

TEACHING PHILANTHROPY TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH:
A Resource for Unitarian Universalist Religious Educators

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Defining Philanthropy

The *Learning to Give* program¹ defines *philanthropy* as giving, serving, and taking private citizen action for the common good. The definition includes the traditional connotation of philanthropy as giving and extends the definition to cover volunteer work and social activism. A key element is the voluntary participation of citizens acting outside of business and government for the common good.

The New Jersey *Youth in Philanthropy* program² Teacher Resource Guide defines *philanthropy* as voluntary action for the public good that can be expressed as voluntary giving, voluntary service and voluntary association to help others live a better life. *Voluntary giving* is described as sharing money or material resources, or both, with others. *Voluntary service* is sharing time and talents (or work and wisdom) to help others. *Voluntary association* is coming together in a group to address the problems of society, to fulfill the needs of society, or to enhance the lives of others. Emphasis is placed on the words *for the public or common good*.

How Philanthropy is Learned

Research indicates that children learn the value of philanthropic behavior through the following means:

- *MODELING*—By observing voluntary behavior intended to help others modeled by their primary caregiver, teacher, or religious leader.
- *COGNITIVE LEARNING*—When explicitly informed by a knowledgeable adult about philanthropy, its benefits, and the causes and effects of philanthropic behavior.
- *EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING*—Opportunities to engage in giving and serving activities.

Philanthropy Curriculum Concepts

- *Factual concepts*—about what philanthropy is, its relationship to government and the marketplace, and the place of philanthropy in the life of a community.
- *Motivational concepts*—the reasons people have for being philanthropic, including promoting the idea that any individual can be philanthropic and make a positive difference in the world.
- *Procedural concepts*—the process of how philanthropy is carried out, the structures (nonprofit or religious community) how the money and services are distributed and used for the benefit of society.
- *Personal Development concepts*—the values and skills development which come from understanding one's own desire and ability to help others (known or unknown), to make

individual choices about which causes to support, and awareness of the ethics and moral responsibilities of philanthropy (honoring donor intentions).

Philanthropy and Religion

Faith-based organizations and youth programs fill an important role in today's society, where family and schools leave off. In these environments, added learning opportunities in the areas of philanthropic giving, stewardship and volunteer service are of significant value.

Religious philanthropy is distinguished from other philanthropic giving because of the theological teachings that influence it. Commonly held beliefs include:

- God is seen as the ultimate or higher authority, which provides all we receive and to which we are accountable.
- We view ourselves as stewards with responsibility for the material resources we receive.
- Giving is discretionary rather than obligatory in that we see a portion of all we have going back to the benefit of God's creation, including our volunteer service.
- Giving is a way of thanking God for all that we are given.
- Giving our *fair share* is a reflection of our intent and giving is an expression of our religious values and beliefs.

The teachings of Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions have significantly influenced philanthropic culture and practices over time. Throughout our American history, religious philanthropy has prompted social change by addressing major issues and ills.

Nearly 47% of all philanthropic giving in America goes to religious institutions and causes. People who attend religious services regularly tend to give at higher levels and volunteer more frequently. Children and youth benefit from involvement in service and giving activities that are directly linked to the teaching and practices of their faith and religious values. The "faith factor" ³ has been identified as a factor having a positive influence on all kinds of secular philanthropy, particularly in the areas of high risk youth.

Teaching Philanthropy

Caring and sharing behaviors can be learned and taught at all ages, from infancy onward throughout life. The roots of learning philanthropic behavior begin with an infant's capacity for developing empathy, which is learned through being cared for and later being taught by the examples or messages of trusted adults (parents and caregivers).

The teaching and learning of philanthropy take place in several environments:

- **Home**—the best setting for learning caring and empathy in relationships.
- **School**—integrating service-learning opportunities and voluntarism, as well as explicit instruction about philanthropy and its role and benefit in society.
- **Religious Community**—opportunities for engaging in acts of giving and serving in a safe and structured environment and with clear linkage to the religious teachings and stories of the faith.

- **Youth Programs**—community-based service organizations designed for young people.

Recommended practices based on current understanding of young people and philanthropic learning and development include the following:

- Sharing the stories and visual resources that clearly communicate and exemplify the value of helping, sharing, and altruistic behavior. This practice can begin in preschool years.
- Linking the stories and examples of philanthropic behavior to the teachings, values, and the people of the faith. These can be introduced in elementary school years through giving and services activities related to the holiday celebrations and traditions.
- Service-learning activities, particularly effective when introduced during the middle school years.
- Teaching effective interpersonal skills and reflective thinking necessary to develop qualities necessary for mature relationships: empathy, caring, and responsible behavior toward others. This is of particular value to older youth.
- Hands-on activities and structured learning experiences in safe and supportive environment.

¹ *Learning to Give* (<http://Learningtogive.org>) is a program designed for use in K-12 public school classrooms. There are six components to the LTG program: curriculum, classroom support material, teacher professional development, publications, evaluation, and dissemination and replication. The LTG materials is available online, free for use without copyright concerns.

² *Youth in Philanthropy program* (<http://www.yipweb.org>) was designed by the New Jersey Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals in the early 1990's as an educational program for grades K-8.

³ A term attributed to Harvard economist, Richard Freedman, referenced U.S. News and World Report article: *Can Churches Save America?* by Joseph P. Shapiro and Andrea R. Wright, Sept 9, 1996 issue.

Bibliography

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