

**“Changing Our Story”  
A Stewardship Sunday  
Fox Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship  
Appleton, Wisconsin  
fvuuf.org**

**March 12, 2017**

**Lisa O’Connor:**

Along with Karen Iverson Riggers and Marti Wheeler, we have been the small but mighty Stewardship Team for the last few years. Although we love this work, it has been a bit exhausting at times, because we have felt that Stewardship was the last thing that anyone wanted to talk or hear about. We had been hearing for years the same old story which is essentially “we make do and we get by.” That story doesn’t match up with the vital, progressive and forward-looking congregation that we believe we are. So this year, inspired by additional new members to the Stewardship Team, we rolled up our sleeves and got to work. The first thing we needed to do was to address the problem.

**Shannon Kenevan:**

I’ve been a member of the Fellowship for nearly 20 years. Some of you may know me from here, or from my work in the community via Voices of Men and Harmony Café. After last year’s stewardship drive, where we again came up short and needed to create a band aid solution, I was inspired to get engaged in stewardship, and in particular, to help the team draft a problem statement so that we could look at our financial struggles fearlessly and begin to address them. This is the statement we drafted.

*“In a vibrant congregation where we do so much, so well, stewardship stands out as an anomaly.”*

- Our Fellowship has a narrow view of stewardship being nearly synonymous with the annual ask and little more.
- Stewardship is not strongly linked to the Fellowship’s or individual members’ mission, vision or values.
- Our annual giving levels are often at a maintenance level and regularly require “band aid” approaches, mission or fair share cuts, being understaffed, etc.

- There are a minimal number of people who assume leadership for our stewardship, even though it is deeply important to the success of the entire Fellowship.
- We have a culture of discomfort in asking for money.
- We are hesitant to publicly speak about our faith and actively promote the Fellowship to others, limiting new member growth opportunities.

This statement addresses many different areas of struggle for us, and also suggests opportunities for doing better. One line, in particular, stands out for me.

*“In a vibrant congregation where we do so much, so well, stewardship stands out as an anomaly.”*

As I mentioned before, I was involved with Harmony Café. Harmony Café was a also vibrant place, where we did so much so well. But money was always a struggle for us. When we had to close our doors a few years ago, I had so many people come up to me saying: “the place always seemed so full”, “we never knew money was an issue,” and “I thought Harmony would be around forever”. I feel that Harmony’s vibrancy -- how many people where there and how much was going on -- actually helped people feel less urgency to give.

And I feel that way about the Fellowship sometimes – beautiful building, amazing services, talented people working here, tons of congregational engagement. It feels vibrant, and we may not feel the urgency to give. But communities like this can be fragile, and a solid financial base can help it thrive and sustain. I always looked forward to my two daughters spending Friday nights at Harmony open mic as teens. That will never happen now. But I do want to ensure their home here, at the Fellowship, will always be available for them. Our world needs places like this, and our giving matters.

**Karen Iverson Riggers:**

I’ve been a member here at the Fellowship for almost ten years and a dedicated member of our Stewardship Team for almost six years. I chose to join the Stewardship Team and also be involved with our Capital Campaign and Planned Giving Committees in the past because my professional background is in fundraising and development. In other words, in my nonprofit career, I’ve spent lots of time asking people for money!

In the past six years, I’ve seen some shifts in how our Fellowship talks about and asks for financial support. Culture shift is a difficult, and sticky thing, and I’d like to

share a little bit about some of the dialogue our Stewardship Team has had this year in capturing our Stewardship Story.

In our congregation, we've created a safe space to talk about just about anything and everything, but one of the things often absent from our dialogue is talking about linking our money to our values, including financial support of this beloved community.

## ***A New Chapter***

**Cathy Cofell – Mutschler:**

I'm also a new member of the Stewardship Team. My husband and I signed the book in 2000 and have helped in various capacities, most recently making a mean cup of coffee. I've been asked before to join the Stewardship Team and always said no - I was too busy, I had more pressing obligations. This year, however, I understood that the pressing obligation was here. Our Fellowship needs to write a new chapter in its history, not retell the same story we hear each year around Stewardship time that goes like this: ***We're a caring and committed congregation who is passionately dedicated to the existence of the Fellowship.***

So far, yes, that's true! This Fellowship has been able to do amazing things since its earliest days, including when it was a 100 member Fellowship. In the eyes of the wider world of Unitarian Universalism, we're a success story! We have much to be rightfully proud of – to call a Senior Minister, and then an Associate Minister, to be able to support a full-time Business Administrator, Congregational Life Coordinator and Director of Religious Education – all important and necessary milestones! We've been able to move from the Moose Lodge where I first started, to the Fellowship Hall and then, finally, build this beautiful new sanctuary.

But, there is another part of that story – ***we don't want to grow too large, we can get by with volunteers, we will give just enough to make ends meet and maybe a little bit more.*** That's been our story for several years now. While not diminishing the hard work and giving of so many people, we also have to face some hard truths; we are reaching a point in our congregation's life where "just enough" doesn't make it. Here's why:

- You've heard that we are the 11<sup>th</sup> largest congregation in the UUA; but our budget is 87<sup>th</sup>. We simply don't give at a level that's appropriate for our size.

- Some people feel that if they can't contribute a lot, they won't contribute at all. We are here to tell you that every amount counts, matters and makes a difference. We are interdependent web. Our ideal is 100% participation in this year's Stewardship campaign.
- We are grateful that almost all of our staff members have reached a mid-point range of salaries. This is vital to retention and recruiting of the quality level of staff the 11th largest UU needs. However, we need to stay at mid-point which will likely continue to rise in the next 2-3 years and we need to plan for that.
- We are in the market to attract the best new senior minister we can; but if his/her or their salary is out of proportion to other staff salaries, we do a disservice to existing, hardworking staff.
- During this time of transition, we have relied heavily on the Unitarian Universalist Association's resources, but we are not paying our Full Fair Share to the UUA and haven't for years.

People ask: "Well, how much should I give?" We used to say 5% of your income is a good goal to strive for. For those of you who are first time pledgers, that's a good guide. For those of you who are pledging again this year (thank you!) we're looking at the budget in a new, more visual way. We're offering you three different options, what we're calling the "red, yellow or green budget."

**Slide: Red, Yellow, Green**

**The Red Budget** is what we're calling "the Bare Bones" budget. The red budget equals \$747,693: it represents a 7% increase in pledges and an overall budget increase of 1.25%. Last year's budget was \$738,411, which we met only because some members stepped up after we fell short and made a generous matching pledge increase for one year. We cannot depend upon that generosity again this year. A red budget means no additional staff or increase in any program costs.

**The Yellow Budget** is a 13% increase in pledging and a 6.3 % increase in overall budget. Yellow would allow us to provide the necessary assistance for our Religious Education Director, hire a facilities and maintenance manager, and fund programs that you – members of the congregation – are involved with and/or wish to support.

**The Green Budget** would mean an 18% increase in pledging and a 10.7% increase in overall budget (\$817,539). A green budget represents where the Fellowship

should be. It would allow for the addition of much needed staff to support communications, outreach, audio-visual needs, youth and young adults, our Religious Education and music programs. Green is not unrealistic; it is a vision of who we already are – but one that is not currently supported by our budget.

We heard that twenty new members joined the Fellowship last Sunday. Unitarian Universalist Churches and Congregations all over the country are experiencing a surge of attendance and membership that is unprecedented - I suspect because of what is happening in our world today. We want to be ready to continue to receive these new members, their children, their families and elders and support them to grow in mind and spirit. And now, more than ever, we need to continue to be this community's leader in social justice and a safe space where we are cared for, rejuvenated, supported.

We can do it, now, through this year's Stewardship Campaign. It starts with me – and it starts with you: your individual decision to give to this campaign. Every gift counts, every gift turns the page on our new story.