

Charlie Gross Testimonial 3/5/23

Why do I give to UUCA?

When I joined this church I found a spiritual home. A place where I could express myself freely, where I was welcomed, where my ideas were welcomed, and where I could grow my spirit. That spiritual home soon became a spiritual bond as I got to know you, share ideas with you, and serve this church with many of you. Thank you for putting up with me.

A few months ago my daughter bought her first house in a new and diverse community of 300 homes in north central New Jersey. My wife and I visited her several times to help her clean, move in and decorate. When we were there over a weekend, I Googled "Unitarian Universalist Church nearby." Then Mr. Google promptly asked me to allow location finding, which I did. The nearest UU church was one mile from her house. Its lower parking lot was literally across the street from her development.

I went to church that Sunday and subsequent Sundays, always sitting near the front of the church. After the service when I got up to leave, I couldn't help but notice that the congregation was all white. And we were all especially pale as it was wintertime. I asked the Greeter if there were any members of color. He said there were a couple and he had hoped there would be more when the development was built across the street, but alas there were not. He lowered his head and said, "It's hard." "It's hard." I can still hear his voice saying "It's hard." I immediately thought of how proud I am of this church and all the hard work done by our BBC and the 8th Principle team and this congregation to welcome and then center people of color. The BBC has worked hard for many years and continues to help to teach me to how to work "to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in myself and our institutions."

When I joined the church I thought I was woke. After all, I was a liberal and I had read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and Angela Davis's book *If They Come in the Morning* in the 1970s. In reality, I had only one eye open. The BBC has helped me begin to open that other eye by teaching me the history that was suppressed, teaching me about subtle acts of exclusion, teaching me about the concealed

parts of institutionalized racism, and by giving me tools to combat racism. They have helped to cement my spiritual bond.

I want to put a plug in for my favorite tool – the NAACP Anne Arundel Green Book. I use this resource to find superb professionals and contractors of color, such as my accountant, my plumber, and my electrician. The BBC also urged the Building Expansion Committee to hire a contractor of color to build our addition, which has turned out to be a wonderful experience. It is a privilege to work with the Wickers, David and Abby, and we look forward to completing the expansion next month. I want to personally thank the BBC and 8th Principle Team for all it's done for me and for this church.

Lastly, I want to tell you about a time when I accidentally tithed. I really didn't mean to tithe, but I did and, after the fact, it really felt good. When I retired, I decided to try to keep my pledge the same even though the bulk of my income was coming from social security. The rest came from my IRA savings. Over time, I was doing OK financially. Then COVID came and shut down almost everything, making it hard for me to spend money. When I got the COVID stimulus check from the government, I increased my pledge yet again. And when it came time to do my taxes, I realized I hadn't spent much money that year - no dining out, no travel, nothing lavish to spend money on, so I had a very low taxable income. My donation to UUCA turned out to be 1/10 of my annual income.

So again this year I'm increasing my pledge, as I got a raise in my social security benefit. I don't give until it hurts, but I do give until I can feel it. And I feel good about it. I invite you to increase your pledge as you are able to help support this church that we love. The underlying reason I support this church generously is you. Thank you for being who you are and for your thoughtfulness and for your generosity.