

## Our Diamond Bright Future

UUUFB, November 10, 2019

Thank you, Rachel, and thank you, too, Lisa, for sharing your thoughts about why you support your UU congregation. There's a book about congregational stewardship that lists eight (I think) different methods for conducting the annual budget campaign. The method we are using this year is called "Commitment Sunday" or "Miracle Sunday" or even "Consecration Sunday." We ARE focusing our stewardship efforts on this morning's service. The key component of this plan is supposedly that someone offers a motivational "Sermon on the Amount," which isn't quite what I have in mind this morning. An amount will be mentioned but it won't serve as the text.

To begin with, here is some general information about the current Stewardship campaign. For those of you who are new to

this Fellowship or maybe to the general practice of church giving, here's what we're doing and why. Once a year, we pledge to each other a financial commitment to support the Fellowship in the coming year. These pledges support 85 – 90% of our annual budget. If we reach our goal this year, we plan to hire a Religious Education teacher, to lead one of two age groups of our children, as well as hiring a Music Coordinator. And we want to live our values by giving our employees cost-of-living raises. Our goal—the total amount we need to pledge for next year's budget—is \$190,000. As you can see from the pledge meter, we are already \_\_\_\_\_ % there.

Speaking of percentages, we don't ask for a tithe—for 10% of your income—as some faith traditions do. There IS a concept of a UU tithe, but it's a little different: a UU tithe gives 5% to the UU congregation and 5% to other causes that support our values. But, in typical UU fashion, the decision

whether to pledge, and how much to pledge is an individual one.

And it IS a decision—a choice. Making a pledge—no matter the size—is a way of saying “I *intend* to support our Fellowship.” I found this in my notes from a Stewardship workshop at the UU General Assembly a few years ago: “Giving should be intentional. What does it *mean*? The discipline of deciding how much to give and to whom can be liberating.”

Liberating? Really?

Yes, liberating. One thing I’ve learned through my involvement with stewardship over several years is that you can—and should—set priorities for your giving. *All* of your giving. Helping my mother with her affairs toward the end of her life, I saw that she gave to a very wide range of causes—some I wouldn’t have guessed she had a strong affinity for. The National Arbor Day Foundation? And it grieved her when she

no longer had the means to give so broadly. That drove home to me how important priorities can be for how I decide to give my money. And it actually IS somewhat liberating. Just recently I've told two different phone solicitors from a national political party that my donations go to *local* candidates only. They persisted, and so did I. My means are not unlimited, and I choose to use them here at home. The national party may try again, but it felt wonderful to give myself permission to say no in that particular instance.

I want to use some of our time together this morning in what might be called "audience participation," or, as Laurel reminded me, what teachers call "think, pair, share." I have a recollection that we did something like this at least once before. It was probably some time ago, because my memory of it takes place in the Senior Center. Anyway, I went to several stewardship workshops at GA this past June, and one of them

included practice in creating our own personal “money story.” We talked in small groups or pairs, answering a set of questions. So that’s what we’re going to do here, now. There are 3 x 5 cards in the seatback pockets if you wish to use them for notes, but *you don’t have to*. Please turn to someone sitting near you to ask each other the question and share your answers. Couples—couples? You spend enough time talking together about money, so you should talk with someone OTHER than your partner this morning. So find a partner near you.

Here’s the first question to share: *What did you learn from your family about generosity and philanthropy?* Go ahead, think, pair and share for the next few minutes, until I sound the chime.

Here’s the question again: What did you learn from your family about generosity and philanthropy? [3 minutes]

Was that interesting? I hope so. Something I learned at a local fund-raising workshop just the other day is that whether

one's parents went to church is a key factor leading people to donate to causes. Now let's turn to a different question. *When did you realize that money can be a tool to express your values?* Again, take a few minutes to pair and share until I sound the chime again. That question again: When did you realize that money can be a tool to express your values? [3 minutes]

There are a couple more questions if you want to continue this little exercise on your own later. They are: What is your earliest memory of money? Was it positive or negative? And why do you give to this Fellowship? Want to hear those again? [pause]

This year's stewardship campaign comes at perhaps a clearer inflection point than in other years. We have been celebrating our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, with a long timeline on the wall over there, and pages of pictures of people being UUs together. There are quite a few familiar faces in those photos, though

some of them have different color hair now. Those photos show us the warmth of our community—just look at all those smiles!

The timeline looks kind or prosaic—marching forward through the ages passing many milestones. Now that those milestones have been accomplished, they may seem foreordained. Of COURSE we set up an office! Of COURSE we called a minister! Of course we hired an RE coordinator, and an office staff person, and began paying our Sunday pianist. Even this building, now that we're here, may feel like it must have been inevitable. Maybe it was. But every one of those long-ago decisions carried risk—they all represent the best thinking and clearest vision of leaders grappling with essential issues and being willing to take what looked like a big step at the time.

And they WERE big steps! As the future they imagined, we owe it to those in the past whose vision moved us forward

to commit—RE-commit—ourselves now to live out our mission and move us from our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary—our diamond jubilee—into a diamond bright future. The two new staff positions we hope for in next year’s budget—an RE teacher, a music coordinator—can look a little scary in the black-and-white numbers of a budget spreadsheet. But they will let us provide more focused and age-appropriate Religious Education for our children—our future. And they will give us inspiring music to enrich our Sunday mornings.

Now, for some dreary logistics: I hope you brought your completed pledge form to turn in today. You can put it in the collection plate with your second Sunday offering or

\_\_\_\_\_ . We have extra pledge forms and return envelopes and even complete pledge packets if you need them. Just see me during coffee hour. The deadline for turning in forms is Sunday, November 24. This



gives the Finance Committee and the Board time to finalize a 2020 budget within the limits of our pledging so the Fellowship can vote on that budget at our meeting in January. We try, in every Stewardship campaign, to provide a way for you to understand what exactly your gift can do. So if you have questions about the budget or the process, Board members are ready to answer them this morning. Who are Board members? Well, I'll ask them to stand now and mention that we have blue name tags, so we can be identified in the wild.

The “big idea” at two of last summer’s GA stewardship workshops was I/RA, as in “Integrity (and) Resource Alignment.” Our Integrity—our deepest values—should align with the Resources we can give to carry out our mission. If you have already completed your pledge form, let me be the first to thank you for your commitment to our “diamond bright” future. For the others of us, I hope the testimony we’ve heard

and the pairing and sharing we've done this morning has clarified the many reasons for supporting this UU Fellowship and has rekindled the fire of commitment. As we sang in our opening hymn,

When the fire of commitment sets our mind and soul a-blaze,  
When our hunger and our passion meet to call us on our way  
When we live with deep assurance of the flame that burns within  
Then our promise finds fulfillment and our future can begin.

*[Silent meditation]*

*Peg W'herry, November 10, 2019*