

Light the Flame

June 17, 2018

Rev. John T. Crestwell, Jr.

Happy Father's Day to the dad's, mentors and male guardians who are still important in the world. Important in raising healthy children, and being a presence and active participant in their lives. We men (us dudes) have been taking some hard hits lately—deservedly so—toxic masculinity is a problem. Male energy has been too oppressive. But I salute the divine masculine and feminine in men—that knows being a man means strength and vulnerability; it means seeding possibilities into boys and girls and families and communities without the need of over-aggression or chauvinism. Happy Father's Day to you!

The person you saw in the beginning and end of the video is a dad, close friend, and colleague, the Rev. Peter Friedrichs of the

UU congregation in Delaware County, in Pennsylvania. As you saw, his congregation benefited a greatly from the 3 times per year \$20 gift (\$60 total) given by hundreds of UUs across the country. Like Peter's congregation, we too have been blessed by the Chalice Lighters Program. A program whose money over the last several decades has fathered hundreds of programs from idea and concept, to real tangible things. Chalice Lighters has given us 4-gifts over the years and after their most recent grant to us is complete, we will have received \$80,000 from their generosity. Generosity that helped create a Membership Coordinator job in the past and present; philanthropy that helped expand our Religious Exploration program and money given to support my ministry in its early years. I am thankful for their investment. We are stronger because of it. As a part of the newest grant they asked us to have a Sunday where we asked you to join the cause. I am asking you too. We have about 40

CL's (btw, please stand if you are a CL supporter. (Applause).

They are asking for 20 more people to step up this year. We can do that. If you are interested, use the form in your OOS and sign up today. Thank you.

Giving is contagious. It has a reciprocal effect. We sing every Sunday: "From you I receive to you I give together we share by this we live." We give not just to receive but we give because—when done from the heart and with the right intention, it feels really good. One of my visions for this congregation is that we become even more philanthropic. We do indeed give thousands away each year already, but how about giving hundreds of thousands away to support people, places and things that support our progressive values inside our faith and outside our faith.

I am vested now with Unitarian Universalism because it has invested in me. Colin Powell said sort of the same thing when

people asked him why he was a Republican. I get it. Scripture says “To whom much is given much is required.” Merriam-Webster defines success as “to completely cover”. When people invest in you, they are enveloping you with an expectation; there honors, favors, expected—power or authority is conferred and the investee must do their best to respond accordingly. The seeds planted are expected to sprout. Sometimes investment asks for loyalty, sometimes it is a financial return on investment (in business); sometimes the ROI is the use of your time and talent for a cause. We all have lit our metaphorical flames, dedicating ourselves to things in our lifetimes—kids, spouses, partners, causes, and the like. We have invested in people and people have invested in us. I’m talking about reciprocity.

You know, I was doing the numbers and if you include stipends, salaries, insurance, retirement investment, grants, and

more...over the past 17 years since I became a UU this faith has invested over 1.4 million dollars in my growth and success.

Think about that for a minute... How much has been invested in you?

When I came here I was answering your call. You wanted to invest in a minister who could take you to a new place... Darrel Nash was on my search committee and was also on the Chalice Lighter Grant selection committee too, back in 2008. He'd been a steady force in my life at my first church helping Davies Memorial UUC to get \$60,000 from the CL program. Darrel knew about my vision of building a multicultural worship community. We did so successfully at Davies 1-4 people there, before I left, were people of color—an anomaly in the UU World. But I was ready for a bigger challenge and a bigger charge. The UUCA search committee sent me a packet (hold it

up). In this packet was a vision statement that over 100 people participated in back in 2008. These people were ready to invest in something new, challenging and big. I want to read some of that to you now.

(READ FROM SEARCH PACKET 4-minutes)

Powerful...Powerful stuff that you wrote. And that's why I answered the call—your vision aligned with mine. You wanted to invest in the same dream I was already manifesting; and I knew in my heart, given the right time, leadership and tenacity, this could happen in Annapolis. You said in the packet, explicitly that you wished for the congregation to be 25% racially diverse (you named it). We are not there yet... We are on our way... 'Ask and it shall be given.' It does appear to me though, that UUCA got what it asked for. We speak things into existence. That's why the old saying says "be careful of what

you ask for because you just might get it” is always apropos.

BTW I can get you a copy of this document if you like. It’s worth reading as we contemplate the present and future of our congregation.

This month the theme is blessing. And some here, I know, have trouble with this word. “If we are blessed then they must be cursed...If we are a blessing then what are they?” It’s easy to get caught in either or in this case. But if you go to the root of the word. You can reinterpret blessing. In the Small Group Ministry packet this month blessing translates to: “being ripe, mature, having reached a stage of the fullness of the person I am meant to be.”

SLIDE: The meaning shifted in late Old English toward ‘pronounce or make happy, prosperous, or fortunate.’ In the Semitic language of Aramaic, the phrase translated as ‘Blessed’ in the Beatitudes was actually *tubwayhun* which refers to being

ripe, mature; having reached a stage of the fullness of the person I am meant to be. –SGM June 2018 packet

In some ways we are ripe as a congregation to mature into the fullness of our vision to be **EVEN MORE** what we are meant to be—a beloved community—a safe haven for religious refugees and those looking for something different—something that represents who they are spiritually, and gives them the space to grow, spiritually.

That's what generosity in thought and deed does. It allows us to be a blessing to ourselves and others. That's what the Chalice Lighter grants do—they fund land for new churches, fund new rooms and spaces, fund growth and diversity plans, fund finding and nurturing new Unitarian Universalists. It made it possible, in part, for me to be giving this sermon today and I know I owe them my ROI; they have completely covered me with their love. I can afford to give my \$20 per month. I must be honest, I

lapsed in my payments, after the Joseph Priestley District became Central East Region, but I am recommitting today— hopefully with you— to support this vital program of our faith.

Paying it forward is what I'm talking about today. Investing into something that will come into fruition. Like dads and moms do—they invest in their children's future. Pay it forward. It was a powerful movie awhile back—a tear jerker (you should watch it—it was about a social studies project about doing nice things for people. You be nice to two people; and they be nice to two people—and the ripple effect that happens. How the movie unfolded was just beautiful. The power of giving of yourself was evident). Like the movie, there are so many synchronicities and serendipitous moments that occur when you live with a spirit of generosity—when you live to be a blessing to others. I can't put into words the little and big

miracle's that happen again and again. And I think that's what the writer of the song "Pass it On" meant. That giving of your time, talent and treasure, is contagious! **SLIDE UP:** Giving is love in action... "It only takes a spark of generosity of giving, of love to get a fire going...and soon all those around can warm up in its glowing. That's how it is with love once you've experienced it. You want to share with every heart, you want to pass it on." Thank you Kurt Kaiser for those marvelous words. Being a blessing, lighting your flame is of course a choice... Just as it is a choice to see yourself as good or courageous or generous. One of the exercises this month in the SGM packet was walking around and choosing to bless everyone you see with a silent/positive thought. "I bless you, and you...I wish you laughter; I wish you joy and prosperity. I wish for you good health and good fortune. Some of you may have tried it and

found it extremely helpful. You feel good afterward. I did this once when walking through an airport. You feel empowered and full of love. HOW ABOUT WE TRY AN OUT-LOUD VERSION OF THIS... Quickly TURN TO YOUR NEIGHBOR on your left and right AND GIVE THEM A GOOD WISH RIGHT NOW. “I WISH YOU JOY, happiness, laughter....SAY IT OUT LOUD TO THEM!

It feels good! It’s healthy to do this. We teach this practice (the silent practice of blessing others) in the UUCA prison ministry. Last week, we asked the guys to choose to see the good in their other cell-mates as they go about their day. Forgive on neutral territory; that is—start to see their pain the way you see your pain and bless them in their struggle for peace. We told them to mediate on this before they started... The looks some of them gave was priceless. “You want me to wish someone ‘well’ who

I don't like? You want me to think happy thoughts for someone that cut in front of me in the chow line? ***YES! I want you to be generous in spirit because that is where the power lies! The power is in the opposites*** of our ego/self-preserving natures.

SLIDE UP: As it is written: “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” Blessed meaning ripe, ready, mature in spirit, AWAKE; “blessed are they, for theirs is the kingdom.” When your spirit matures and is ripe, you know that the joy and love and generosity is already present and waiting for you to SEE it standing at the door knocking saying HELLO I'm right here in front of you!

Invest in seeing the generosity all around... Let it infect you to be a blessing to others. Go out and forgive and bless and don't do it for THEM BUT do it for YOU—because of the great

bounty of love and blessing that has been bestowed upon you.

To whom much is given much is required.

But truly when we give and share there is reciprocity. It feels good to give. So really what we do is NOT only ABOUT THEM but it is really about US—about us ripening our spirits in the name of love; and as we ripen and mature in spirit we SEE with new eyes and sing with joy and exhilaration: “What wondrous love is this oh my soul, oh my soul.”

The power is in reciprocity. Even when done in silent—there’s a buildup of love waiting to emerge. Even when you give a little \$20 donation the energy adds up and manifests into a larger fortune for another UU congregation. That’s the magic of it all... When you see good people like Martin King or Gandhi, or Mother Teresa emerge in our world to bless humanity--that is from an energy buildup of love and generosity--hundreds of

little tangible and intangible things that converge. And the truth is, we change our world by our love (which includes all the big and little stuff we do—the everyday investments in generosity, compassion, empathy, and kindness that we share out loud and in silence. You want more love? Law of reciprocity says invest in giving more love. You want more generosity? Reciprocity says be more generous. And it only takes a spark. A tiny little spark to set something powerful ablaze. You can do that with your love.

As Kurt Kaiser says as I close: **SLIDE UP:** “I wish for you my friends, this happiness that I’ve found. The love that’s deep within; it matters not where you’re bound. I’ll shout it from the mountain top! I want the world to know. This light of love has come to me. And I want to pass it on.” Amen.