Lake Institute Network of Emerging Scholars

*Building the Field of Faith and Philanthropy*

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Religious leaders are not the only ones who struggle with talking about faith and money; scholars do too. While religion remains one of the most significant drivers of philanthropy, it is often missing from the scholarly field of philanthropic studies and non-profit management. The opposite is also true. Religious studies scholars and theologians understand the importance of giving, service, and philanthropy in the multiple faith traditions they study, but they rarely engage the topic in their own scholarship.

This lacuna is slowly changing as more scholars are engaging these topics. What do we mean by faith? How should we define giving? And how are these two connected? These are not simple questions, and Lake is excited to be one place leading the conversation. In our continued efforts to answer them, we have launched the [Lake Institute Network of Emerging Scholars](#) (LINES). Twenty emerging and established scholars with a host of other faculty and guests gathered in Indianapolis last week to share their research and cultivate a growing conversation on the relationship between religion and philanthropy. LINES serves as an important medium for the Institute’s commitment to create, foster, and sustain an interdisciplinary field of scholarly research focusing on the relationship between religion and philanthropy. The scholars we invited for the first gathering came from multiple disciplines. They were historians, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, and practical theologians. And they covered an array of subjects: from measuring the motivations of donors who attend religious services to the practices and philanthropic outlook of emerging adults; from the professionalization of Catholic hospitals to the religious roots of international humanitarian agencies.

Each scholar presented their cutting-edge research and received feedback from other participants as they continue to move forward with their scholarship both in the discovery and dissemination phases of what they are learning - not only in the halls of the academy but also in shaping the philanthropic practice and language of faith communities.

The convening spent as much time asking questions as providing answers. In partnership with the IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, our research often takes stock of the role of religion in the philanthropic sector. Through [Giving USA](#) or our own [Congregational Economic Impact Study](#), we are able to discern giving trends in religious communities and provide insights into best practices. We can speak to the way institutional differences (congregations, non-profits, or for-profit corporations) or different giving vehicles (weekly collections, annual fundraising campaigns, or crowdsource funding) impact faith-based fundraising.
Yet, Lake Institute is also eager to expand the conversation even more broadly as we seek to create, foster, and sustain an interdisciplinary field of scholarly research. How might we continue to explore the language we use, the institutions we study, and the individual or communal motivations that shape a field? What courses might we offer in universities and divinity schools? What resources are best in promoting professional development? What are the questions we should be asking to help with future generations? It will take collaborative and interdisciplinary work to nurture a sustained conversation. At Lake Institute, we are ready to work alongside others to continue to ask questions and search for answers.

We often think about our work at Lake Institute in three broad areas. Through education and training, we offer courses and seminars around the country for practitioners leading religious communities and faith-based non-profits. Through thought leadership and public understanding, we serve as a convener of the various communities interested in issues of faith and giving and translate our research and knowledge to the broader public. But, we see both of these areas as grounded in our research and scholarship.

1. What are the pressing questions you are asking in the field of faith and philanthropy?

2. What resources do you rely on in making sense of these questions?

Let us know! Email us at lfi@iupui.edu and share your reflections.