

Stewardship Dinner Remarks -
March 17, 2018

You are probably very used to John Long standing up before you and doing things he considers funny. I am grateful to you for putting up with my silliness. But for the next few minutes I want to urge you to think seriously, I am speaking not to entertain you but to challenge you. It's because I believe in you that I am able to stand up here and ask your help.

This 25th year of our history has made me think back on the folks back in 1993 who gathered in houses and talked about creating a home for liberal religion on this island. It must have seemed an audacious dream, and yet they persisted. They located worship spaces in unused buildings and swept them out and washed windows and painted walls and gathered up folding chairs. They didn't need a sound system because the group was so small. A few are still here, more have passed away or moved. But they believed in their dream of a spiritual home a community of like-minded thinkers and seekers. They dreamed this place into existence. I think back on those folks, most of whom I never met and I feel real gratitude. They made this possible.

What will people 25 years from now in 2043 think of us when they look back? Will there be a UUCWI around then? If there is not a UUCWI, the question is moot. They won't think of us. But if there is a healthy and strong congregation, I hope they will look back with the same gratitude that I feel for our founders. I hope they will say, "Those people 25 years ago stood up when they needed to. I am thankful for their generosity to me."

We are at an important juncture for this congregation. It's not just our 25th anniversary. It's also the time when we shall shortly be voting on a long-range plan for the next steps in building our future. Since we built this building, we have not developed a new master plan which guides the congregation in moving forward. AND we are currently in a search for a new minister with Dennis moving on after six years of loyal service to

us. This a special time and it offers us special opportunities.

This year's stewardship drive has a primary goal of pledging enough to offer a competitive salary to interested candidates in the ministerial search. We who live on Whidbey Island may think it is the cat's pajamas and that anyone interested in a half-time minister's position would be thrilled to come here. But we would be very naïve to think that Whidbey Island will be a factor that trumps another reality in the search. UUCWI has made some real gains in raising the minister's salary, but we are STILL below the minimum UUA salary guidelines for a half-time minister serving a congregation of our size compared with similar congregations in our region.

Last year's pledge drive aimed to make a significant improvement in that salary, but we were able to balance this year's budget only because our minister generously and voluntarily took a one month furlough. We are currently a congregation with an 11-month minister.

The finance committee working with the Board and the search committee has developed a budget that aims to give us the option of offering a minister's contract as high as \$48,000, about 10,000 more than we currently pay. That would put us well within the middle range of salaries for our size and region.

Camille and I felt that we had pretty much maxed out what we can afford to pledge last year. Two retired teachers without much interest in going back to work. Many of you, I am sure, feel similarly constrained.

Then I thought about the place that this congregation serves in my life and in my heart. And I have to say that thinking back on those who sacrificed over the last 25 years so that we could be here helped me to see that I should increase my pledge this year. We have increased our pledge by 12%. That increase sounded like a lot to me until I broke it down over 12 months. It's the cost of 1 and ½ meals each month at Neil's Clover patch. Less than a tank of gas. Or the grooming of half our dog Bob. Could Camille and I do that? Yes, we could.

We all have different financial situations and I understand that. You have to decide how important this community is to you and what you can do. The average pledge to UUCWI is \$1000. There are lots of pledges more modest than that and there are lots of pledges larger. This congregation survives because of our time and treasure. We may have all sorts of other ways of valuing this community, but what allows it to exist is time and treasure. Both are essential.

Imagine that this community no longer existed. Who would be missing from your life? What activities would be missing from your life? If this really is important to you, are you willing to sacrifice to keep it healthy? I ask you to consider stretching when you make your pledge.

We pay almost \$9000 to the UUA in annual dues, We pay the UUA/Region, not the other way around. We pay \$90/member — regardless of how much your pledge is. So take your pledge and subtract \$90 (or \$180 for a two-member household) and that's the net toward our operating budget. We all need to be aware of this when we determine what our pledge will be.

In the next three weeks you will be contacted by one of our volunteer stewards who will visit you and ask you to think hard about your pledge. This visit is also a chance to give the steward feedback about how the community is serving you and what we could collectively do better. We are not going to formally survey you this year – we did that for our Long Range Plan and the search committee will shortly be surveying you for different information. Please welcome the steward who is serving the congregation in this critical work.

Like these stewards I am proud to be asking for your help this year. Time and treasure. What can we do together? What can we be together? How can we serve together? Thank you.

~ John Long