptual frameworks took on greater meaning and significance as they became embodied in new patterns of action on the ground.

Third: Strategic philanthropy involves innovative efforts that take into account a view of religious life and its landscape that is both long and broad. If what I have said is true about the ways in which pastoral and ecclesial imagination are necessarily and essentially rooted in ancient Scripture and in long traditions of faith and worship, then strategic religious philanthropy must be undertaken with that larger whole in view. And if it is also true that learning ministry involves a long arc of time and a broad ecology of communities of faith, then strategic philanthropy must work in many places simultaneously and often sustain its support over fairly extended spans of time. This does *not* mean that any particular philanthropic endeavor needs to take on the whole. That's impossible. Nor does it mean that it must be large in scale. It means, rather, that it should be aware of and attuned to the larger whole of which it is a part. The fact that the work of "cultivation" requires a long and careful tending also has strategic consequences that must be taken into account. Though real differences can be made, there are no quick fixes.

Fourth: Strategic religious philanthropy requires a profound sense of abundance. Of course, the abundance of Lilly Endowment's assets has been crucial, and faithfulness in their stewardship is always a top priority. But even more importantly, I mean the kind of abundance brought by pastors and members to their congregations and the gifts already resident in the people of their neighborhoods and

larger communities. This abundance, once recognized, gives rise in the minds and hearts of everyone involved a real confidence in the people's own capacities to create the kinds of communities that enable them to flourish. At Lilly Endowment, we have seen these capacities expressed again and again and again—in local congregations, in colleges and universities, in theological seminaries and in every other kind of organization we have funded. These institutions' often surprising ability to deploy their gifts in new ways with support from our grants regularly generated in us—and also in them—a lively confidence in their extraordinary capacities for innovation and renewal.

Among the gifts the people bring, of course, is their own financial generosity. Every study of American philanthropy sends the same clear message: religious Americans are significantly more generous with their time and their money than are those who do not participate in congregational or other forms of religious life. This is true not only with regard to their giving to and serving in their congregations and other religious institutions, but also with regard to wider charitable causes, particularly those that serve people in need and people who are poor. This kind of local generosity is fundamental; it is the fertile soil out of which all other forms of religious philanthropy emerge.¹⁵ (In this regard, it has been quite amazing to see how profoundly generous members of congregations and other religious institutions have been in supporting the many new projects and programs Lilly Endowment's grantees have established over the course of several decades. Generous donors have provided strategic ongoing funding for virtually all the programs I have described in my remarks today, amounting to many millions of dollars.)

Finally: Cultivating thriving communities of faith requires strategic efforts to enable communities of faith to learn from their own and from each other's work and to share their wisdom with one another. Once the abundance of gifts comes into

¹⁵ See Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), pp. 444-454, for an excellent summary statement of these findings. See also Melanie A. McKittrick, J. Shawn Landres, Mark Ottoni-Wilhelm, and Amir D. Hayat, *Connected to Give: Faith Communities* (Los Angeles: Jumpstart, 2013), available at www.faithcommunities.connectedtogive.org. Unlike many studies of religious giving, this one reports not only on giving to congregations but also to what these researchers call “religiously identified organizations (RIOs)”; that is, organizations that serve individuals in need and/or broader educational, civic, social and cultural purposes “within an explicitly religious identity or religious value frame” (p. 2). This report concludes that when RIOs are included as recipients of religious giving, “nearly three quarters of Americans’ charitable giving—73%—goes to organizations with religious ties” (p. 9).

view, they must be made known throughout the larger community of communities. Strategic philanthropy thus needs to sustain a formative conversation across the life of any major initiative. In the Endowment's case, this has taken several forms. The first has to do with what we came to describe as "learning from your own work." We strongly emphasize among our grantees what is usually called "evaluation." But in our view, evaluation efforts that enable people within their own programs and institutions to attend honestly and carefully to their own efforts are the kind that really make a difference. When people and institutions are encouraged to learn from what they themselves are doing, from how they are doing it, and from what impact it is having, they themselves are much more likely to develop increasingly effective ways to make differences that really matter in the lives of the people they seek to serve.

Once they do, it is important for them to share with others what they have learned. In order to foster widespread mutual learning, it is important for strategic philanthropy to make it possible for people to gather frequently in carefully structured face-to-face conversations—whether in small groups, seminars or large conferences. In addition, it is important to support efforts to communicate the character and substance of funded initiatives and projects to a wide national audience. Publications that describe in some depth what these communities and institutions are doing are especially helpful. Such writings articulate the insights and practical wisdom that have emerged, and thus guide and encourage others in similar efforts.

By whatever means, learning from one another's own work, experience and wisdom includes intentional, well-resourced reflection about excellence, purpose, and what it means to take up a way of abundant life. This has been a constant dimension of all these efforts. It continually informs not only the work of the communities of faith but also the Endowment's own continuing strategic grant-making. We have sought, in sum, as best we could, to cultivate among our grantees and with ourselves a shared community of faith.

* * * * *

There is much more to say, but I am eager to hear your responses and engage with you in the discussions that we are about to begin. So let me conclude with just one more thought.

When the kind of philanthropy I have been describing stirs the lives of grantees and the communities, pastors and persons they touch, the capacities these strategic principles are meant to promote do not remain at the Endowment. Instead, they gradually begin to shape the purposes and self-understandings internal to many of the institutions involved in these efforts. Their experience in this community of communities seems to enable them to engage more creatively and fruitfully in their own work and thereby to cultivate communities of faith more wisely and effectively. They are finding new ways of listening to, joining with and helping to cultivate the abundance of gifts that God both promises and provides. And in so doing, they are becoming more fully participants with one another, and, I pray, ultimately with God, in a way of life abundant.

Craig Dykstra, PhD

*Research Professor of Practical Theology
and Senior Fellow in Leadership Education at Duke Divinity School
Former Senior Vice President, Religion, Lilly Endowment, Inc.*



Dr. Craig Dykstra became a member of the faculty of Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina, in August, 2012, after his retirement as Senior Vice President for Religion at Lilly Endowment, where he served for 23 years. An ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), he previously served as Thomas W. Synnott Professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, editor of *Theology Today*, associate professor of Christian education at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and assistant minister of Westminster Church of Detroit.

Under Dykstra's leadership, Lilly Endowment made more than \$1.5 billion in grants for religious purposes. Major initiatives included efforts to support programs for the theological exploration of vocation on church-related college campuses and to encourage a new generation of pastoral leaders for congregations and the larger church; to foster excellence in pastoral ministry and congregational renewal across a wide range of denominations and theological traditions; to strengthen seminaries in their efforts to provide robust theological education for ministry; to encourage and support excellent scholarship in a variety of theological disciplines and in the study of American religious life; and to support creative religion news reporting through various media. In addition, Dykstra oversaw the Endowment's grantmaking in support of research on and programs to strengthen American philanthropy and nonprofit institutions and well as its special initiative to support members and veterans of the armed services and their families who have been involved in recent combat deployments.

At Duke, Dykstra is continuing his scholarly work that has focused on “Christian practices” as a key concept for thinking about what it means to learn and to live the Christian faith and life, to organize the discipline of practical theology, and to re-envision the work of pastoral ministry. He is also writing and teaching about the organizational conditions and kinds of leadership practices that enable religious organizations to be effective in their core missions and to thrive institutionally.

His previous publications include: *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, co-edited with Dorothy C. Bass (Eerdmans, 2008) and *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd edition, (Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005). He contributed to and collaborated with Dorothy Bass in the creation of *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (Jossey-Bass, 2nd edition, 2010). Dykstra also wrote a book on moral and religious education entitled *Vision and Character* and was co-editor of a book of essays on contemporary faith development theory.

Born in Detroit and raised in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, Dykstra graduated with distinction from the University of Michigan in 1969 with a bachelor of arts degree in philosophy. He earned the master of divinity degree from Princeton Seminary, where he also received the Ph.D., magna cum laude, in moral theology and Christian education. He has received honorary doctoral degrees from Muskingham College, Hanover College, Centre College and Wabash College. In 2009, the Council of Independent Colleges honored him with its Award for Individual Philanthropic Leadership. In 2012, he was inducted into the Indiana Academy and the Governor of the State of Indiana named him a Sagamore of the Wabash. He and his wife Betsy have two married sons and five grandchildren.



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