



This year's pledge team (from left): David Potyondy, Rich Jaeger and Marcia Wattson.

From the Pledge Team: Why Do I Give?

by David Potyondy (Pledge Team Chair)

Why do I give 5% of my family's income to First Universalist? Because I was asked. Let me explain. Two years ago, I was asked to join the Pledge Team. What is this Pledge Team? It is a 3-member committee that runs the Pledge Drive. What is this Pledge Drive? It is the time when all members of the Church are asked to make a year-long financial pledge to the Church. The pledge monies provide more than 80% of the Church's operating revenue.

When asked to join the Pledge Team, I had been a member of the Church, along with my wife, Lianne Knych, since 2001. We had two young children, Owen and Luca, who participated in religious education. I had been an RE teacher for the past five years, and in the process, had connected with many of our younger children. Through participation in Circle Suppers and Family Circle Suppers, I had become well connected with many families with young children. I was also keenly supportive of the small group concept. I participated in an early form of these groups in 2001 to 2003, and I had been a participant or facilitator in three of these groups since Justin had arrived. I felt that I was a part of the First Universalist community. When I was asked to join the Pledge Team, I decided that this was a

good way for me to help maintain and grow our community.

My pledge-team work has kindled within me a growing awareness of generosity, and how by cultivating generosity one can grow in spiritual maturity. I believe that the purpose of the Church is to develop spiritually mature members: people who challenge themselves to create better lives for themselves, their families and their fellow citizens. The Pledge Team is committed to fostering stewardship within our Church community. To us, "stewardship" means acknowledging that we have a shared responsibility toward the Earth — including our lives, our possessions and the communities of which we are a part — and that we are called to express our gratitude by being generous with these blessings. Marilyn Robinson touches on this idea in her 2004 book, *Gilead*, by describing a certain type of "courage that allows us to be brave — that is, to acknowledge that there is more beauty than our eyes can bear, that precious things have been put into our hands and to do nothing to honor them is to do great harm. And therefore, this courage allows us, as the old men said, to make ourselves useful. It allows us to be generous, which is another way of saying exactly the

same thing.”

Indeed, the Pledge Team hopes to transform our Church into a congregation of generous people. Our mission is expressed well by Michael Durall in his 1999 book *Creating Congregations of Generous People*:

“Secular organizations solicit financial support from members and friends. . . . But I believe that religious organizations have a stronger authority—indeed, a moral authority—to challenge people to lead generous lives.”

Now that all of these grand ideas have been stated, I am still left with answering the core question:

Why do I give 5% of my family’s income to First Universalist Church?

Part of the answer lies in being a part of something larger than myself. There is a good energy in the Church, and we are moving forward. I want to help keep us moving forward. There are far too many things going on at the Church for me to participate in, but I can help to move them all forward by my pledge. The beauty of our Church community is that we are all invited to help shape our shared vision, and we are all in this together — by working together we can achieve more, both personally and globally, than by working alone. We are a community working together to grow: both inwardly, by becoming more spiritually mature, and outwardly, by becoming powerful creators of a bold, progressive future in which all can experience the Universalist message of love and hope. I envision First Universalist as a large ship that is moving forward through the sea, and I want to grab hold of an oar to keep that ship moving forward. This is how I can make a difference in the world.

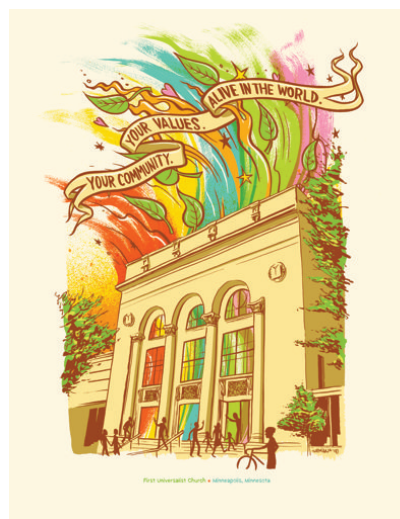
This year’s Pledge Team is shown at the beginning of this piece. We will be asking all of you to pledge 5% of your household income to First Universalist. We realize that this is a big stretch for most of us. It certainly has been for me (and Rich and Marcia will share their stories in the November and January Liberals). In my case, Lianne and I have increased our pledge each year during the past three years to arrive at our present level of 5% of our income. The biggest increase occurred after I had joined the pledge team and begun thinking deeply about generosity. Justin met with Lianne and me for coffee and DIRECTLY ASKED US TO INCREASE OUR PLEDGE BY \$3000. That was a really hard conversation for me. Talking about giving is a difficult thing, perhaps because of the explicit nature

of money—it is black and white, it is quantifiable, and it forces us to confront big questions like the following blunt statement by Michael Durall:

“An important question about stewardship is: Should generosity be one of the core values of religious people? Phrased less delicately: Is it possible to lead miserly lives (or conversely, lives of great indulgence) while giving little to the church or to any other charitable organization — yet attending worship services and considering oneself to be a person of faith?”

As I sat there talking with Justin and Lianne over coffee, this question was resonating in my mind, having recently completed reading the Durall text as part of our Pledge Team work. Upon further reflection and conversation with Lianne, I realized that we both believed strongly in the work of the Church, wished to increase our charitable giving and were happy to give most of those monies to First Universalist. Those difficult conversations helped us to arrive at a good place, a place where we feel that our charitable giving, our money and our life energy are aligned with our values.

The pledge team is organizing a Canvass to take place before the Pledge Drive launches on February 23. We hope to find 30 canvassers and have each canvasser meet with three members of the Church. In this way, we hope to engage 120 people in dialogue over this difficult topic with the hope that they will join us and agree to give—or move significantly toward giving—5% of their income to First Universalist. If you are asked to be a canvasser, or are canvassed, please consider taking part in this work of our Church. After all, we are the Church, and it is up to us to step up, grab hold of an oar, and help keep that ship moving forward.





This year's pledge team (from left): David Potyondy, Richard Jaeger and Marcia Wattson.

Pledge Team: Why Do I Give?

Richard Jaeger (Pledge Team member)

By nature I am cheap.

Last fall at the church camp-out, Justin approached me with a request. Would I serve on the Pledge Team? Why would he ask me of all people? Aside from being the occasional church auctioneer and teaching RE, I was not much of a leader in our church. I certainly never envisioned myself as one. Besides, I am really cheap.

I agreed to be on the Pledge Team because my friend David Potyondy is on the Team, so I figured meetings with David and Justin would be fun. I might also be able to understand my cheapness and help the church at the same time.

I have struggled with the idea that giving to our church is charitable giving. Overall, members and friends of First Universalist have above-average incomes, with a few of us in the often-scorned top 1%. The church does not look like a charity case to me. So why does our family give almost 5% of our income to our church? The obvious reason is that the church needs our money to keep the doors open. The more important reason is that the church, following its mission statement, is the springboard for the charity, social justice work, community building and spiritual work that we believe contributes to a better world. I have come to realize that having wealth gives me privilege and fuels the desire for more wealth, but it leaves a hole in my heart and makes me feel hollow.

I realize that I am not a complete citizen of the world if all I do is save, own and consume. I must give. Giving to First Universalist is better than giving to just any charity. Here we are encouraged to be part of the change.

I know that I'm not the only one with these issues about giving. I want to share some information that we've learned about the First Universalist budget and giving patterns. First Universalist is a big church with a lot of members, and 29% of the members are contributing 71% of the money that this church needs. If we were to take our annual budget and divide it by the number of pledges, we would each need to pledge roughly \$1500 a year to maintain status quo. My wife Jennifer and I will give 5% of our income, because we feel a responsibility to our church to not just keep the lights on but to allow the church to live into its vision and be part of the change.

When I see the work of our church, the money we give has far more meaning to me. I could answer the mass mailings from the various charities with checks of support and say that I'm doing my part, but in my heart I feel nothing. When I give to First Universalist I'm giving to Simpson Shelter, Habitat For Humanity, GLBT issues, Augsburg Fairview Academy, crisis centers, racial justice issues, to a Religious Education program that is the village that helps us raise our children to be responsible loving adults, and more. Without money, First Universalist is only a place for words. When I give responsibly, I am giving the church the power to put feet on our words, to do as we say and make a difference in the world. I may be cheap, but I have a responsibility to give. If the grip on my wallet isn't too tight, maybe next year we'll give 6%.

I am asking every one of you to aspire to give 5% of your income to First Universalist Church. For some, that is a big leap, while for others, it is a small step. If you can't make the big leap all at once, then do it incrementally, but do it. Pledge with the 5% goal in your future and step up to your responsibility of giving. Thank you.



Annual Poinsettia Sale

Every year, our community has the opportunity to buy beautiful poinsettia plants in a variety of colors and sizes and at great prices! AUW's only church-wide fundraiser pays for poinsettias that are personally delivered to members of our community who have experienced loss or difficulties this past year. This is a wonderful tradition and much appreciated by recipients. The remaining proceeds goes to fund programs, scholarships and childcare for AUW events.

You can pick up order forms at the AUW table in the Social Hall after Sunday services anytime in November. The deadline is November 24. Poinsettias will be available for pick up on December 8.



From the Pledge Team: Why Do I Give?

by Marcia Wattson (Pledge Team Member)

I have been a Unitarian since I was in nursery school, and I'm now a retired senior. When I became a member in my 30's, I had no idea what the church budget was or how my contributions related to it. I had learned the importance of generosity and aligning my spending with my values. I just hadn't connected that with the needs of the church. Back then, in the 1980's, I thought \$5 a week seemed about right. As I said, I didn't really have a clue about what it cost to keep the church operating.

After a few years, a canvasser from the church visited me in my home to ask for my pledge. It was the first time I had had a conversation with anyone about how much to give to the church. At the time, I was between jobs, working as a consultant, and contemplating divorce. The woman was very understanding and assured me that whatever I could afford would be appreciated. If my situation changed and I needed to adjust my pledge, that was understandable too. It was important to the church to have some idea of what to plan for in the budget, and my pledge would help them do that.

Over the years, as the church grew and we bought the building on Dupont and committed to investing in the city's future, I became more deeply involved in the life of the church, first through the Unity Summer program and later on the Board of Trustees. It was a revelation to me how much time and talent the Unity Summer committee and the trustees were willing and able to devote to the work at hand. It was even more of a surprise to learn how rewarding it was to give more than I thought I could to something I believe in.

When I ask myself, as I often do, "Why Church?" the answer is usually something on the order of, "because I love this community and what it stands for." This religion encourages me to experience my deepest truth with honesty and to live with compassion and generosity. I am grateful for the values and lessons I learned growing up as a Unitarian and especially grateful for the kindred spirits I have met here at First Universalist. To see and hear the youth of our church express their ideas and feelings with their openness and dedication to UU values, I know that I want this church to be here for many generations. When I get to know the members of this church who came here and found a home, an inspiration and comfort in difficult times, I want this support to be here for those who need it. When we stand together for marriage equality, racial justice, human rights, peace and environmental sustainability, facing our imperfections and



This year's pledge team: David Potyondy, Rich Jaeger and Marcia Wattson.

vulnerabilities through this work, I find it very easy to justify pledging more than 5% of my income to sustain this legacy, and it feels good.

There are many other organizations doing important, valuable work in the world, and I want to support them as well. My goal is to give another 5% to groups outside the church, which is partly accomplished through our offerings every Sunday that give away 70% of the collection. I feel so lucky and grateful for what I have been given and so moved by the needs waiting to be addressed, that sharing feels natural and right.

As I write this, a song from the children's choir is running through my mind. "Each of us is a flower growing in life's garden. Each of us is a flower; we need the sun and rain." Our contributions to the church are like the sun and rain that sustain our growth and keep us healthy. May we give generously to maintain and grow our selves and this church community in its efforts to create a healthier world.



Consider joining 50 other members of our Church and commit to Meatless Mondays. Studies conducted by John Hopkins and Harvard University have found that going meatless one day a week may reduce your risk of chronic preventable diseases. This includes intestinal and colon cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity. In other words: eating less red and processed meats and more vegetables and fruits give you a better chance of living longer and healthier. Look for more information and pledge cards in the Social Hall after both services.

First Universalist Church
3400 Dupont Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55408
Phone: 612.825.1701 Fax: 612.825.8879
Sunday Services 9:30am and 11:15am

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Why I give 5% to First Universalist

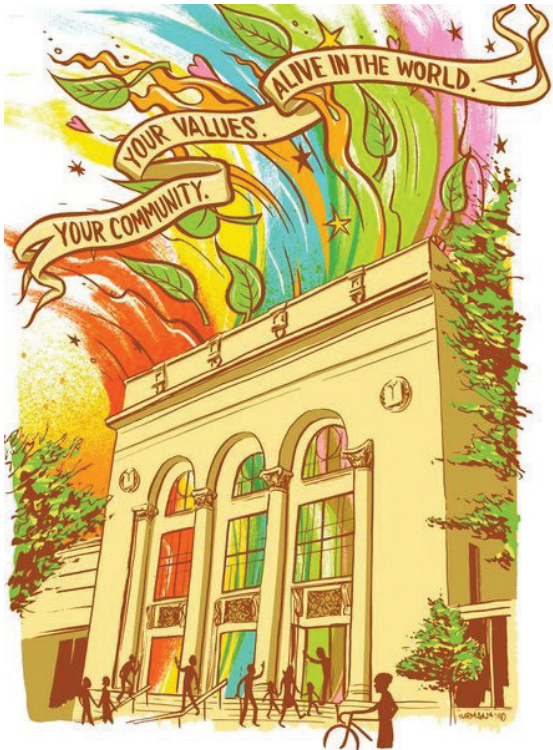
I am proud and grateful to call First Universalist my spiritual home. In fact, I am increasingly proud and grateful to be a part of this faith community. My relationship with and commitment to our church and Unitarian Universalist denomination is as a life-long UU, as a current member of First Universalist's Board of Trustees, as a former Coming of Age mentor to several youth, and as a former member and chair of our Pledge Team. I have long understood the obligatory part of my role at church: to give to the church financially, to receive spiritual guidance and growth here, and to grow into a more complete version of my best self in order to best serve the world around me. Because I take those responsibilities seriously, I give 5% of my income to First Universalist (pre-tax, gross income—but in a way, those details seem like unimportant semantics). I wonder if I will someday be so bold and so overflowing with generosity that I will give 10% of my income to this beloved place.

I have recently experienced a series of difficulties in my personal and family life. These have challenged me financially, in addition to emotionally and spiritually. Through the support and growth I received at First

Universalist in these times, I understand my role here even more completely now. My activities at First Universalist remind me of how perfectly imperfect my human life is, they connect me with other powerfully precious people, and they help me form deep relationships that link me to others with love. As the church becomes more strategic and powerfully visionary in its engagement with the community outside its own walls—as we understand our responsibility to both share our gifts abundantly and receive others' gifts graciously—I see that this place reflects my values more than any other place in my life. It is important to my spiritual health for my spending to reflect my values.

I give 5% to First Universalist because—when I understand its role in my life, in our lives, in this way—I can't afford not to. I humbly invite you to consider joining me in giving 5%. What kind of discovery and transformation might this kind of stretch bring to you?

With gratitude,
Lark Weller



First Universalist Church • Minneapolis, Minnesota

THE liberal

FIRST UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

In the universalist spirit of love and hope, we give, receive and grow.

Issue 5, Number 8

February 2014

The Great Gathering is February 22nd, 2014!

Do you like parties? (I do.)

Do you like our church? (I do.)

Then I think we're going to LOVE the big church party we're calling The Great Gathering!

By Jill Braithwaite

If you're like me, Sunday mornings can be a whirlwind of enjoying the beautiful, meaningful service, connecting with friends and newcomers, and then grabbing a spring roll and dashing to a meeting. I'm so excited about the chance that the Great Gathering offers to enjoy some relaxed time together as a community in a fun, Saturday-night atmosphere.

This is a great chance to celebrate our incredible faith community, to hang out with old friends, and to make new ones. We've got all kinds of fun planned, including music, dancing, great food from the fantastic Chow Girls Catering, and the chance to sign up for Mini Gatherings that will support the work of our beloved church community.

I can't wait to check out this year's offering of Mini Gatherings. For me, it's like getting to set up a bunch of fun social events (that someone else has planned!), while simultaneously supporting the work of our church. What could be better? I know for sure I would never have been on a sailboat if it weren't for a gathering I went to a few years ago. Who knows what new and delightful experiences await this year? **I hope to see you at the Great Gathering!**

Moving from a Sustainer to a Visionary

By Pamela Vincent

In past years, the pledge drive has asked members to make, or move toward, an annual pledge of 5% of their income. This year, the pledge team has developed a "Fair-Share Giving Guide" which describes four categories of giving. For some time now, my annual pledge has landed me in the Sustainer category: "The church is central to my identity, and I am committed to sustaining our programs". I give at this level (which corresponds to the 5% ask) because, quite simply, I was asked to do so. Giving is a learned behavior--people decide to increase their level of giving because someone asked them to decide. But more than this, I give because my primary spiritual practice is gratitude, which when consistently practiced, naturally leads to a practice of generosity.

Attending Sunday services provides the center point to my week. When I do not come to church, I feel off-kilter the entire week. If you know me, you know that I am very active at First Universalist--the church

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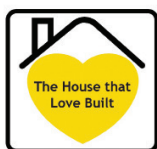


Daytime Connections

Thursday, February 20
 10:30 AM –12:00 PM, Cummins Room
 Lunch to follow (\$5 suggested donation)

The National Standing on the Side of Love campaign is reimagining Valentine’s Day as a social justice holiday, as a time for us to celebrate love’s power to transform communities.. So, for our February gathering, we will explore the links between love and justice. Through conversations and group discussions, we will speak from the heart about how we have been moved to show love in our hurting world—when we have chosen love.

Daytime Connections meets monthly on the third Thursday and is for folks in the second half of life. If you will be staying for lunch or have any questions, please contact Terri Burnor, Ministerial Intern, at terri@firstuniv.org or 612-825-1701 ext. 135.



Update on the House that Love Built (continued from page 9)

Chuck Coskran, a longtime Habitat volunteer, said he was especially moved to watch whole families take donation envelopes to the front of church on Dec. 22nd. “I bet more parents got involved because of the kids, than kids were pulled in by parents.”

More than 55 percent of recordable donations were in the \$100 to \$1,000 range, with only a few reaching \$3,000.

First Universalist stands out because few small organizations, particularly churches, are sponsors for a whole Habitat house. The church is in a category with large Minnesota corporations, such as Cargill, General Mills Foundation, Ecolab Foundation and formerly Delta Airlines.

Now that the money is gathered, church leaders will begin organizing for the house to be built at 3026 Morgan Ave. N, part of the Jordan neighborhood. The 1,600-square-foot home will have three bedrooms.

Summer work dates will be announced soon. Volunteers will be needed for more than putting up walls and roofing. Can you help make lunches? Can you pick up scattered nails? Can you lay sod or plant flowers? Can you help teach the new owners how to lovingly maintain their property? There is a lot left to do!

Moving from a Sustainer to a Visionary (continued from cover)

Sunday morning. At the heart of what we do here is the belief that each person can make a meaningful difference in our community and the world. First Universalist provides me the means to help make the world a better place, in ways large and small. This church has a long and rich history of making significant change in our community, and I want the institution to continue to make those differences, and to be the agent of change for many more years to come, even beyond my lifetime. In 2009, as we celebrated our 150th anniversary, I looked around at the people attending the celebration dinner. I realized that although it was unlikely that I would live to celebrate the 200th anniversary, there were some in attendance who would be. It is for them, and for the generations yet to come, that I have been pledging at the 5% Sustainer level.

As I consider how central to my life the church is, and my hopes for the church to continue in generations to come, I am committed to the Sustainer level, and am aspiring to give at the Visionary level: “I am committed to both the present and future growth of my church”. It is a bold move, but Rev. Schroeder reminded us in our 150th commemorative book, “...none of the people in our church’s past thought small....as we move into the future... I dream that all of us will be equally bold, in the present, here and now.”






I hope that you join me in giving or aspiring to give, at the Sustainer level, and together we will move from Sustainer to Visionary!

Don’t Forget...

The deadline for *The Liberal* is now the 15th of each month!

Email your submissions to communications@firstuniv.org

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THE liberal

FIRST UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

In the universalist spirit of love and hope, we give, receive and grow.

March, 2014

Issue 5, Number 9

Why I Give to First Universalist **By Karin Wille**

I grew up on a dairy farm in southern Dakota County with my parents, my three siblings and my grandparents. My siblings and I went to school in the tiny village of Randolph, in the same brick building where my dad and his brothers had attended school. Every Sunday the whole family, including my grandparents, attended church services followed by Sunday School for children and adults at the little Methodist church in Randolph.

Life on the farm in the 1950s wasn't easy, especially for my mom, a "town girl" from nearby Cannon Falls. We lived in a 24' X 24' house with no running water and a wood burning stove. My mom had three babies in diapers before she got indoor plumbing. I still remember how cold the outhouse was in winter, and the treks my older sister and I made through the snow to the woodshed up on the hill, earning two pennies for each armload of wood we carried down.

As a farm wife with four kids, my mom economized in every way possible. She made nearly all of our clothes, tended a big garden, canned and preserved endless vegetables and fruit, sold eggs, and butchered chickens with my grandma. My dad worked just as hard as my mom. He got up every morning at 5:00 AM to milk the cows, pitched manure by hand to clean the barn every day, sat on a metal tractor seat (no cabs in those days) in the dead

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Choir Tackles "Leonardo" **By Randy Buikema, Choir Director**

For the past month, the First Universalist Choir has been devoting 45 minutes of its weekly two hour rehearsal towards learning the pitches and rhythms of Eric Whitacre's "Leonardo Dreams Of His Flying Machine."

Choir Member Ann Kay, with the assistance of Choir Accompanist John Jensen, has been leading sectional rehearsals with the sopranos and altos while Choir Director Randy Buikema works with the tenors and basses.

At the end of each rehearsal the two groups unite to put the parts together.

Choir member Charlie Betz devised a high tech way for choir members to practice their parts outside of rehearsals.

He created 20 separate recordings and turned them into downloadable computer files. Each choir member can download a recording with his or her individual part, and then download another recording where all parts are present but that part is heard more loudly. The first set of recordings

help singers to learn the pitches and rhythms without the distraction of the other parts. The second set helps the singers hear how their parts fit in relation to the others. The sectional rehearsals and the high tech practice

aids are helping the choir learn this monumental piece at a rapid rate.

Many members have been diligent in practicing outside of rehearsal time.

Randy has encouraged them to "panic NOW!"

Hoping that the extra time devoted now will result in

confidence and calm when the choir presents "Leonardo" during worship on April 6.

Please cheer on the choir as they continue this incredible journey. Look for an update in next month's Liberal.

Randy has encouraged them to "panic NOW!"

Thank you to our Sponsors and Volunteers who made The Great Gathering a Success!

The Tree of Life Project

By Marjie Smith of the Planned Giving Committee

Have your eyes ever wandered to the beautiful wood sculpture in the Sanctuary? Do you know how it got there? Let me tell you the story.

In November of 1990, then minister, Terry Sweetser, and the Endowment Memorial Trust Committee asked the Visual Arts Committee to provide recommendations and artistic input on a piece that would be created to commemorate those making memorial bequests to First Universalist Church. The committee commissioned Roger Junk to create a three-dimensional triptych out of wood, The Tree of Life. The piece was to symbolize

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First Universalist Church
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Minneapolis, MN 55408
Phone: 612-825-1701 Fax: 612-825-8879
Sunday Services 9:30 am and 11:15 am

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Save the Date Can you spare half a weekday to help legislators understand the importance of affordable housing? On Tuesday, April 8, First Universalists and many others will participate in Habitat for Humanity's annual "Habitat on the Hill." No experience is necessary. Participants will register at 8:00 AM, train at 8:30AM and then speak to their legislators until served a free box lunch. To stand out at the Capitol, volunteers will be given a Housing Hero t-shirt and encouraged to wear hardhats, tool belts and other construction gear. If interested, please contact Joan Naymark at joan.g.naymark@gmail.com.

The Affordable Housing Bonding Bill would channel \$100 million into affordable housing across the state. More than 600,000 Minnesota households pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing. More than 10,000 Minnesotans are homeless on any given day. The event is cosponsored by the Homes for All Coalition.

Why I Give to First Universalist

Continued from Page 1

of winter or the heat of summer, and came in for supper 15 hours later after milking the cows for a second time.

Despite the press of work of the farm, my parents gave of their time, talent and treasure to church. Typical of gender roles those days, my mom taught Sunday School, made costumes for the Christmas pageant and spent endless hours in the church basement kitchen, where her well-honed cooking skills were much appreciated! Dad served as Sunday School Superintendent, emceed the Christmas Pageants, and served on the Board of Trustees. And they tithed --10% of their limited income -- because "that's what the good Lord said to do." It didn't matter that the money they gave to church could have paid for running water, an indoor toilet, a bigger tractor, or so many other conveniences to make their lives easier. They gave 10% to their faith

community because they were generous and grateful people, and because for them it was a spiritual imperative.

I left my Methodist roots as a young adult nearly forty years ago when I could no longer abide the patriarchal trinity and started attending First Universalist. Like my parents, I volunteered in numerous capacities over the years, including as an RE teacher and as Board President. I gave financially from the beginning, because supporting my faith community with my time, talents and treasure was a spiritual imperative that I learned from my parents and that has continued to make sense to me. I haven't always matched my parent's commitment to tithing, but I've tried to give at least 5% most years.

I give because generosity is a tenet of my faith, because I want this church to be here another 154 years and beyond, and because supporting an institution that transforms lives is consistent with my values. But I also give because of what

I get from this community, and how I have grown from and with it. I raised my children here (my daughter is now a UU minister), married (and divorced) here, learned valuable lessons, made countless mistakes, developed wonderful friends, and brought my dreams, pain, joys and truths - my whole self - to this place of love and hope. Through it all I have been held, challenged, comforted, stretched and healed by this beloved community, and by a love that will not let me go. That is what keeps me here after all these years, and what keeps me giving, receiving and growing.

What about that little Methodist church of my youth? About 10 years ago, that congregation made two big decisions - to move and build a new, bigger church home and to give away 10% of their congregational income to those in their community that needed help. Ten percent is a big commitment for an individual or a congregation but my parents' church has ended every year with a balanced budget since they started giving generously.