

# Resources for Communities of Ongoing Religious Exploration

V.1 Unit 6

Stewardship

Suggested chalice lighting

*Come into this circle of community. Come into this sacred space.*

*Bring your whole self!*

*Bring the joy that makes your heart sing.*

*Bring your kindness and compassion.*

*Bring also your sadness and your disappointments.*

*Spirit of love and mystery, help us to recognize the spark of the divine that lives inside each of us. May we know the joy of being together.*

## I. Introduction

What is stewardship? According to Merriam-Webster, stewardship is ‘the office, duties, and obligations of a steward.’ A steward’s job is ‘conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially: the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care.’

This addresses one aspect of stewardship that is most fraught: individual and communal attitudes toward money. It can mean different things to each of us and in fact means different things to different generations of people. Consider this breakdown of how generations think of money: (As with any generalization, the lists may not accurately or completely describe the experiences and perspectives of an individual in a particular generation. Note where your experiences and perceptions are in line with the generalizations and where they differ.)

### The GI Generation (born between 1901 and 1924)

Shaped by the Great Depression, World War II

Characteristics:

- Many experienced upward mobility, faring better financially than their parents
- Institution builders and leaders, conformist

### The Silent Generation (born between 1925 and 1945)

Shaped by Roosevelt presidency, Korean War, Cold War, anticommunism, technological and scientific advances, Civil Rights movement

Characteristics:

- Many experienced steadily rising affluence
- Engaged in defining and humanizing the world; founded organizations of political dissent that Boomers would later radicalize
- Generation limited in numbers, caught between GIs and Boomers
- Uncertain about roles and expectations, both personal and national

### The Baby Boomers (born between 1943 and 1963)

Shaped by civil rights movement, Vietnam, sexual revolution, liberation movements, political unrest and assassination, Watergate scandal

Characteristics:

- Revolt, rebellion, mistrust of institutions
- Quest for self; decision making based on internal standards
- Committed to values of gender equality, racial equality, environmental stewardship
- Counterculture gave way to strong right-left ideological divide

#### Generation X (born between 1964 and 1980)

Shaped by the Reagan and George H. W. Bush presidencies, the end of the Cold War, the AIDS epidemic, the home computer, the Internet as a tool for social and business purposes, high parental divorce rate, high incarceration rate

Characteristics:

- Cynical and disengaged
- Pragmatic
- Self-contained
- Pessimistic about economic future
- Believe that a person's success or failure is based on one's own choices

#### Millennials (born between 1981 and 2001)

Shaped by highly involved and protective parents and institutions, electronic social networking and new media, targeted marketing, Columbine school shooting, September 11 terrorist attack, unemployment, War on Drugs, environmentalism

Characteristics:

- Tech savvy
- Seek instant gratification
- Idealistic and community focused
- Team players
- Culturally liberal

#### As-yet-unnamed Generation (born after 2001)

Shaped by communications and technology, War on Terror, the first African American U.S. president, and forces as yet unknown

Characteristics: To be revealed

Based on the work of William Strauss and Neil Howe, *in Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: Quill, 1992) and *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000). This appears as a handout in Tapestry of Faith program *Faith Like a River: Themes in Unitarian Universalist History*.

## **II. CONNECT: Readings**

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... 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.” 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. ~ Lauren Tyler Wright

Complete possession is proved only by giving. All you are unable to give possesses you. Without sacrifice there is no resurrection. Nothing blooms except through an offering. Whatever you aim to protect in yourself atrophies. ~ Andre Gide

Any budget is a moral statement of priorities, whether it's a budget created by an individual, a family, a school, a city, or a nation. It tells us, mathematically, what areas, issues, things, or *people* are most important to the creators of that budget, and which are least important. ~ Jim Wallis

### III. GROW

Questions for consideration and discussion

1. Money is a powerful entity in our lives, whether we like it or not. What feelings characterize my relationship with money in my own life? (e.g., fear, doubt, confidence, strength, anger, resentment, hope, ...)
2. How have my feelings and behaviors around money changed during the course of my life? Have those changes been intentional, or incidental?
3. What values and priorities are expressed in the way I allocate money?
4. What assumptions do I make about other people, based on my perceptions of how they allocate their money? Am I consciously aware of these assumptions, or do they creep in unnoticed? Are they reasonable?
5. The UUFM budget is its official, detailed statement of its own values and priorities. What does it say about who we want to be and what we think is important?

### IV. SERVE

Reflective:

As you move through your daily life, consider your position as *steward* of all that is entrusted to your care:

- relationships (family, intimate, collegial, casual, etc.);
- natural environment (water, air, plants, animals, etc.);
- things (vehicles on the road, others' property, objects encountered, etc.);
- intangible inheritance (family and cultural heritage, folklore, religious values and practices);
- intangible bequest (opportunities created, threats averted, stories repeated, values affirmed, etc.);

Depending on your personal perspective, perhaps your own life is included on this list.

At some point each day, look back on how your engagement with these things has demonstrated your stewardship. Consider: Have my actions enhanced or detracted from these things? Were these actions based in deliberate decision, or were they thoughtless? Do the decisions that I make with my money demonstrate or express an attitude of stewardship toward these things? Or do these decisions demonstrate an attitude of ownership of the people, events and things around me?

Active:

Each day, seek out one way to express the values and priorities that you hold dear, in a decision or action involving money. Not in words or gestures, but in spending (or not spending) money in a particular way or for a particular purpose.

## **V. Conclusion**

Money is widely regarded as an inappropriate topic of conversation. Talking about money is crass, or rude, or otherwise socially unacceptable. Whether we do not have enough for basic needs, or have accumulated enough to sustain our children when we are gone, we think about it all the time. It plays an important part in what we study, where we live, what medical care we receive, what we eat, how we spend working hours and how we spend leisure time. Money is the most common issue in divorce. Clearly, we need to talk about it.

What has it felt like, to think about and talk about our relationship with money in the company of others? Did it feel honest and authentic within ourselves and among each other, even if it was uncomfortable? To what extent did feelings of shame or embarrassment, self-consciousness and vulnerability, mistrust or other uncomfortable feelings interfere with that?

Were you surprised by differences in the group? By similarities? What other feelings did you encounter? What got in the way, and what was missing? If people in the group would like, invite them to share these things, without interrogation or challenge.

## **Suggested words for extinguishing chalice:**

When people meet, endless possibilities emerge. New cultural experiences and openness to new ways of understanding and doing things. A special attention to the other and a sense of service beyond self development. Today, we affirm our commitment to openness, willingness to grow, enriching curiosity, and active cooperation. ~*Fulgence Ndagijimana Assemblée des Chrétiens Unitariens du Burundi*