

Giving Sunday

Rev. Lori Staubitz 05/08

Opening Words:

"Your gifts – whatever you discover them to be – can be used to bless or curse the world. The mind's power, the strength of the hands, the reaches of the heart, the gift of speaking, listening, imagining, seeing, waiting . . . any of these can serve to feed the hungry, bind up the wounded, welcome the stranger, praise what is sacred, do the work of justice or offer love. Any of these can (limit possibility), lock the prison door, hoard bread, abandon the poor, obscure what is holy, comply with injustice or withhold love.

(Our Past history cannot take the place of our present needs for spiritual and moral commitment). We must each answer the question: What will I do with my gifts?"

-adapted from Rebecca Parker

"The function of the church is to bring people into communion with a group where the power of transformation and the ethical standards rooted in it are operative. When we say operative, we mean that this power is capable of changing people, of eliciting commitment to a way of being that makes a difference in their attitude toward themselves, others and (promotes an ultimate relationship to the creative power of life.) In short, the church's mission is to aid us in achieving voluntary community. Only by such commitment can we, in Channing's words, be always young for liberty. Without such a commitment, we become content with mere philosophy or belief which keeps us always at a distance and insulates us from the true source of vitality and openness to the power of the Spirit. In short, the function of the church is to propel us to become what we love through voluntary acts of devotion, commitment and sacrifice, a willingness to subordinate personal interest to create a greater good for the larger whole.

This act of submission is fully voluntary...as we commit ourselves, our gifts and our love to that higher cause that can and will lead us further toward the creation of the beloved community.

-adapted from J.L. Adams "On Being Human"

Ours is a voluntary association. "Some associations exist to promote public policy while others form to enable charitable giving for philanthropic causes. Others are expressive and exist to mainly promote the interest of the members in their association with each other such as social clubs, self-help, educational or cultural groups." J.L. Adams "On Being Human"-page 61.

"Still others voluntary groups exist for the purpose of making a profit. Large association of this type sometime form pressure groups to affect government policy. Labor unions in the main belong to this class."

Although our actions may resemble some aspect of each of these, the purpose of our Unitarian Universalist Association and its member congregations is nothing less than the loving transformation of each life and the unity of all life.-

It is an ancient vision that calls together all that is divided into wholeness. This universalizing vision that will perhaps never fully be realized, but never the less empowers all that we are.

This may be a far cry from what many of us anticipate when we first decide to join a congregation. Even for those of us who grew up in organized religion as children, can be alarmed with the “sticker shock” of the collective cost of this new start ministry—For we are both privileged and responsible for the ongoing life of this congregation as we hope and pray that it will flourish well beyond our life time.

Commitments of time, special abilities and financial resources deserve deep and thoughtful individual reflection. I know the sacrifices that I have made and the profound level of giving that has come from you, the congregation. All of our collective efforts bring us to this day. Here we are, a people of Vision and Mission; a community which strives to live by its Covenant and Principals.

One familiar word used to describe organized religious groups is the word “flock”. For many believers, this of course relegates the congregant to the position of followerlikened to a sheep led by a shepherd...each member is asked to conform to a standard.

Surprisingly, in some congregations parishioners give generously especially as images of heaven and hell role off a fire and brimstone preacher’s tongue warning his or her “flock” of the consequences inherent in their willingness to give or not.

Now how much easier our job would be if we were to use the Guilt and Reward method for fundraising. Tempting....but no!

In all seriousness....if we understand religion to be a means of engendering personal integrity and universal compassion, community and justice- spiritual arm twisting is just not an acceptable practice for fundraising or increasing membership.

No matter how effective the promise of heaven or hell may be, the only image of a future life that I am willing to call forth here today is the one that we have the potential to create together right where we are...right here, right now.