

Sermon: “What Flavor Do You Bring to Community?”

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Every budget is a theological statement.

Think about it.

Your family budget is a very stark example of what you value.

For many, our largest expense is housing. That makes sense. A safe place to get out of the weather and lay your head is of primary importance.

The next largest line item in our monthly expenses may well be a car payment, insurance, and gasoline costs. In our world, we need transportation to get to work, and so that’s a big priority.

Utilities are also a high priority. We need heat, water, electricity, telephone, and internet access. Anyone who argues that we do not need phones and internet access in

this day and age has not tried to apply for a job or order take-out.

Other things filter in after these basics:

Groceries

Student loans

Netflix, hulu, other streaming services

Name some others??

College tuition?

Dining out?

Savings?

Movies?

Theater?

Clothes?

Hobbies?

Books?

Right. And what about charitable giving?

Is that a priority?

Think about it –

Public broadcasting?

Audubon Society?

ASPCA?

The arts?

School club fundraisers?

Your church?

Do you plan your charitable giving in your monthly budget, or does it just sort of happen if you've got some left over?

It is easier to plan charitable giving if you use an automatic payment plan that has your bank send money from your account each month.

We do the same kind of budgeting process with our time. Let's look at how we budget our time. Ideally, we spend a third of our time sleeping, but then we spend close to that much working, for those who work full time.

That leaves one more third to be split up among the things we value, and how we prioritize those things can reveal how much we value different things.

How much time do we spend with our families? Kids, grandkids, spouse, extended in-laws and outlaws?

How much time do we spend poking at screens and computer games? Do you really want to track how many hours you're on Facebook? Gah. I know I don't. What about exercising or doing self-care? Cooking and eating healthy meals? Or do we value other stuff more so we only budget time enough to hit a drive-through on our way somewhere else?

Our budgets will reveal what we value. Our budgets reveal what we worship.

We put our resources toward the things that are important to us.

We prioritize our giving based on how highly we value the work of various organizations and institutions.

But when it comes to giving to our churches, Unitarian Universalists ... well, church funding just doesn't seem to be a priority for us.

Nationally, Unitarian Universalists come in nearly dead last among mainstream religious groups in member contributions according to percent of income. Mormons and Jews do pretty well, donating somewhere around 8% of their income to the church.

And it's not that we don't do charitable giving. We are easily as philanthropic as any other predominantly white, suburban, educated cohort, which is to say not terribly, but never mind. The problem is that we give to SO MANY organizations whose work we value. We live out our values by supporting the arts and justice work all over the globe. Yay for us!

Except our home congregations are often last on our list of priorities when it comes to charitable giving. And as much as I want to support everyone living out our values, I'd like you to take a look at that formula in your own budget and see if there is a way to move this congregation up the list of your giving.

When I was at Andover Newton Theological School, I took a fundraising and money management class from then seminary president Nick Carter. He said that the board of trustees at ANTS had an unwritten policy for its members: that the seminary they served as trustees would be their second largest line-item tax deduction, with their first being their home congregation. That was the level of financial commitment that was expected of seminary trustees: that they support their own churches first and foremost, and then Andover Newton second. After that, please feel free to donate to the Audubon Society, Oxfam, GLAAD, or Greenpeace as you like. But it was expected that seminary trustees would prioritize and pledge their support to religious institutions first.

Now you're not seminary trustees, and all but nine of you are not congregational trustees at the moment. But I'd like you to think about where the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Susquehanna Valley fits in your life. How important is this place? How much do you value it? What does it mean to you? What has this place meant to you in times of trouble? During the years your kids were growing up here?

Are you supporting it in a way commensurate with that level of significance in your life?

I ask you to think also about the role this congregation plays in the larger community. We are a refuge for those seeking an affirming, celebrating community for their queer families, queer kids, trans kids. As things get more and more frightening for queer people, and trust me, they will. As things get more dangerous for queer people and trans people and people of color, and disabled people, and all others who hold marginalized identities, the role of *this* congregation in *this* area is going to be quite literally a lifeline of support.

This building and this community will be a sanctuary for those who are bullied and harassed or threatened. They will know that here, they will be loved. Here, they can find safety from shame. Here, we will help them get all the support they need.

This congregation is so incredibly vital here. I cannot explain to you how enormous and important that is.

I know that not everybody will be able to pledge big amounts of money. I get that.

As a diverse group that is more than the sum of its parts, I also know that it is our diversity that makes us strong and makes us special. And we need everyone to show up and participate, because that's what makes this place magic. All kinds of people, each doing what they can to help sustain and nurture this faith community.

There is important work ahead of us. Very important work.
Life-saving work.

May we consider carefully how best we can be a beacon
of love and hope in a dangerous, hurting world.

Amen.