

Question One themes: How do you approach generosity as a spiritual practice in your congregation?

Ministers are thinking, preaching, writing and working with their lay leadership about this. It's hard work, and to incorporate generosity into the church's spiritual life requires time, energy and courage from the minister and lay leadership. It's not about using this or that program for stewardship; it is about breaking through reluctance to talk about money and connecting money to the church's mission and ministries.

There are things that make this hard. It's hard if the minister wants to do more but feels out of step with the congregation. And these have been hard times. One minister said his church was facing cost overruns this year, and two said that their budgets and/or staff salaries have been flat for four to five years.

Question Two: What might inspire your congregation to see giving to the UUA as a spiritual practice:

COMMON THEMES

Need experiences, opportunities and connections with the UUA.

Name and quantify resources and services received from the UUA.

Need stronger communications and clear statement of purposes.

Paying UUA dues seen as an obligation or duty. Not inspired.

Question Three: What stands in the way of greater generosity to the UUA?

1. Lack of Financial Generosity in the Congregation. One minister noted there was "scarcity thinking" among congregants, and another noted an early congregational history of receiving financial assistance from the AUA, that contributed to a cultural lack of financial responsibility. However, the much broader concern was "economic reality." Ministers noted that many congregants were "financially marginal" and that "the middle class is getting more and more squeezed." Another reported cutting Fair Share giving deeply in the past to balance the budget. There was a sense of taking care of the congregation first before giving to the larger movement, and the inability to inspire spiritual generosity when congregations are already challenged to simply maintain bricks and mortar or are making hard choices of choosing Fair Share or cutting staff. One minister serving a congregation committed to Fair Share could at least imagine that what could get in the way of continued generosity would be a conflicting need to attend to local needs and growth.

2. Lack of Connection to UUA and Lack of Clarity and Understanding of Its Programs and Resources. Congregants feel more connected to their congregations than to the UUA and it is “harder work” to inspire interest in and giving to the UUA. Can make it tangible by pointing out resources such as RE programs and saying “it’s your responsibility,” but many “just don’t get it.” There has been a lack of clarity about recent UUA systemic and program changes (such as GIFT) that may stand in the way. One minister pointed out that recent experiences with UUA and District advisors on a ministerial transition strengthened culture of maintaining Fair Share. Another minister stressed the need for greater “relational linkage” to that congregations know UUA is listening and that engenders congregations to listen to the UUA, and noted that an influential congregant and lay leader on Presidents Council was helpful in connecting the congregation with the UUA. Still, even with more connection and use of services, when financial times are hard, the inspiration to greater generosity is missing.

3. Awareness of Inequity in Giving. One minister noted a congregation that felt taken advantage of once it realized the other churches that weren’t Fair Share. There is a lack of incentive to give generously when others aren’t doing their part. There was a suggestion to give regions bonuses for meeting goals in terms of giving.

4. Lack of Confidence in UUA. One minister stated that the UUA is not starting new churches, is not providing significant resources to existing churches to grow, and provides limited high quality worship resources. The minister viewed the UUA as basically an administrative agent for funds for certain initiatives, and that much of what the UUA is spending on is irrelevant and extraneous to the Association’s existence, purpose and expertise.