

Faith it Forward: Why America Needs to Unite Around Faith

Did you know that, according to the American Enterprise Institute, someone who attends church regularly is 21 percent more likely to donate to charity, and 26 percent more likely to volunteer, than someone who does not? As a nation, we also outpace every other developed country in charitable giving. Faith is not the only motivator of generosity in the American spirit, but it is definitely a significant one. At a time when our nation's political and cultural debates often seem bitter with division and strife, uniting around faith is perhaps more important now than ever before. Why is this? Because faith motivated by compassion and love moves us forward. It unites across backgrounds, perseveres throughout difficulties, and never stops fighting for the voiceless, the hopeless, and the oppressed. Every day, people of faith serve tirelessly behind the scenes to better our communities. They are accomplishing this individually as well as collectively, through philanthropy, organizations, and churches. Often, they are making a more direct and personal impact than government programs ever could. In the Fourth District of Virginia – the area which I am privileged to represent in Congress – one such individual is LeOtis Williams. LeOtis grew up in Suffolk, Virginia, and even though his family sometimes struggled to make ends meet, his mother would unfailingly welcome guests to their dinner table and share generously of what they had. That memory inspired Mr. Williams to do the same thing in his community. Every year, around Thanksgiving, folks come from all around Hampton Roads and Northeast North Carolina – to line up and receive a turkey from LeOtis Williams. Last year, Mr. Williams gave away a total of 2,000 turkeys and 200 bushels each of collard greens and cabbage to families who could not afford Thanksgiving dinner. And that's not counting the 1,300 hot dogs and 400 hamburgers cooked onsite, as well

as cases of water and juice given away, according to the *Suffolk News Herald*. This past year, 38 organizations participated and many more volunteers. Mr. Williams says that in total, he has handed out about 16,000 turkeys to date, benefiting 64,000 individuals. When asked about his motivation for giving, Mr. William talks about his faith, quoting Colossians 1:16: "For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, everything got started in Him and finds its purpose in Him." Being a contributor to the community allows me to integrate my personal values of loyalty, dignity, optimism, and compassion as the cornerstone of my interactions with others," says Mr. Williams. "You know that you are doing the right thing when it feels good to your soul." While we can count turkeys and bushels of collard greens, who can say the countless number of lives that have been touched by LeOtis Williams' ministry? Who can say how many people felt loved and cared for, because of one man's decision to meet a need he saw in our community? To put it another way, what would the impact on the community have been if LeOtis never acted? How many people would have been left hungry and unreached? Mr. William's story is just one of many. Countless individuals and organizations throughout our communities and the country are motivated by their faith to help others, advocate for change, and aspire for a world where everyone is treated with dignity and compassion. It is important to tell these stories. Policies are often generated because of real life stories of how those policies impact the lives and direction of a nation. However, amidst the policy debates, we sometimes lose sight of the stories. That's why, as the founder and co-chairman of the Congressional Prayer Caucus, I am joining with members of Congress across the country to tell these inspiring stories of how people of faith are making a positive impact on their communities. We're calling the initiative "Faith it Forward," and hope it will help unite the nation around celebrating the hope and inspiration that comes from helping others. Do you have a story to tell? If so, you can join with us in sharing the

selfless work that people of faith are carrying out each and every day. Just visit the Facebook page at [facebook.com/faithforward](#) and fill out the quick form so we can share how someone you know is “faithing it forward.” Together, we can tell the stories of hope that are changing our communities, our country, and the world. **Congressman J. Randy Forbes**, R-VA, is the co-chairman of the Congressional Prayer Caucus.