

Your Generosity Makes Everything Possible

Readings: 'A Prayer Among Friends' by John Daniel
'The Affirmation of the Edmonds Unitarian Universalist Congregation'

'We call ourselves a religious community, not because this place is, in itself, holy ground, but because what we do here and say here and are here make it so.' These words have been spoken every Sunday morning for decades by the Unitarian Universalist congregation in Edmonds, Washington, just north of Seattle. That is the church that helped raise me and those words are etched in my heart. We are borrowing them this morning because they are our truth as well. We are a religious community. We are People's Church because of what we do here and say here and are here.

Zoë, Bob, and Rochelle have shared small pieces of what we do here and say here and are here, but we know that their stories are just a beginning. There are so many stories we can tell about this place, this community. We can tell stories about what happens when we gather together on Sunday mornings – stories about voices lifted in unison or beautiful music; stories about children who delight us all during the time for all ages; stories about welcoming new members and dedicating ourselves to the children being raised here; stories about a poem, story, song, or sermon that brings comfort or insight or wisdom, that stays with us and echoes in our hearts and makes life better or easier to bear. The story of sitting in this room with dozens and dozens of other people who are different from us in many ways – belief, background, gender identity, sexual orientation, generation— but who share our fundamental commitments to freedom, love, and justice. Stories about coming together and feeling less alone. There is more meaning and less isolation because of what we do here and say here and are here.

There are the quiet stories of people in our church community who make this a church of the people, by the people and for the people. People show up for one another in hard times with cards and casseroles and care. People who show up to committee meetings and stay to the very end to make sure that church programs work. People share their insights and learn in our classes and discussion groups. People teach and care for our children. People say yes when asked to serve on the board or to donate their services to the church auction or usher and in so many other ways. There are the stories of welcome, of new people finding community, connection, and support among us. There are the people who know their limits and need a season to not be the ones who show up, who trust others to do the work of the church and cheer them along. There are the people weathering times of illness and loss who lean on this community and let love and care come their way.

For many of us, it has been a hard year and a half. Too often, headlines break our heart and we know there is so much needless suffering in our community and in our world. Rather than give into despair and inaction, People's people have kept on moving forward, have kept on loving boldly. Because of what we say here and do here and are here, we are making a difference in Kalamazoo, making our community a more just and loving community. The world needs us now, more than ever. Rochelle told some of these stories already, but, of course, there are more. Last year, you gave a book – an age appropriate, culturally sensitive brand new book—to every child at Lincoln Elementary School. For too many of the kids who received them, it was the first book they owned. Last month, you all raised nearly \$3,000 for Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism, far exceeding our matching goal. This will help create a more just and inclusive Unitarian Universalism. The Altyaras, the Syrian refugee family that so many in this church—and our wider community—have supported with tutoring and home repairs and job coaching and driving lessons and many other ways got their green cards this week. They are making a home here, away from trauma

and war. Homeless transgender teenagers have used our showers before job interviews. They have gotten jobs and moved into housing and toward stability. We have prepared over the past year to welcome immigrant friends and neighbors into sanctuary in this building should that need arise.

What we do here and say here and are here makes a difference. Each of us – and our wider community need this difference now more than ever.

There is less loneliness because of what we say here and do here and are here.

There is less suffering because of what we say here and do here and are here.

The world is better because of People's Church. I hope you all feel proud of what happens here, of what you all make happen here in this building and beyond our walls.

And you all know what's coming now. Now I get to tell you to keep being the inspiring, generous, loving, justice-making community that you are.

Your generosity makes everything we do here possible. Thank you and let's keep on moving forward. And as I move forward with this sermon, I will be focusing on financial generosity. We all know that there are many ways to be generous – all the stories that we've told are about People's people who give their time, their ideas, and their talent and their money. Thank you for all of the ways you are generous and dedicated to the work of this church.

Those of you who are newer around here should know that we don't spend every Sunday singing our own praises and asking for money. We usually dedicate a full service to this once a year and spend about a month talking more about money than we do for the rest of the year combined.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are rooted in a free church tradition. This means that there is no central authority, no bishop or pope or synod or other group that can tell us what to do here and say here and be here. This freedom, this power, comes with responsibility. There is also no central authority that funds us either. Your financial generosity pays for nearly everything. Thank you for being so generous.

Today, I ask you to consider your pledge to continue the good work of the church for our next fiscal year, which begins in July. We will have pledge packets available for you after the service and we ask you to turn in your forms either paper or online within the next month—earlier if you want to put your name in the drawing to cut in line at a potluck. Then our finance and board leaders will begin building the church budget, which will be approved by the members of the church at the annual meeting on May 20.

Please continue to be the generous people that you are so People's church can keep on moving forward. What might that generosity look like? I will offer up a few ways to think about generosity. Given our diversity of thought, I would not expect us to all approach generosity in the same way.

When church people ask me what amount they should give to support the work of the church, I encourage them to give an amount that falls into the sweet spot of making them feel great about their giving—and that feels responsible and won't lead to any resentment. We all have different financial lives, so that sweet spot is different for each of us. What is an amount that would make you feel generous and responsible every time you write the check or place a marked envelope in the collection basket or see the electronic transfer come up on your bank statement? You could be so many places right now and you chose People's Church. The fact that you all are here today means that People's Church is a priority in your lives. People's Church should also be a priority in your finances. For some of us, our generosity is

giving two thousand dollars per month. For others, it is two hundred dollars per month. For others, it is twenty dollars a month. Most of us fall somewhere in between these groups. Other people need a financial waiver because they can't give money now. Everyone is a valuable part of our community. When we all are generous, it is enough.

If you're someone who wants advice on what to give based on numbers, not feelings, there is a fair share giving chart in the pledge packet that you can pick up when the service ends. Find your income and your level of commitment to the church and it will tell you a recommended percentage of income and dollar amount to be a fair share giver. Some of us are fair share givers every year. Some of aren't. Some of us are arranging our financial lives to be fair share givers and it takes a few years to get there. Everyone is a valuable part of our community. When we all are generous, it is enough.

Some of us have financial lives that are not stable enough to have a good sense of what our finances will look like in July when the next church fiscal year begins. Everyone is a valuable part of our community. Some who live this story make a modest pledge now, something they know they can meet. If circumstances change and income goes up, they give more and exceed their pledge. Whatever you write on the pledge form is not a cap on your giving for the year – that's true for everyone. Each of us is living a different financial story – and each of us is a valuable part of People's Church. Each of us is making decisions about generosity that are the best for us, that make us feel proud, responsible, and part of all the good things that happen here. Whoever you are, wherever you come from, whomever you love, wherever you are on your life's journey, you are a valuable part of our community.

So let us keep on being generous.

Let us keep on moving forward.

Let us keep on loving boldly.

Let us keep on singing loudly.

May what we do here and say here and are here continue to create a world of less loneliness and less suffering.

May it be so. May we make it so. Amen.