

“Sermon on the Amount”

Jim Pickel

February 8, 2015

First Parish of Norwell

A mark a yen a buck or a pound;
A buck or a pound, a buck or a pound;
A mark a yen a buck or a pound;
It makes the world go ‘round.

Money, money, money, money;
Money, money, money, money

Joel Gray and Liza Minelli certainly got it right in Cabaret – money makes the world go around. It also makes possible all the wonderful things that our church community can do for itself and for others – AND, it pays the salaries of our Minister and staff. As we anticipate the joy of welcoming a new spiritual leader amongst us, we need to remind ourselves that we must maintain the Minister’s and staff’s compensation levels congruent with the salaries at other eastern Massachusetts churches.

The results of last year’s canvas were disappointing, and, as a result, some difficult decisions had to be made that affected our ability to act on some of our most cherished values. For instance, the \$15,000 budget of our Service Committee, the arm through which we minister to the needs of humanity, was completely cut, as was the budget of our Denominational Affairs Committee, except for the church’s Fair Share contribution to the Unitarian Universalist Association. Therefore, First Parish Norwell probably will not be represented at General Assembly this year in Portland, unless someone steps up to fully finance his or her own trip, including airfare, hotel, meals, and conference registration. Also, the Worship Committee’s budget this year allows for only one guest minister for the entire church year, which is one reason you’re being forced to suffer the sound of my voice THIS morning and, excruciatingly, again in a few weeks on a different subject. At least THIS morning’s words will be brief.

Two other notes: First, although we did transition Julian from part-time to full-time, NONE of our staff received a raise in salary. Second, the beautiful renovation of our parsonage, another factor important in attracting a new minister, presented a difficult fiscal challenge that we are working to solve.

All of this means, of course, that we’re hoping for a much better result for our pledge drive this year. The cost of simply paying our Fair Share to the UUA is \$60 per member, per year, and our dues to the Ballou-Channing District are \$22 per member, per year.

As I said before, we need to be able to claim a strong fiscal position in order to attract an experienced minister.

A few words about how other religions and denominations go about supporting their spiritual leaders, their physical facilities, and their moral obligations to make the world a better place.

One of the Seven Pillars of Islam is Zakah.

In Arabic, **zakah** means purification, growth and blessing. Paying **zakah** is meant to remind Muslims to be appreciative of the blessings that Allah has bestowed upon them, and to help empower those who have less.

Muslims are called upon to pay 2.5% of their assets -not just their income, their assets, annually as Zakah. (As long as their total assets equal or exceed the prevailing price of 3 ounces of gold – currently a little more than \$1200/ounce.) I think we all have assets of more than \$3600. They may deduct their debts and certain expenses in figuring their assets, but 2.5% of total assets is a pretty hefty contribution.

Some Jewish temples use a “Fixed Dues” system, requiring every family to contribute the same amount. Others use the “Fair Share” system, requesting that congregants give 1% to 2% of family income. Others, like Temple Israel in Sharon, have abandoned both systems and have adopted a completely voluntary system like ours.

They inform the congregation of how much it costs per family to operate the temple, and leave the pledge amount to the members.

A word from the Mormons:

One of the blessings of membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the privilege of paying tithing – 10% of one’s income. This privilege is a double blessing. By paying tithing, Church members show their gratitude to God for their blessings and their resolve to trust in the Lord rather than in material things. They also help further the work of the Lord on the earth, blessing others of God’s children with the opportunity to learn of Him and grow in the gospel.

Some other Christian denominations require or suggest tithing as well, but most leave the amount of donations for supporting church functions and charitable giving up to individual members.

The UUA has a suggested giving chart that can be helpful in determining the appropriate amount of a pledge in our denomination, and I can assure you that we’re all off the chart – and not in a good way.

Whatever the system or requirement, a national survey of congregations of various religions showed that fiscal health is strongly related to congregational vitality. And beyond that, acts of charity and generosity produce feelings of joy in those who give.

I’d like to end with a brief mathematics lesson.

IF Joel Gray is correct and Money Makes the World Go Around and IF the old adage is correct and Love Makes The World Go Around... then, if Money is A and making the world go around is B, and Love is C, then $A = B$ and $C = B$; therefore, $A=C$.

So, in the case of support for our church community and building, Money = Love.

Hey, you can't argue with math. Amen