

Giving in the American Experience: Tradition, Challenge, Choice

*A Civic Leadership Seminar
sponsored by The Project on Civic Reflection at Valparaiso University
with funding from Lilly Endowment, Inc.*

Leaders:

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This six-session seminar has been designed to provide civic leaders in Northeast Indiana with hospitable space for reflection on the challenges of giving, aided by conversation with other civic leaders and by attention to past traditions of civic thought and action. We will read selected historical and contemporary writings about giving, chosen to illuminate our current situation and to give insight into the ways that others in different circumstances have thought about giving. Participants will also be invited to write their “giving autobiography” and develop a giving plan for their own use.

Session I (September 23, 1999)

A Point of Departure: American Themes

Readings:

- Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (Mentor Paperback Ed.), Selections:
pp 55-61: The Sovereignty of the People; Local Government
pp 111-115: Unlimited Power of Majority; Tyranny of Majority
pp 143-149: Philosophical Methods of Americans
pp 189-202: Love of Equality; Individualism; Free Associations; Use of Free Associations in Civil Life.
- “Lessons from Wingspread: The Ten Trillion Dollar Transfer of Wealth,” through p.19

Session II (October 21)

The Money Problem: American Preoccupation and American Taboo

Talking about Giving: In preparation for Session II, please talk to two people of generations other than your own about their attitudes toward giving money, and write down some reflections on what you have heard. How comfortable was the conversation? Do your conversation partners differ from you in their attitudes toward giving? How?

Readings:

- Tocqueville, Democracy in America, pp209-213 (“Of the Taste for Physical Well-Being in America”)
- Andrew Carnegie, “The Gospel of Wealth” [Reader]
- Robert Wuthnow, Poor Richard’s Principle, “(Not) Talking about Money” [Reader]

Session III (November 11)

Wisdom about Giving: or, Wrestling with the Money Problem

Developing Your Own Giving Autobiography: In preparation for Session III, please reflect on your own experience in the light of what we have read. Make notes on your timeline about:

- ⇒ Childhood experiences of giving and receiving.
- ⇒ Groups and organizations in which you have participated.
- ⇒ Persons that directly invited you to give or taught you about giving.
- ⇒ Beliefs, sayings, texts, or messages you remember about giving.

Readings:

- Catharine Beecher, “No Duty More Difficult to Set by Rule” [Reader]
- Andrea Walton, “With Strength to Reason and the Warmth to Feel: A Portrait of Clementine Miller Tangeman (1905-1996), Philanthropist and Educator” [Handout]

*Holiday Break! For a little reading, see
“Short Stories on Giving: A Holiday Sampler” in Your Reader!*

Session IV (Date TBA)

Participation in Larger Traditions of Giving

Your Giving Autobiography (Continued): During our holiday-filled break, continue to add notes and memories to your giving autobiography. As you move through the holidays, what larger traditions of giving (religious, familial, community-based) do you find yourself participating in? Are there traditions from your childhood that you have chosen not to carry forward? Have you developed “new” traditions of giving? How so? In response to what?

Readings:

- Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House, Selections [Reader]
- Susan Wisely and Elizabeth M. Lynn, “A Foundation’s Relationship to Its Public: Legacies and Lessons for the Lilly Endowment” [Handout]

Session V (Date TBA)

On the Difficulties of Going Well

Readings:

- Shel Silverstein, The Giving Tree [Hand-out]
- “The Giving Tree: A Symposium,” First Things (January 1995) [Reader]
- Parker Palmer, “Leading from Within” [Reader]

Session VI (Date TBA)

Concluding Reflections: A Habit and a taste for Serving Others

Developing Your Own Giving Plan: In preparation for our final session, please write down (for your own use only) your thoughts about a personal plan for giving.

Readings:

- Review Tocqueville selections
- Sarah Orne Jewett, “The Spur of the Moment” [Reader]
- Wingspread report, short recommendations section