

The Values of Money
Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver
March 22, 2026

Reflection on the Annual Pledge Campaign by Donna Aase

Good morning. I'm Donna Aase and I'm a member of the Annual pledge campaign team. This morning I'm going to reflect on the campaign theme, provide a few details about the campaign, and finish by introducing the team.

Not many know that this bridge plays an important role in my origin story. I'm from Ilwaco WA, at the mouth of the Columbia river. My three older siblings were all born at the small hospital in Ilwaco. This bridge, which we always called the dragon bridge, opened a few years before I was born, and by the time I came along, the maternity ward at the small hospital in Ilwaco was gone. Astoria was the closest maternity ward, so I was born in Oregon. Might not seem like a big deal, but in my immediate family, I'm the only one not born in Washington, and it was a thing, and it's been a thing my whole life.

It took four years to build the Astoria-Megler bridge, finally completing highway 101 between Olympia and Los Angeles. Building a bridge, any bridge, is not a quick thing. It takes careful study, planning and preparation. It requires many different talents and skills along the way. And materials need to be acquired and constructed in a very precise order. This all takes time and requires a lot of complicated work. And then, in the end, two things that weren't connected before are now joined. The two things aren't closer together, but the road is easier to travel. We don't need to go out of our way or take a more dangerous route.

Our campaign theme, Building Bridges to the Future, is fitting for where we are on our journey. This is Rev. Kathryn's last year with us, so we're in the very beginning of the planning and preparation stage, which will continue through interim ministry and search. Your pledges, your contributions for the coming fiscal year, will help us maintain our remaining wonderful staff and support fully our interim ministry. The work will be easier because of the bridges we're starting to build now.

As I wrap up my time, I want to mention a few things happening between now and the end of the campaign on April 19th. In worship there will be testimonials from a range of congregants, sharing their thoughts on supporting this congregation. Each Sunday you'll also get a report of the previous week's responses. Everyone who responds will be represented with a brick on our sturdy bridge.

Besides responding with a financial pledge or update, you can contribute campaign couplets and bridge coloring pages. Campaign team members will be available at their booth after both services every Sunday, and for those of you viewing online, virtual sessions will be held on April 12th.

Finally, I want to name the team members who are bringing the campaign to you this year. We are Julee McTaggart, Pat Wozniak, Gail Sears, Tracy Reilly Kelly, Rev. Kathryn Bert, and Natalie Hutchison Duff. Julee and I will be in the booth after service today. Stop by on your way to the party to say hi, return your pledge form, ask questions, or pick up a bridge coloring page. Respond to our call and help us build bridges to this congregation's future.

The Values of Money© by Rev. Kathryn A. Bert

The water is troubled. When Paul Simon wrote *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, it was Spring of 1969 and both Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr had been assassinated. The war was raging in Vietnam as were racial tensions at home. Richard Nixon was in the White House. The water was troubled when Paul Simon wrote this song, and it is troubled now. Couldn't we all use a friend to lay down like that bridge over troubled water? We are that bridge for one another –this congregation forms that bridge, helping us to rise above and go beyond and walk into a future that actually celebrates our values.

As much as I abhor and fear the troubled waters we are currently in, they do serve, if nothing else, to clarify my values. When greed and grift, selfishness and power hoarding, oppressive and unequal policies prevail, the contrast couldn't be greater with the world I imagine: one in which we valued and understood our interconnectedness, stood up for justice, helped people transform into better people, valued our differences, dismantled inequalities, and practiced generosity. Langston Hughes, Leader of the Harlem Renaissance in the early part of the last century, a revival of African American culture, Langston Hughes wrote

*Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.*

(It never was America to me.)

*O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.*

*(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this 'homeland of the free.')*

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

*I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.*

I don't know about you, but I have been more conscious of the power of money in this last year than even before. It's not just that I contrast my accumulated wealth with the wealth of the few in power who use public office to hawk their wares and increase their personal coffers, while taxing the poor and taking away rights. But I have also become more strategic with the little money I do have (little in comparison with the tycoons in power; a lot in comparison with most people on earth). As big

companies dropped their diversity, equity and inclusion programs to cater to the proudly “unwoke” administration, I started paying attention (again) to where I spent my money.

“because attention is so much more like water than anyone told me” — writes Eve Driver
“it is just as hard to hold enough of it in our palms to let someone else have some”

Lynne Twist, in *The Soul of Money*, says that money is like water, too. She writes:

“Money flows through all our lives, sometimes like a rushing river, and sometimes like a trickle. When it is flowing, it can purify, cleanse, create growth, and nourish. But when it is blocked or held too long, it can grow stagnant and toxic to those withholding or hoarding it.”

“Like water, money is a carrier. It can carry blessed energy, possibility, and intention, or it can carry control, domination, and guilt. It can be a current or currency of love—a conduit for commitment—or a carrier of hurt or harm. We can be flooded with money and drown in its excess, and when we dam it up unnecessarily, we keep it out of circulation to the detriment of others.” End quote.

I like this idea of money as a carrier like water. It is a carrier of our values. The party that is Coffee Hour following this service was planned by your Annual Pledge Campaign Committee – and they consciously spent money for this party in our neighborhood, this neighborhood of the International Business District on 4th Plain, because these businesses have suffered greatly because of the ICE raids in the area that abducted, among others, José Paniagua Calderón after driving over his foot while he was held down on the ground. Understandably, immigrants and some people who are simply black or brown, don’t wish to be caught up in such raids and have been avoiding the neighborhood.

So, your Annual Pledge Committee, made an effort to spend your money in the neighborhood, as many of us have been doing. The impact seems small when I boycott the Goliath Target – although, clearly an organized and large boycott does make a difference, but it can feel small to the individual. Whereas when I spend my money, rather than withholding it, in a small business where every dollar counts, the impact feels more tangible and immediate.

I know it’s a strategy other congregations are encouraging as well. I had lunch with the local UCC pastor recently, in the neighborhood. He told me that on his way to having lunch with me, members of his church invited him to have lunch – also in the neighborhood, for the same reason, that they are consciously spending their money in support of immigrant-owned businesses, to counteract the cruelty of this administration policy that targets immigrants. That same amount of money withheld from Target has negligible impact, but spent in a small business makes a big difference.

Lynne Twist goes on to say that

“In [the] condition of scarcity, money shows up not as a flow, but as an amount, something to collect and hold on to, to stockpile. We measure our self-worth by our net worth, and only and always more is better. Any drop on the balance sheet is experienced as a loss that diminishes us.”

“Grounded in sufficiency, money’s movement in and out of our life feels natural. We can see that flow as healthy and true, and allow that movement instead of being anxious about it or hoarding. In sufficiency we recognize and celebrate money’s power for good—our power to do

good with it—and we can experience fulfillment in directing the flow toward our highest ideals and commitments.”

There is plenty of research to support the notion that the poor are more charitable than the rich. There are likely a variety of reasons for this – if a two people of were to give the same amount a charity, the poor person would be giving a larger percentage of their wealth than the richer person, for example. But my suspicion is that it has to do with this idea of privilege, a term I’ve never really loved because most people that one would call “privileged” don’t in fact, *feel* privileged. It’s a relative term, hard to prove, and a pretty low bar. Privilege, in the way this term is used, ranges from simply being less subject to abuse and hardship than other people all the way to those with extreme wealth and power, the oligarchs, if you will.

My ability to walk and shop and eat on 4th Plain without fear of being picked up by ICE because my skin is white, my language is English, I have sufficient money and “look” like those in power. What is a privilege should actually be a right, though we know it is not. But because I am free to walk and shop and eat on 4th Plain, relatively unobstructed or without fear, I’m not as aware of my reliance on the protection of my neighbors. I can pretend to be self-sufficient.

People of color, those who don’t speak English, don’t have money, or people with a visible disability are more likely aware of their dependence upon others.

I think this can explain why the poor and less privileged show up as more generous in the research because they know that they depend on others. You have to rely on a neighbor to get to work if your car breaks down, or public transportation fails. If you don’t have the funds to take an Uber or Lyft. You have to rely on others to watch your kids to go shopping, or a myriad of other tasks that people with means can hire out. Privilege is not just about social location – skin color, native language, gender identity, education, but it is also about money: Having enough. Enough to hire things out and to pretend to be self-sufficient, to not be dependent upon others. When we can pretend self-sufficiency, that is when we tell others to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” We only believe the myth of self-sufficiency once we’ve forgotten the myriad of ways in which we are connected and that our success was built on generations of others – their successes, but also probably their exploitations.

My ancestors got land in the Midwest stolen from Native peoples who were killed or displaced, and my family built their success on the exploitation of others – even if my family didn’t kill or displace others themselves, they took advantage of the offer of land by the government that did. My mom says it was gifted in exchange for service in the military, and she has some great stories about the Cackler ancestors holding on to that land while others went back East to bring more family west to it. The older I get, the more aware I am that I have advantages I did not earn but inherited, and that my existence is entirely dependent upon others I know as well as others I will never know.

I love the message of the 1946 film, *It’s a Wonderful Life*. I cringe at the depictions of African Americans in that film. Frank Capra should have known better. After all, the Harlem Renaissance was in the 1920’s and 30’s and this film was made in 1946 – I think of the contrast of the language of the Hughes poem I quoted with the inane dialogue provided to the Black actors who surely cringed at their lines in this film, but said them anyway in order to be employed in the movies. Those moments aside, the larger message of the film is a reminder that we are connected and that human relationships are more important than accumulating money. Mr. Potter is the evil rich guy, the antagonist robber baron, who depicts that

“condition of scarcity, money shows up not as a flow, but as an amount, something to collect and hold on to, to stockpile.”

He measures his self-worth by his net worth, and only and always more is better. Any drop on the balance sheet is experienced as a loss that diminishes him. He doesn't know how to relate to George Bailey, our protagonist, self-sacrificing hero who

“Grounded in sufficiency, [knows] money's movement in and out of our life feels natural. We can see that flow as healthy and true, and allow that movement instead of being anxious about it or hoarding. In sufficiency we recognize and celebrate money's power for good—our power to do good with it—and we can experience fulfillment in directing the flow toward our highest ideals and commitments.”

The Bailey Building and Loan, George Bailey's company, is about to go under because Mr. Potter has stolen the deposit. Because George Bailey has let the money from the Building and Loan flow like water into his community, lent money to the poor and created affordable housing, all the people he helped comes to his rescue. His brother Harry makes a toast at the end that sums up the message: “A toast to my big brother George: the richest man in town.” George is rich in relationships and because of that, is grounded in sufficiency. In sufficiency he recognizes and celebrate money's power for good—our power to do good with it—and he experiences fulfillment in directing the flow toward his highest ideals and commitments.

Church is about relationship, sufficiency, and our values. ‘You are enough’ we are invited to tell one another at the beginning of worship. It's a little uncomfortable to say for most of us, because it is an admission, in part, that most of us don't *feel* like enough in this world: This world of exploitation and scarcity, greed and grift, selfishness and power hoarding, oppression and inequality. But you are enough. And we are enough. Writes Lynn Twist,

“When we perceive the world as one in which there is enough and we are enough to make the world work for everyone everywhere, with no one left out, our money carries that energy and generates relationships and partnerships in which everyone feels able and valued, regardless of their economic circumstances.”

It is such a joy when we welcome new members into this community, as we have done this morning. With these new members, I dare say, we are more than enough. We are rich in relationships and grounded in sufficiency. We are that bridge for one another – a bridge over troubled water - helping us to rise above and go beyond and walk into a future that celebrates our values.

Obviously, a part of my task this morning is to remind you to pledge your money where your values are and to support this congregation financially so that we might be that bridge for one another and to the future. But my greater responsibility is to remind you that you are enough, that we are here for one another and a place where our values matter. Our money carries energy and generates relationships and partnerships in which everyone feels able and valued. This commitment matters. The commitment of the members who have joined this morning, and the commitment you make when you let your money flow like water and support this congregation that supports you.