

## Introduction

*Stewardship: The Joy of Giving* is a five-session program in which primary children, intermediate children, youth, and adults can learn about stewardship with their peers, then celebrate it together. The program affirms every person as a steward—that is, as a caretaker or trustee with a vision for the future.

This curriculum aims to empower all who participate in it to be stewards of self, family, community, congregation, and Unitarian Universalist faith. Successful stewardship involves not only protecting the resources that exist, but also nurturing growth to ensure the future. Stewardship invites each person to balance spiritual development with good works in the wider world, enabling us to put our faith in action.

*Stewardship: The Joy of Giving* is, above all, a resource for congregations. As leaders of the program, you are encouraged to adapt it to your community and its people. Infuse each session with stories of generosity from your participants, the stewardship legacy of your congregation, and the unique challenges and opportunities in your community for your ministry of stewardship.

### Goals and Assumptions

*Stewardship: The Joy of Giving* is a lifespan program that is designed to engage participants in peer groups - primary group of five- to eight-year-olds, intermediate group of

nine- to twelve-year-olds, youth, adults - concurrently in four sessions. The final session is an intergenerational celebration of stewardship. This final worship service needs to incorporate the learnings and experiences across the generations and to share leadership cooperatively.

The primary goal of this curriculum is to promote an understanding of stewardship grounded in Unitarian Universalist spirituality and ethics. It makes four basic assumptions:

1. Stewardship is about taking care of something we value and enabling it to grow. When we become stewards, we take responsibility and contribute our time, talent and treasure.
2. Money touches every portion of our lives. When we—children, youth, and adults—learn to use it to meet our needs and support our values, we are empowered. Money is no more or no less important than talent or time; all are related, and all can be shared.
3. How we learn is just as important as what we learn. We undertake this study of stewardship in the spirit of respect and affirmation toward others. The projects we do are meaningful. Our aim is to empower individuals and strengthen the whole congregation of children, youth, and adults.

4. Giving is a joyous process, and it has the potential to help us grow spiritually. We need to experience the process and reflect upon it to understand how it works and why it is important. We will know we are successful when participants experience their giving as “making a difference” in what is most meaningful to them.

See Leader Resource 1, Overview, for more information about the understanding of stewardship promoted in this program.

## **Program Process and Structure**

The four programs in this book follow the same general outline, adapted to the needs of the different age groups involved. In Session 1, participants learn what stewardship is and relate it to life experience as well as Unitarian Universalist values. In Session 2, participants learn about other stewards of the congregation and the UU movement and begin to claim responsibility for building on their legacy. In Sessions 3 and 4, participants identify concrete ways to act as stewards of the congregation, the community, or the Unitarian Universalist faith, and either carry out a stewardship project or make a plan for doing so. In Session 5, all age groups come together to help the congregation celebrate stewardship.

This five-session lifespan program can be completed in five weeks, but you may wish to make it a ten or twelve week curriculum, or even to use it as a theme to be incorporated in

many educational activities in congregational life. Although the order of the sessions is flexible (and each session can stand alone), there is a compelling logic in the sequence as presented: understanding the concept of stewardship; understanding your congregation's legacy of stewardship; designing, planning and completing a stewardship project; and celebrating stewardship together as a congregation.

Before beginning this program, read all of the sessions. Consider—perhaps in conjunction with other teachers and leaders—whether and how you wish to adapt, expand, enhance, or enrich these materials. You may want to include other activities that focus on Unitarian Universalist principles, stories, history, and heritage. You may also wish to incorporate information particular to your congregation. For example, if you are a First Parish, your history mirrors that of the founding of our country; if a member of your congregation is a renowned community leader, include this information in your program. Research your congregation's archives for people and events and places to celebrate. Look for sites in your community where your congregation's leadership is documented. Consider combining the age groups for some activities.

When planning the concluding worship service, involve participants in the design and leadership of the ceremony. Invite participants from all generations to share their knowledge and experiences. Allow enough time to rehearse the service. Also, schedule the service carefully, coordinating with the social responsibility, finance, and/or worship committees and the minister. You may wish to avoid conflicts with other fundraising activities, such as Guest at Your Table, UNICEF, or Unitarian Universalist/United Nations

Sunday. It is important to schedule this program and celebration with all congregational leaders to find the appropriate time and place in your congregation's calendar year.

## **Session Plans**

Each session begins with a statement of goals; a summary of activities and approximation of the time each will take; information about the required materials and preparation; and notes for the teacher. Sessions last for one hour and consist of five sections: Centering, Commentary, Story/Activity, Contemplation, and Commitment/Celebration. Each section represents an integral part of the learning process.

The Centering section brings participants together and invites them to focus their attention and energy on a topic related to the theme of the session.

The Commentary section introduces the topics of the session and encourages participants to express some of what they already know and feel about those topics.

In the Story/Activity section, participants explore the topics of the session. Teachers act as facilitators by sharing resources, raising questions, and providing new experiences for learning.

In the Contemplation section, participants consider the implications of what they have learned and reflect on what they have experienced.

The Commitment/Celebration section concludes the session with an offering and a brief ritual.

This session outline is identical for all four age-group programs. For the youth and adult groups, however, we suggest an important modification. An opening check-in—a time of personal sharing and intentional community building—is essential for youth and adult programming. This experience helps each participant feel heard and respected by the group, which in turn develops mutual trust and acceptance. We recommend that you add ten or fifteen minutes for a check-in time during the Centering section for these units.

The end of every session includes an opportunity to take an offering. You may wish to explain the practice each time you take up a collection. For Unitarian Universalists, the offering is a celebration of the fact that the congregation is supported and governed by the people; it is a voluntary act of commitment. It is also a privilege. Passing the collection basket signals a shared commitment to the work of the congregation. In the words of the Reverend Ellen Johnson-Fay, “ The offering is a sacrament of the free Church. It is supported by the voluntary generosity of all who join with us. The offering is given and received in grateful appreciation of our shared hopes and values.”

The times given for each activity are approximate. Actual times will depend on the group size and characteristics and the leadership style of the teachers.

Each session of this book includes Reflection and Planning questions to guide you in evaluating the session, as well as in preparing for the session to follow. Ten or fifteen minutes of discussion with your co-teacher(s) will enable each of you to grow as a leader. In addition, consult your religious educator and minister for suggestions and resources throughout this program.

## **Environment**

It is important to meet in a space that is large enough to accommodate the number of participants in your group and the variety of activities in this program. Have a space that is clean, bright, and aesthetically inviting. Include items that engage all the senses and invite different kinds of learning, such as pictures, music, stones, plants, or scented candles.

You will need the following equipment and space within your meeting room:

- chairs and/or cushions so that participants and teachers/leaders may sit in a circle
- work tables and chairs for writing and art projects
- wall space for posting banners, pictures, signs, and other illustrations
- open areas for small group work and games
- resource table for books, pamphlets, and other items

## **Interviewing**

Several units require recruiting guests and interviewing stewardship leaders, so plan ahead to do so. In addition, all units offer possibilities to bring guests into your meeting room, interview them, and gain a deeper understanding of the stewards of your congregation and forebears of our Unitarian Universalist faith. Pay attention to the following as you arrange these activities.

- Recruit guests who are:
  - experienced stewards of your congregation.
  - moved to act as stewards by their religious values and beliefs
  - able to articulate why and how their religious values motivate this work.
  - willing to talk openly about these issues and their own experiences with your group.
  - most importantly, comfortable with children/youth and able to communicate with them openly and honestly.
  
- Allow yourself enough time to find the most appropriate people for this activity. Your religious educator, parish minister, board president, and church administrator may have suggestions.
  
- Try to organize a balanced panel, including men and women, people of different ages and backgrounds, and people with different kinds of experience.

## **Conclusion**

Leading this program offers the opportunity to influence the faith development and religious identity of participants of all ages. The chance to deepen one's faith, and to engage in ethical action because of that faith, is one to cherish and handle with care. Take pride in leading and participating in this program, for you are helping children, youth, and adults—indeed, your whole congregation—become lifelong stewards of our Unitarian Universalist faith.