

*Our Need to Give***A Message for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation****By The Rev. CJ McGregor****Delivered on February 16, 2020**

The culture we live in encourages us to always be thinking about what we need more of. More clothes, more cars, more food, more vacations, more education, more money for education, more income, more... On and on it goes. Church leaders often get caught up in this, too. We need more volunteers. We need more kids. We need more teachers. We need more people. We need more space. We need more money. The church needs more! Influenced by the world around us, the annual pledge campaign becomes a few people telling the rest that the church needs more ... the church needs more of our time, of our talent, and especially more and more of our treasures. It is exhausting!

Let me ask you? Have you ever heard of a church saying, “we have plenty?” I think a lot of people are tired of the messages that really say the church “needs to receive”, especially when that message is concentrated on a Sunday or two, or a month or two during the annual pledge drive. Let’s give that kind of campaign message a breather!

It is not about what the church needs to receive. Whatever we offer is graciously welcomed with a glad heart. Your leaders will put together whatever we all collectively offer, figure out how to best, with wisdom and effectiveness and joy, spend whatever amount of money you promise to give. They will make promises based on your promises. There will, like there always has been, a budget for All faiths members to say “yay” or “nay” to, next month during the annual meeting. It will be based on what you have promised, whatever that promise is. And it will be fine. It will be just fine.

Let’s not spend our energy worrying about what the church needs to receive. Instead, let’s talk about our need to give. When I first got here, you had a practice of sharing monies put in the plate on certain Sundays during a second collection. Not every Sunday, but certain Sundays. It seemed like a good and generous gesture to me. But it didn’t feel like a practice that was helping to change how you see yourself. Too many church people go around feeling, not as good as they could. So, I asked that we begin to share a percentage every month, thinking maybe that would help.

Now, every second Sunday ten percent of what goes in the collection plates goes out the door to a growing list of organizations doing good works in this community. You were giving before. Now you are practicing generosity more often. More money is going out in the community and more “feel good” about who we are is coming in. I have not heard anyone yet say; “I would rather not feel so good about being generous.”

We are the people who enjoy giving and giving generously because giving makes a difference in our lives and positively impacts the lives of others. Our tonic for what the world needs, what we need, is to move within the circle of generosity. The “feel good” isn’t limited to us. We are the people who get phone calls, e-mails, visits from people who want to know if we can support the social change agency that they are working for that is trying to do good in Fort Myers? Just a

little change from our collection plate is changing our reputation. We have moved into the circle of generosity and it shows.

We are the people who give away money ... helping to heal a hurting, bruised, broken world. There are those who are motivated to give because they believe that living is just as much about receiving as it is about giving. Too often, when our concern is for the church's need to receive, we forget to listen for what motivates people to give. There are at least 3 kinds of motivations.

When a pledge campaign lumps everyone together as if we all care about how much the budget needs to increase, or how lovely a pie chart looks, we are not listening for what makes people want to give. One motivation, and it might be yours, is the need to live within the circle of generosity. They are people, many of whom are UU's, who are full of trust in the benevolent universe. Grateful for being alive and aware of their blessings no matter what kind of life they live, they choose to be in the world in a way that acknowledges that giving is part of living. As a matter of course, they give back because they have been given to. It is essential to their very being. It is not a matter of obligation, but like breathing, an "of course". They might call it paying it forward.

Whatever it is called, people motivated by a trust in the benevolence of the universe, give because they are alive. These folks, and you may be one, don't need a pledge campaign to convince them to give. They already do. What they might need is a good reason, a compelling reason to give here. They want to know how lives have been changed, how the world is going to change, because we exist. They want to know what this church gives away, how generous are we?

Before I arrived here, as I was reading over your materials, I clearly heard, that you are a church that is proud of the way you care for each other. You are a people who love having fun together. Building community is important here. The attention you give to compassionate communication is part of showing what kind of people you are and want to be. You sing and hold hands....and you are OK with being connected in passionate ways with each other.

There is a motivation that causes people to give that comes from the need to belong. You might be this kind of a giver, you want to be part of a group who knows who they are and why they come together. You want to and often do trust your leaders to take you to places you want to go. You give because you are excited about being part of this congregation. This group is so much fun, you want to go to be on board. You give because you know that is what is expected, what it takes to be counted as "in". All you ever want to know is what does it take to be part of the gang?

The standard here is that members give.... Time, talent, and especially treasure....the more active you are, the more you will give all three. And the more active you are the more willing you are to make sure that everyone who wants to be "in" can be.

You give just a little more, just to make sure those who, for whatever reason can't give of their treasure right now, are "in", too.

Then there are those who, and you might be one, that are not so motivated by living within the circle of generosity or being a member of the community created and constantly re-created here. For them giving has to do with their integrity as an individual. It is about honor. You might be motivated by honor, if you look over the budget in great detail and you take out your calculator.

What you are looking for is your fair price. What does- what you use- cost? They are actually eager to pay for what they have consumed. For them giving is a matter of equal exchange, of a fair price. They are very motivated to erase a debt they owe, to bring it all back to equity as often as possible. They simply want a way to assign value to a service they have or they expect to receive. These kinds of givers want to know what the part of congregational life that they participate in costs so they can pay their fair share. They appreciate knowing the details. What they have gotten and what they will get is important and they want to know what a fair exchange is. What the church needs to receive doesn't help them know what their fair exchange rate is. If you are this kind of giver, I can help you figure it out! Meet me in my office, we'll enjoy the calculations!

What moves you to give? Do you understand your generosity as something that says who you are? Do you give to be for a group with a cause, to be part of the team that's going where you want to go? Do you make a contribution equal to the measure of what you have and will get? We are probably all motivated in one degree or another by all of these reasons, be it our internal sense of who we are or our desire to join in, to go with and where our team is going, or as an equal exchange for the good services that we have received.

These various motivations reveal the diversity in our reasons for giving. You may be most motivated by one reason or another, or by some combination of two, or even three. The point is we don't all possess the same motivation, or the same combination of motivations for giving.

If you discover that you are motivated by a deep sense of giving back because of having received, you may want to consider adjusting the parts that make up what you give away to worthy causes. In other words, this cause may have become more worthy!

If you are among those motivated by a sense of honor, and it is not so much about you and the "universe", nor so much about you and the "gang", but about you and your sense of integrity...you are both willing and able to make a fair exchange for what you consume, or you wouldn't consume it.

You want an answer for the question; "What is a fair price for a worship service that includes great music and singing, a message that moves you, heat and lights and hymnals, and cushioned seats and childcare? What is a fair price for a place to park, a bathroom, someone who listens to you, visits when you aren't well, a minister who can officiate your next wedding, one who will lift up your legacy when your time comes? What is a fair price for the amount of time you enjoy a safe building with professional staff?"

Seeing with more clarity who we are, where we are going, and what we have received...how we already give, the price of being with who we want to be with, what we owe, knowing whatever is our way to come into better alignment with what we most need. May we all live the good life, fully in the circle of generosity, the circle created by this community, full of people with integrity and honor, who have fun and feel good together..

This liberal faith asks nothing more and nothing less than for you to be in living relationship with what good you value, to make promises that reflect what good you value, and to the best of your ability make good on your promises. We are the people who... connect, grow, heal, ...and give. We are the people who celebrate life! the people who Help Heal the World

We are the people who practice generosity by donating 10% of our undesignated offering every month to a local community organization that is doing work to heal the world around us. We are the people who support others. We often take risks, engaging in public advocacy for those who are without power or voice in our society. We are the people who are committed to feed the hungry and welcome the stranger and promote peace. We are the people committed to the ways of compassionate communication.

We are the people who are moving past the past and into the future.

We are the people growing in numbers... we have widened our perspective about who it is we serve. We are the people growing in our sense of commitment. Every member and many friends make a promise of what they will do with a glad heart.. Your promise is that this church will not talk about what it needs to receive. Rather What do we need to give?

May it be so.