

Pledge Commitment



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The other evening while I was watching the Patriots Play-off game, I also was organizing my jewelry case. It occurred to me while I was doing this how incredibly fortunate I am. I have more than enough pair of earrings. I have plenty of pretty baubles and bracelets. I have a lot to be grateful for. And one of the things I am grateful for is First Church Unitarian Universalist. It really is a bright gem in the community. It is something that I am glad to give money to on an annual basis.

When Ron and I think about our pledge commitment to the church. We take into consideration that many things we do with the money we work hard for. Paying for the house,

for food, for insurance, vehicle, a new solar system- that hopefully will be paid for in 6 years, fire wood, and entertainment are some of the expenses we allow for and pledging to the church.

Some might ask why do we pledge to the church who pays my salary and provides us with an income?

I am hopefully optimistic that churches and in particular First Church Unitarian Universalist of Leominster has something to offer that is not found anywhere else. It is no secret that a growing number of Americans feel spiritually bereft, no secret that a growing number of people are questioning where to go to find nourishment of a deep and meaningful sort, a growing number of people are longing for finding a place of deep compassion and caring, a place where trust-worthy albeit sometimes testy relationships can be forged, a place where goodness abides. I am of the opinion that we can be that place and I am a realist and I know it takes funds to do this. That is why Ron and I pledge each year about \$3000.

I have learned how to become materially happy with what I have, a lovely home, many pairs of shoes and yes earrings and baubles as I shared in my opening confession.

I live in a great neighborhood and though occasionally the nattering's of want and scarcity niggle at my mind, generally I have learned to take what I have, much I have earned with long hours and hard work and much that has been given to me and I feel blessed. There have been times when I did not have enough to get by, times when I was scrapping the bottom of the piggy bank looking for quarters to go get milk, and there have been times when I needed to ask others for financial support but this was motivated by true need.

Yet as a just ordinary people we can due extraordinary things during times of real need. Listen to this story from Jane Rzepka retired minister from Reading Massachusetts. "in the 1930's of course, times were tough. During that period, members of our church were accustomed to pledging either twenty-five, fifty cents or one dollar a week. In the 1929-1930 church year, all the members fulfilled their pledges of thirteen, twenty-six of fifty-two dollars.

But as the Depression continued, our ledger books begin to show tiny numbers at the bottom of each page. Five cents. Two dollars. Twelve dollars. And then a little "S". five cents 'short' of the pledge. Twelve dollars. Just what

one would expect. But picture this more numbers began appearing at the bottom of the ledger. Four dollar, eight cents, seven dollars. Thirty cents. And after these numbers, the tiny letter o. meaning over the pledge.

There is no evidence of a special appeal, no traces of a public discussion, only the quiet generosity of the people. For every pledge that had to fall short, one of many generous people overpaid to compensate. “Just regular folks. They dedicated their babies, they worshiped, they reached out to do their part in the world, they tended one another, they kept the place going, they tried to live their best lives. “ⁱ

Why could and did the regular folk come together like that? My guess is that they knew they needed the church to help them get through the tough days and nights, they knew that one day they would need to depend on the kindness of another and they gave when they could how they could even when it was most difficult.

They gave because they needed one another and that is one of the most important reasons to give because it is an antidote to the overconsumption attitude of seeking for

some materialistic, hedonistic, self-centered way of attaining peace of mind.

Michael Schuler, a Unitarian Universalist colleague from the First Society of Madison Wisconsin, writes,

“ Overconsumption, the celebration of excess, repeated sacrifice of the common good for private gain, a perverse taste for violence, and an unhealthy thirst for retribution are side effects of civilization that has turned the individual pursuit of private self-interest from a vice into a virtue. ⁱⁱ

I appreciated his words in light of the most recent Martin Luther King, Jr. gathering when our own Mark Moran brought out the notion that we have become a revenge seeking culture that has lead us to pursue violence as a common course of action. Our mayor stated that he thought churches could lead the way in helping to stem the violence. Mark has invited me to write a sermon about this and I accept that invitation. Today I am just going to step lightly into the topic as to how I see it relates to the support of a church. If we are as broken a society as I think, if a culture of violence and retribution are prevalent as I believe then I do think that churches and especially our

Unitarian Universalist beliefs provide a needed antidote. In particular I think of our principle that speaks to respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part. If we are a part of something as precious as a spiritual community that can address the need to feel cared for, to be challenged when assumptions and attitudes about the other can interfere with being welcoming, loving, caring communities. If we are part of a precious community that not only allows but encourages exploration of a variety of beliefs and encourages spiritual growth, then I think this is a place I should support with my money and my time. the more we talk about the wounded-ness of the world, the more we provide a hospitable respite from the cares, struggles, violence of the world the more we can be agents of transformation out to the world.

So I give and pledge to this church because I believe we can make a difference inside these walls, witness this space and the many groups that meet here and outside these walls. Now we need to just push ourselves a bit more to wander outside. Christa asked me to provide ways we could do this and I will hand out a sheet for you to look at and

see ways we can go as a group together to start shining our UU light into the world.

However, without your pledges we will not be able to sustain all that we do. Over the next few weeks we ask you to think about what the church means to you and to translate that into a financial commitment. Give what you can and then think about it again and see if you can give just a bit more. It is those \$5.00 and \$25.00 and \$50.00 dollars more that make the difference.

ⁱ Kathleen Montgomery, *Bless the Imperfect: Meditations for Congregational Leaders*. 'Just Regular Folks'. Jane Ranney Rzepka p 3

ⁱⁱ Thom Belote, Editor, *The Growing Church : Keys to Congregational Vitality*, "Transformation' Rev. Michael Schuler, Skinner House Books, Boston. Ma.