

Giving--the Sacred Art

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A Unitarian Universalist
Study Guide for Small Groups

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Giving...the sacred art

When practiced consistently and intentionally, giving can become a spiritual discipline and, even more, a sacred art. When we practice giving regularly and understand that our motivation has some connection outside of ourselves, we have the opportunity to radically transform our lives, the life of another person, even the lives of entire communities...It's about creating an entire lifestyle of generosity. ~Lauren Tyler Wright

Six Sessions (1-1 ½ hours each)

- Session 1** *Giving as a Sacred Art and Giving as Worship*
 - Session 2** *Giving as Stewardship: Managing our Abundance*
 - Session 3** *Giving as Holy Obligation: Transforming Identity Through Discipline*
 - Session 4** *Giving as Redemption: Restoring Money as Life-Giving Legal Tender*
 - Session 5** *Giving as Charity: Providing for the Needy with Compassion*
 - Session 6** *Giving as Justice: Believing in and Working Toward Righteous Equality*
- Closing Celebration** *(optional)*

Appendices

- 1** Giving and Generosity Quotes
- 2** Money and Spirituality: Writing Your Money Autobiography
- 3** Story of Generosity—Harvard UU Church, Harvard, MA
- 4** Biblical Story of Generosity--The Widow's Mite

RESOURCES FOR SMALL GROUP SESSION LEADERS

Session outlines are designed for six one and a half hour (1 ½ hr) group sessions, held weekly or bi-weekly, as appropriate to the setting and overall program schedule.

For helpful small group facilitation tips, visit the following websites:

Ann Becker and Associates:

<http://abecker.com/resources/files/ABAFacilitatingaSmallGroupMeeting.pdf>

Pickett Institute Curriculum (adaptation-2002):

http://www.ilj.org/publications/docs/Facilitation_Skills_Developing_Facilitative_Leadership.pdf

The UU Small Group Ministry Network:

<http://www.smallgroupministry.net/public/sessions/index.html>

General Guidelines for Establishing Groups

The group establishes its own covenant or guidelines for interaction and confidentiality. This should be put into practice during the first session and reviewed at the start of each session thereafter. Often group covenants include the following points:

- Respectful interaction—listen deeply to others when they are sharing and speak for yourself, no put-downs, take turns.
- Commitment to attend and fully participate in each session.
- Mutual accountability—honoring privacy and upholding the covenant.

The UU Worship Web is a rich online source of readings, prayers, sermons, and other worship elements and planning tools.

<http://www.uua.org/spirituallife/worshipweb/index.php>

Study Group Preparation:

Each participant should have use of a copy of the book, reading the first chapter for Session 1: ***Giving—the sacred art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity***© written by Lauren Tyler Wright. 2008. Skylight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, VT.

www.skylightpaths.com \$16.99/copy. Available at the UUA Bookstore, www.uua.org/bookstore

You may choose to provide a print copy of Appendix 2 as additional resource for reflection: ***Money and Spirituality: Writing Your Money Autobiography***

Session 1 *Giving as a Sacred Art and Giving as Worship*

- I. Session Preparation:** Read Introduction and Chapter One. Bring the book and a journal. Print copies of Appendix 2, if to be used for handouts (optional).

II. Chalice Lighting

Create an opening ritual that incorporates the Buddhist teaching (page 3-4) lighting the participants' individual tea lights from the single flame of the chalice.

III. Check-in and Introductions

IV. Discussion: *Giving as Worship*

The author points out that “worship reorders our values and our priorities by helping us fasten our vision on the eternal, on that which transcends our small egos. Likewise, giving in all its forms helps us to reorder our everyday perceptions that keep ‘me’ and what is ‘mine’ at the center of the universe. By giving, we release our desire to hold desperately to what is in our hands and find that we are left with open palms and a mind no longer distracted by clinging to stuff. This posture of open hands and open mind, in turn, spurs further generous giving and helps us to see through the cultural clutter to the deep interconnectedness we all share....We set off a chain reaction when we live out of thanksgiving for the abundance of God; gratitude spurs generosity.”

Questions for discussion:

- *Does the author’s description of worship resonate with your notion or experience of worship?*
- *In what ways does Unitarian Universalist worship help us to reorder our values and priorities and provide opportunities for gratitude and generosity?*

V. Individual Reflection & Journaling—followed by sharing in pairs or triads.

- “The single most and ultimately redemptive idea that we can set loose within the capitalist world today is the simple recognition that life is a gift....We respond to God’s gracious gift of the world by simply being gracious and generous with one another.”

- “Joy springs from positive experiences of generosity, but there are challenging encounters that also hold meaning and power for which can be grateful.”
- “Joyful gratitude is much more subtle and complex. It’s not a happiness that overrides other emotions, it’s a gladness that sits alongside our pain.”

VI. Money and our faith community:

- *What are the expectations for giving money in our congregation?*
- *When you give money to our congregation, does it feel like an act of worship?*
- *Does giving to our congregation feel different then giving to other charities?*
- *What are the ways for giving to our congregation?*
 - Electronic giving
 - Checks quarterly
 - Weekly offering

VII. Individual Reflection & Journaling—sharing in pairs or triads.

- *In what ways do you experience worship through giving in non-monetary ways?*
- Refer to examples on pages 17-18 of the book.

VIII. Closing Words

IX. Planning for Session Two—review the preparation for session and make assignments.

Session 2 *Giving as Stewardship: Managing our Abundance*

- I. **Session Preparation:** Read Chapter Two and Prepare Appendices A-D forms (in the book, pages 131 – 140).

Supplies: Poster board (1-2 pieces), a 64 count box of Crayons; print copies of Appendix 3, if it will be used as a handout.

- II. **Chalice Lighting and Check-in**

- III. **Opening Reading** (pages 25-26)

Lauren Tyler Wright shares her story:

In grade school I had a box of sixty-four Crayola crayons. It drove me crazy when kids would borrow them because, inevitable, they would blunt the sharp point of the crayon, put them back in the wrong color order, or, heaven forbid, break one. Truth be told, it took me at least a month after I got the box to actually use one of the crayons because I wanted to keep them perfect for as long as possible. That's how much I valued the little bit of control I had over those sixty-four uniquely colored objects, they were mine.

When I eventually came around to the idea that my crayon box was not really mine in the first place but was rather on loan to me for a while, I discovered a surprising sense of freedom—of relief, almost. I was freed from fretting over the inevitable demise of each perfectly sharpened crayon tip. I still had a momentary anxiety attack when I heard snap and saw a classmate with a piece of crayon in either hand. But I released the worry in my heart about messing them up and was freed simply to enjoy what had been loaned to me and to share it with others.

When you are able to see every component of your life—your money, your home, your car, your bank account—in this way, you find that you worry less and that giving generously is no longer threatening or a chore. Instead it becomes a life-enriching experience that underscores the abundance of what you do have. The secret is learning to hold your possessions more loosely. It's a strange paradox, but it's true: when you loosen your grip of control on your stuff, you find that you actually appreciate it more than you did when you clutched it for dear life. You also discover a freedom with (and from) your possessions that leads to joy in the act of giving.

IV. **Ritual—**

Pass the crayon box around and invite each person to take 3-4 crayons and invite each person to draw something on the poster board *in silence*, then return the crayons to the box. Once everyone has contributed their drawing, take a few moments to reflect on the visual outcome of their communal creativity.

V. **Giving as Stewardship**

- Defining the concept and scope of stewardship—invite group members to describe the traditions and practices of stewardship in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths. Take a few moments to share thoughts about the theological grounding for these religious practices and traditions found in the stories, sacred texts, and teachings of the faiths.
- Giving as an act of stewardship—managing resources for third party.
- Read the passage from page 26 under the heading Toward Freedom and Creativity.

When giving is viewed as stewardship, you're able to let go of the trappings associated with possessing things and to expand your imagination to consider the possible uses for your sacred abundance.

- Discuss example from popular culture and Unitarian Universalist stories: Oprah's "Pass it On" and "The Big Give"

Appendix 3—Story of the Harvard UU Church, Harvard, MA

VI. **Individual Reflection & Journaling—**followed by sharing in pairs or triads.

Excerpt for reflection (page 28): *[Andrew Carnegie] believed that people of wealth were responsible for acting as trustees of the needy and were obliged to redistribute their assets. He once wrote, "Surplus wealthy is a sacred trust which its possessor is bound to administer in his lifetime for the good of the community."*

- Stewardship is a matter of perspective: Abundance vs. Scarcity
 - Viewing what we have
 - Wanting what we don't have
 - Worrying about running out
- *What about sufficiency? Having enough?*
- *When do we know when we have more than enough?*

VII. Exercise Finding our Extra Abundance

(See page 33 for guidelines and appendices A-D in the book for the worksheets.)

- Review the recommended steps for finding one's extra-abundance and discuss the following aspects:
 - Sacred Act of Budgeting
 - Increasing extra abundance
 - Managing with a vision—giving with intention

VIII. Closing Words

IX. Planning for Session Three—review the preparation for session and make assignments.

Session 3 *Giving as Holy Obligation: Transforming Identity Through Discipline*

I. **Session Preparation: Read Chapter Three**, pages 57 - 76

- Invite three participants to volunteers, each to be ready to share a 5 minute summary and example of one of the three religious giving traditions:
 - 1) Jewish Tzedakah (righteous giving)
 - 2) Islamic Zakat (alms tax)
 - 3) Christian Tithing (giving 10%)
- Each participant is asked to bring a personal care item, non-perishable food item, or money with them to be given to a local homeless shelter or food pantry.
- Bring a special basket for the offering ritual.

II. **Chalice Lighting and Check-in**

“Givers are called to be generous...they give to the right people, the right amount, at the right time...because that is the noble thing to do.” Aristotle

III. **Types of Religious Giving**—participant volunteers share their 5-minute summaries of the three religious giving traditions, as assigned.

- 1) Jewish Tzedakah (righteous giving)
- 2) Islamic Zakat (alms tax)
- 3) Christian Tithing (giving 10%)

IV. **Individual Reflection & Journaling**—followed by sharing in pairs or triads.

Questions for discussion:

- *How do you feel about giving as an obligation?*
- *How and to whom are we accountable for our giving?*
- *What commitment to giving are you willing to make?*
- *How might making a commitment to giving as a spiritual disciple lead to transformation?*
- Review Maimonides Ladder and discuss/share stories as illustrations of the various rungs of the ladder. *In what ways does this progression promote personal transformation and maturity through generosity and giving? What are the most powerful and meaningful motivations for giving?*

V. Dialogue Topics—The Pitfalls of Obligatory Giving (pages 65-68) and the Action Leads to Feelings Lead to Transformation (pages 68-73) sections.

VI. Exercise—Planning our giving commitments

Take some time for participants to individually consider the ways they can commit to regular giving plan, identifying at least one financial giving practice and at least two non-financial giving practices. Write these down. Share and discuss.

VII. Closing Ritual

Pass the basket among the participants, inviting each person to making their offering to the collection for the local agency.

Pass the chalice or a tea light, saying “thank you” or expressing appreciation one to the next as the light is passed.

Closing words

VIII. Planning for Session Four—review the preparation for session and make assignments.

Session 4 *Giving as Redemption: Restoring Money as Life-Giving Legal Tender*

I. **Session Preparation:** Read Chapter Four, pages 77 - 93

Bring tea lights or votive candles for opening ritual.

II. **Chalice Lighting and Check-in**

III. **Opening Reading—**

Money can be used as a tool to celebrate life and increase joy rather than being a source of contention or stress. The key is to have a proper, skillful relationship with money—neither fearing it nor craving it, but respecting it and the power it can have in our lives and in the lives of others...In fact, through skillful giving, money can be transformed from a profane object into a sacred tool for achieving good.

~Lauren Tyler Wright

IV. **Ritual—**

Reflect on the people, things, and circumstances in your life for which you are grateful.

Invite each participant to light a tea light or candle and share a word or phrase that describes for what s/he is grateful.

V. **Individual Reflection & Journaling—**sharing in pairs or triads. (pages 78-83)

Nurturing a healthy relationship with money comes from reflecting honestly on our attitudes about money, consumer behaviors, motivations for spending, and our needs vs. desires for possessions and wealth.

Questions for reflection and sharing:

- *Do you find yourself daydreaming or worrying about your finances?*
- *How do you use money to feel better?*
- *Are you influenced by consumer marketing advertisements and social pressure in your spending?*
- *What are your reactions to the quotes on pages 86-87 about prevailing attitudes about money in our society?*

VI. Exercise—Brainstorm alternatives to buying and ideas for being counter-cultural in our giving (pages 83-86) as a group, responding to the following questions:

- *What are some ways one might create a Modus Vivendi (a lifestyle, a manner of living) of generosity and giving?*
- *How might we help our children or family members learn the importance of generosity and giving in their lives and relationships?*
- *How might our congregation nurture a culture of generosity and giving among its members and surrounding communities?*

Invite participants to identify several of these ideas that resonate with them. Suggest they write these in their journals as a commitment to establish a practice in their daily lives.

VII. Closing words by Lauren Tyler Wright

[The] act of giving is in itself radically opposed to the value-assigning, market-driven, objectifying culture we live in....When we give something away, we very well may be aware of the approximate value of the thing, but coming to a mutually agreed-upon value between giver and receiver is not necessary for the transaction to occur. As philosopher Jacques Ellul wrote, 'Not only does (generosity) destroy the power of money, but even more, it introduces the one who receives the gift into the world of grace...and it begins a new chain of cause and effect which breaks the vicious cycle of selling and corruption.'

Both the poor and the rich struggle to find rightly ordered understandings of money. Some succeed. In both poor and rich communities, we find individuals who have redeemed money from life-giving green stuff to life-giving legal tender. They have found that the true worth of money is not its market value, what it can purchase for us, or the status it can earn us—but what it can do for someone else.

VIII. Planning for Session Five—review the preparation for session and make assignments.

Session 5 Giving as Charity: Providing for the Needy with Compassion

Session Preparation: Read Chapter Five—pages 95-112

Supplies: Bring a copy of the Christian Bible with suggested readings marked. Print copies of Appendix D, if to be provided as handouts.

Ask participants to bring a small thing that holds special meaning to give away.

I. Chalice Lighting and Check-in

Charity offers the opportunity to take another perspective on empathy, encountering the sacred in ways we might not otherwise encounter it...when you change your point of view and attend to the needs of others, particularly the marginalized, you are much more likely to notice the presence of the sacred than if you only focus on yourself.

II. Ritual--

Kabir (circa 1398-1470) wrote “*You came into the world with fists closed and you go away with open palms. So, even while living stretch your hand open and give liberally.*”

Turn to another person in the group and give the special item you brought away, remaining open to receiving a gift from another and inviting the other person(s) to give their gifts freely so that all may receive.

III. Dialogue about the distinctions between charity and justice

Read excerpt from page 98 about giving as charity:

Giving as charity is the most intimate and relational form of giving, and as such it has the most power to change who you are as the giver. More specifically, learning how to experience true compassion for “the other” (the poor, the disenfranchised, the marginalized) has been for me the most powerful step in attempting a lifestyle of generosity. If I could only choose one thing...to highlight, it would be the gift of compassion for those on the outskirts of society...just thinking about how the world could change through the power of compassion, so we will...examine what it looks like to provide for another person’s immediate needs via compassion—sitting with them in their darkest hours, carrying their burdens for a moment, and finding ways to lessen some of their suffering.

Themes for dialogue:

- Empathy, compassion
- Inherent worth and dignity

Biblical passages to refer to: Matthew 25:35-36, 40

- *How might we connect our charitable giving to our first UU principle—to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person? How do our personal values and attitudes affect our giving behaviors?*

IV. Individual Reflection & Journaling—sharing in pairs or triads

Reflect on a time when you experienced charity—either as the one who gave or the one who received. In what ways did you encounter the sacred? In what ways were you transformed? Who has been your mirror--your teacher—about charity?

V. Review list “*What can I do?*” on pages 103-104 of book.

Consider approaches to charity—

- Face-to-face—*organizations or individuals?*
- Controlled vs. Wise Giving—*How do we best balance our need for control how money is used with the need to trust in the organization’s financial choices?*
- Pride—public vs. private giving—*Is my giving about me or the other?*
- Shame or Embarrassment vs. Affirming Dignity—*How might we appropriately engage those with fewer resources in giving activities?*
- Worry and judgment—*do these undermine compassion?*

Refer to the Biblical story The Widow’s Mite (Luke 21:1-4) (Appendix 4)

As time allows, share ideas and reactions to these approaches and the story.

VI. Closing Reading

Read excerpt from pages 111-112 “The Gifts of Charity”

When you practice charity through writing a check to an organization, as a result of creating a relationship, or by just spending time with the needy, you have the chance to connect deeply with both the wide expanse of humanity and the Sacred. You are able to shift the focus away from yourself and onto another person, creating a new point of view.

This change in paradigm creates sacred space, as you celebrate the commonalities you share with those around you and take an introspective look at yourself. It is the entrenched prejudices we acknowledge in those moments of self-reflection that, over years and generations, give rise to societal injustices. In our final chapter we will explore how giving as justice can turn the tide and change the world.

VII. Planning for Session Six—review the preparation for session and make assignments.

Session 6 *Giving as Justice: Believing in & Working Toward Righteous Equality*

Session Preparation: Read Chapter Six (pages 113-129)

Supplies: Tea lights, at least two for each participant. Collect information on planned or legacy giving options through your congregation, UU organization, or community-based justice organization.

I. Chalice Lighting and Check-in

II. Opening Readings (excerpt page 129)

The Buddha said, 'When you see someone practicing the Way of giving, aid him joyously, and you will obtain vast and great blessings,' A shramana asked: 'Is there an end to those blessings?' The Buddha said, 'Consider the flame of a single lamp. Though a hundred thousand people come and light their own lamps from it so that they can cook their food and ward off the darkness, the first lamp remains the same as before. Blessings are like this, too.

~Tripitaka Sutra 10

The possibilities of giving are endless. You are invited to create a lifestyle of generosity, so think about steady and sustainable ways to practice giving. We can't all go out and open a school in Africa for young girls, but we can all do something. Take it from Mother Teresa, 'If you can't feed a hundred people, just feed one.' Whatever you do, may it be done with a generous spirit for the sake of God and your fellow human beings. Amen.

~Lauren Tyler Wright

They who give have all things; they who withhold have nothing.

~Hindu proverb

III. Ritual—

Each person has two tea lights. Each person lights one of their tea lights from the chalice, then moves around the room to light the second tea light of another participant. When all the tea lights are lit, they can be placed around the altar or the room.

IV. Justice and Righteous Equity

Consider the messages about justice and righteous equity presented in the book. The author writes: *Those of us able to use our money to work for justice are also the recipients of a remarkable gift: We have the opportunity to be catalysts of actual change in the world.*

- Honoring our differences
- Sharing our resources
- View contributing to just causes as opportunities to be catalysts for change in the world.

V. Individual Reflection & Journaling—sharing in pairs or triads.

Reflect upon page 117, “Money offers” paragraph and explore money’s role in freedom, choice and power in our lives and communities. Reflect upon page 118, justice giving is transferring power.

In what ways does (has) money offered you freedom, choice, and power?

- Money offers freedom
- Money offers choice
- Money offers power

VI. Exercise-- Brainstorming ways we can contribute to righteous equality and justice.

How might our UU principles and purposes call us to justice giving for righteous equality and reconciliation?

- Standing on the Side of Love campaign
- UUSC Haiti Relief Fund and other similar giving programs.
- The Sienna Project
- Partner Church Council

Choose a giving project as an individual, with another participant, or as a group.

Consider your options for making a planned or legacy gift to your UU congregation or organization for long-lasting support of justice into the future. Review available planned giving materials collected from these entities.

VII. Closing Words

The Buddha said, 'When you see someone practicing the Way of giving, aid him joyously, and you will obtain vast and great blessings,' A shramana asked: 'Is there an end to those blessings?' The Buddha said, 'Consider the flame of a single lamp. Though a hundred thousand people come and light their own lamps from it so that they can cook their food and ward off the darkness, the first lamp remains the same as before. Blessings are like this, too.

~Tripitaka Sutra 10

VIII. Planning for Closing Celebration, scheduled as the group chooses—review the preparation for session and make assignments.

Closing Celebration *(optional session or add-on to Session Six)*

If the group chooses to schedule a separate session for a closing celebration, the following session plan could be used. If the group chooses to add a closing celebration to the end of Session Six, this can be modified as an additional segment.

Suggested theme: Creating a lifestyle of giving as individuals, small group, and congregation.

Preparation and planning: Discuss the theme and the various elements and activities that reflect and reinforce the theme. The following template may be helpful to the group in outlining the plan for the closing celebration. Use available UU resources, such as hymn books, the online Worship Web, meditation manuals, stories and curricula in choosing the elements and activities for the celebration.

Chalice Lighting--

Ritual—

Check-in--

Activities--

Other planning--

Appendix 1

Giving and Generosity Quotes

From Lauren Tyler Wright:

- *Giving reorders our priorities in sometimes surprisingly subversive ways.*
- *Practicing the sacred art of giving helps replace the narrow perspective of “me” with an expansive view of “we.”*
- *Joyful gratitude is subtle and complex. It’s not a happiness that overrides other emotions; it’s a gladness that sits alongside our pain.*
- *Giving is profoundly transformative because it requires two people or entities—a giver and receiver, both of whom are affected by the act of giving.*
- *Everyone can give and everyone can receive.*

From Walt Whitman:

- *The habit of giving only enhances the desire to give.*

From John Wesley:

- *Earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.*

From Andre Gide:

- *Complete possession is proved only by giving. All you are unable to give possesses you.*

From Mother Teresa:

- *Love cannot remain by itself—it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action and that action is service. Whatever form we are, able or disabled, rich or poor, it is not how much we do but how much love we put into the doing; a lifelong sharing of love with others.*

From Henri Nouwen:

- *Money has something to do with that intimate little place in your heart where you need security and don't want to give that away.*

From William A Ward:

- *Giving is more than a responsibility--it is a privilege; more than an act of obedience--it is evidence of our faith. -*

From Rev. Beth Graham:

- *Giving is about more than money, of course. It is also about giving of ourselves, our time, our talents, our hearts.*

From Craig Blomberg:

- *Since most of us already have riches, we need to be praying: ;Help me to be generous and wise in giving more of these riches away.*

From Parker Palmer:

- *The soul is generous: it takes in the needs of the world. The soul is wise: it suffers without shutting down. The soul is hopeful: it engages the world in ways that keep opening the heart. The soul is creative: it finds a path between realities that might defeat us and fantasies that are mere escapes. All we need to do is to bring down the wall that separates us from our own souls and deprives the world of the soul's regenerative powers.*

From Frederick Bueckner:

- *Generosity begins at the crossroads where your deep joys and passions intersect with the world's deep needs, blessing you with the opportunity to live life graciously and with integrity.*

From Kennon L. Callahan:

- *Living is giving. We live life best as we give our strengths, gifts, and competencies . . . We are called to serve, not survive. Our giving makes a difference in our families, our congregation, our community, and our faith.” — adapted*

From Craig Gay:

- *The single most subversive and ultimately redemptive idea that we can set loose within the capitalist world today is the simple recognition that life is a gift.. We respond to God’s gracious gift of the world by being gracious and generous with one another.*

From Henry Ward Beecher:

- *There never was a person who did anything worth doing, who did not receive more than he gave.*

From a Wonderful Array of Unidentified Sources:

- *Give thanks for love we all may share. Give thanks for beauty everywhere. Give thanks for hope of good to be. Give thanks for truth that makes us free.*
- *A spoonful of rice from ten persons makes a bowl of rice. (A Korean proverb)*
- *Giving out of devotion to one’s faith and one’s community feels markedly different than giving out a sense of duty. It becomes, then, a matter of the heart.*
- *Our acts of generosity—giving without the expectation of anything in return—are an outward testimony to our faith and recognition of the abundance present in our lives.*
- *Good stewardship is a matter of spiritual discipline and proper management of resources. Giving, then, happens in due season and is not wasteful.*
- *Fund-raising becomes “soul-raising” when giving connects with one’s deepest held values and out of passion and spirit of generosity.*

- *Compassion & generosity are intricately woven strands that add beauty & richness to the tapestry of our lives.*
- *Children learn the value & importance of charity at any age. It is never too late to leave a legacy or lead by example.*
- *Where there is generosity there is grace.*
- *Generosity is like leaves in autumn: colorful gems of beauty, a gift to the world, leaving a legacy that sustains life.*
- *Generosity is like mountain climbing: satisfying challenge, requires inner & outer resources & a great view from the summit.*
- *Generosity with strings is not generosity; It is a deal.*
- *There are endless opportunities to express appreciation each & every day: in silence, in actions, in words.*
- *Give thanks for love that touches our lives: flowing in, out, and around us.*

MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY

Guidelines for Writing Your Money Autobiography

Why write a money autobiography?

Writing a money autobiography is a challenging and crucial step in understanding our behavior and powerful feelings evoked by money. Even for those of us who find it difficult to write, reflection on money and our life's journey yields insights and deepened awareness.

We benefit from examining our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors which relate to money. This process involves discerning the ways we earn, inherit, invest, spend, give, and waste money, so that we can become more conscious and intentional about our choices.

A money autobiography is useful not only in personal growth, but also in the growth of the congregation. What affects individuals affects the organizations to which they belong. As we grieve over our entanglement with materialism, status and power, and as we open ourselves to compassion, new vision and hope will flow through us and our faith community into the world.

You are encouraged to set aside some quiet time, take up your pen or keyboard, and discover for yourself the gifts of healing, insight, and freedom which often come when in vulnerability and trust we acknowledge feelings, attitudes and experiences evoked by money.

How to Prepare a Money Autobiography

When writing a money autobiography it is important to focus on feelings and relationships as well as reflecting on factual accounts; use some or all of the following questions, as appropriate and helpful.

Write a three-page autobiography which deals only with the subject of your life as it is related to money.

- Include the role of money in your childhood. *What is your happiest memory in connection with money? What is your unhappiest memory? What attitude did your father have? What was your attitude toward money as a child? Did you feel poor or rich? Did you worry about money?*
- *What was (is) your attitude about money as a teenager? What are your memories of this period?*

- *What role did (does) money play in your life as a young adult? As a parent? At age 45, 50, 65? Did (does) your attitude or feelings shift at the different transition stages in your life?*
- *How do you feel about your present financial status? What is your present financial status? What is your monthly income? What are your other assets? What will your income be at age 65, 75, 80? Will you inherit money? Do you think about that?*
- *Are you generous or conservative with your money? Do you spend money on yourself? If so, do you do it easily?*
- *Do you feel guilty about money you have? Do you count your money?*
- *Do you gamble with your money? Do you “throw it away?” Do you worry about money?*
- *When you eat with friends and there is a group check, are you the one to pick it up? Do you make sure that you pay your share and that it includes tax and tip?*
- *Do you tend to be more on the giving end of things, or on the receiving end?*
- *If you lacked money, how would you feel about others helping you pay your rent, or treating when you went out and were not in the position to reciprocate?*
- *If you have money, how would you feel about subsidizing a friend’s rent, or paying more than your share of things? What would you want in return? How would you feel if that friend spent money on something that in your value system seemed “extravagant?”*
- *How have your thoughts about money and your behavior been shaped by the church or your faith?*
- *Do you give a percentage of your income? If so, how do you feel about doing so? What are your reasons for giving?*
- *Have you made a will? If not, why not? Did you include anyone in your will beside your family? Your congregation? Other organizations?*

Additional Questions to Consider

- *Culture and religion often teach different roles and behaviors toward money for men and women. How has your approach to money and its use been shaped by your gender?*

- *How do you deal with the fact that two-thirds of the people of our world are poor? If you have personal relationships with people who are poor and /or work for social justice, how has that affected your attitude toward money?*
- *What experiences have you had of rich and poor living happily together? What did it require of each?*
- *How do you feel about asking other people for money...for yourself, a worthy cause, your congregations, etc?*
- *How does having or not having money affect your self-esteem?*
- *How does having more/less money than your spouse, partner, or friend impact your relationship with that person?*
- *Do you ever use money to control events and/or people? Do you ever use money to give others freedom and opportunity?*
- *Do you feel that dealing with money is a bothersome intrusion into the real purpose of your life?*
- *In what ways is your relationship to money a training ground for your spiritual journey, or an expression of your deepest values?*
- *How would you feel if you discovered that your income was derived from questionable enterprises?*
- *How do you feel when beggars approach you asking for money?*

Ways to Use the Money Autobiography

Sharing money autobiographies in a small group seeking to grow in stewardship and compassion offers unique opportunities for understanding and growth, as well as the possibility of dealing with issues, feelings, and decisions at a much more profound level than would otherwise be possible.

Suggested Resources:

Gary, Tracy & Kohner, Melissa. *Inspired Philanthropy*, 2nd ed. Jossey-Bass. 2002

Jeavons, Thomas H & Basinger, Rebekah Burch. *Growing Givers' Hearts*. Jossey-Bass. 1995.

Kessel, Brent. *It's Not About the Money*. Harper One. 2008.

Klainer, Pamela York. *How Much is Enough?* Basic Books. 2002.

Sweetser, Terry and Milnor, Susan. *The Abundance of Our Faith*, UUA. 2006.

Twist, Lynn. *The Soul of Money*, W. Norton & Co. 2003.

Wright, Lauren Tyler. *Giving—the sacred art*. Skylight Paths. 2008.

These guidelines were adapted by Laurel Amabile from the *Guidelines for Writing Your Money Autobiography* brochure, Ministry of Money, Germantown, MD.

A STORY OF GENEROSITY

An interview with the Reverend Wendy L. Bell, Minister of the
Harvard Unitarian Universalist Church, Harvard, MA

Imagine walking into beautiful Harvard Unitarian Universalist Church one Sunday morning. It's autumn and today is the kick-off service for the church's annual stewardship campaign. You are warmly greeted and handed an envelope with instructions not to open it until prompted to do so during the service. When the time comes, you and the other congregants are asked by your minister, Rev. Wendy Bell, to open your envelopes very carefully.

What's inside these 150 envelopes? MONEY--a total of \$1,020. The envelopes have varying amounts of money: two dollars, five, ten and twenty dollar bills. The message conveyed is: It's our money, the church's money. Not a gift, exactly, and not a loan. The rules for the use of the money in the envelopes are as follows: You can't give it back to the church. (It's not a loan.), You can't spend it on yourself. (It's not a gift.), You have to spend it on something the church thinks is important based on our mission, covenant, and UU principles and purposes. (It's the church's money.)

Why are the amounts in the envelopes different? Not everyone is the same, even though everyone is valuable and each of us is good at some things, not so good at other things. Everyone has something to give, even if it doesn't seem like much. We can each make a difference if we think about what we have to give, get creative, and do something to make the most of what we have.

Rev. Bell asked everyone to record what they did with the money they received that morning on an index card and return the card to her within a couple of weeks. The possibilities were endless, the congregation rose to the challenge, worked together and individually to make the most of what they had received. It was a memorable experience, with lasting effects in the lives of many individuals and families.

For example, one family made the decision that instead of simply donating their money to a local food pantry, they would go food shopping together, bring the food to the pantry in person and volunteer there for an afternoon. Another family pooled all the money they received, chose a worthy cause to contribute it to, then wrote to their extended family and friends to invite them to join with them in making contributions.

Most recently, Harvard Unitarian Universalist Church has found new ways to express its generosity through a new program of donating the undesignated weekly offering collection to causes the church cares about.

Rev. Bell reports that in beginning the program, the church anticipated giving away about \$5,000. In actuality, the generosity of the congregation's offerings far exceeded the estimate, with over \$14,000 in contributions given away in the last fiscal year.

The HUUC is in the midst of preparing for a major capital campaign for the construction of a new fellowship hall and program facility, which kicked off on September 30th. The congregation has pledged their full fair share contribution to the Annual Program Fund, which will be the fifteenth consecutive year as one of our esteemed Honor Congregations.

~Written by Laurel Amabile, APF Quarterly Newsletter, Fall 2008. Used with permission.

The Biblical Story of the Widow's Offering

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

Mark 12: 41-44 New International Version, 1983

As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Luke 21: 1-4 New International Version, 1983

For Children's versions of the Widow's Mite and other activities:

Unitarian Universalist Association curriculum series—*Tapestry of Faith*

<http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/curricula/tapestryfaith/wonderfulwelcome/session11/sessionplan/stories/119719.shtml>

From other faith group sources:

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/widows-mite.html>

<http://www.ebibleteacher.com/children/lessons/widows.htm>

<http://www.kirkofkildaire.org/quest/FQlessons/WidowPlayhouse.htm>

For visual images of the Widow's Mite story:

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/widows-mite-ppt-slides.htm>

For general background information and interpretation:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lesson_of_the_widow%27s_mite

ⁱ Excerpts used in this UU Study guide are from Giving—the sacred art: Creating a Lifestyle of Generosity © 2008 by Lauren Tyler Wright. Permission granted by SkyLight Paths Publishing, P.O. Box 237, Woodstock, VT 05091 www.skylightpaths.com .