

Unitarian Universalist Church of Wakefield  
Lay-led by Wendy Dennis  
April 25, 2010  
**Local to Global**

In place of readings, we heard from Nancy Delaney, representing Oxfam America, and Marianne Snow, representing Gathering Change, with a short homily at the end of the service in place of a longer sermon so that the guests had plenty of time to talk about their respective organizations.

But, earlier in the service, we had, as always, as Story for All Ages.

**A Penny a Day – A story for all ages**  
*by Wendy Dennis*

Last week, you heard about a little boy who wanted to help his father solve the world's problems. Remember how he took all the little pieces of the picture of the world and put them all together?

And, do you remember what song the choir sang as you planted seeds? Inch by inch, row by row, going to make this garden grow.

Well, today I am going to tell you a story about how a little girl named Sarah learned that just a little bit more each day can really add up.

**Here is the story:** Sarah and her sister Sue heard about a group called Gathering Change that raises money to help people who are having a hard time affording food and other things we all need to live.

They wanted to help, but they didn't think they could do much because all they had were pennies. They each had a jar of pennies that they loved very much. And, although they were not selfish, they just didn't want to part with their entire jar of pennies all at once. After all, they might need those pennies some day. So they came up with a plan:

We'll start saving money for Gathering Change by taking one penny a day from our jars, they decided. So that's what they did.

Now, I need two volunteers, once to hold Sarah's baggy and one to hold Sue's.

On the first day, they each put one penny in a baggie. See, I put one penny in each bag. And, on the second day, they did the same thing, EXCEPT, later that day, Sarah thought – hmmm, maybe I will put one more penny in the baggie. After all, what is just one more penny? So that day, she put a total of two pennies in her bag.

The next day, Sue put a penny in her baggy, but Sarah put two, just like the day before. After all, she could spare one more penny...Again, later that day, she thought, "you know, I think I can spare even *another* penny..." So she ended up putting THREE pennies in the baggy the third

day. And, each day, when Sue put one penny in the bag, Sarah added one more penny than she added the day before.

And, guess what happened. Whose baggy has a LOT more pennies?

As a matter of fact, after ten days, Sue's baggy will have only 10 pennies. SARAH's baggy will have 55 cents!

All because, each day, Sarah gave "just one more penny."

And that's the story – thank you for your help holding the bags!

For the adults in the congregation, if you do the same with quarters for ten days, you will end up with \$16.50. In 30 days, by adding one more quarter to the bag than you added the day before, you'll end up with \$116.25! It is a great technique for increasing your pledge amount. <grin>

## **HOMILY**

I'd like to start with these words from journalist and activist Dorothy Day:

“People say, what is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that. No one has the right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to do.”

We have heard today about two organizations that recognize that there is much work to be done, from helping our neighbors in our own community, to taking on issues that must be addressed on a national or global scale. And, we also had a little lesson in our story for all ages reminding us that “one brick at a time” - one penny at a time, is how work gets done.

But still, it can be overwhelming as we think of the troubles in the world. Yes, we can gather change, sign up as a monthly sustainer for groups such as Oxfam America, take part in the Guest at Your Table program as we do each year to contribute to the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, and...well, there are many options.

There are so many options, worthy causes, and dire needs in the world that it can be hard to feel that one can really have much of an effect, no matter how much one gives. And, how much should, or can we give?

C. S. Lewis gives us this guideline. He said:

“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.”

But, if we give more than we can spare, what will happen when WE need those pennies? Although, perhaps, as our penny jar story told us, we *can spare more than we think*.

Obviously, we can't give to every worthy organization in the world. After all, along with making sure that we take good care of ourselves and our families, many of us here today are also invested in ensuring the financial well-being of this spiritual community, as well as other groups or organizations.

So, what do we do? How can we do it all? Can we do it all? Is the only option "to give more than we can spare?"

Perhaps the answer is that we should give more than we THINK we can spare.

Now, I know that sounds like a guilt-inducing fundraising phrase, ☺ but I would like to turn it around and show that, although we usually can spare more than we think, we in turn already give more than we think we are giving.

When Eric Reid asked me last week what to put on the signboard out front for a sermon title, you may have noted that it says: Local to Global.

I choose that title because, in the end, I wanted to remind everyone here, and everyone in our congregation, that we are indeed part of the interdependent web of all existence of which we speak in our 7<sup>th</sup> principle.

For those of you not familiar with the seven principles that Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote, you will find them right after the title page of the gray hymnal.

The interdependent web of all existence. What does that mean? Well, in the context of this service I think it means that, whatever good we do and whatever pennies or dollars we contribute, they often have a much larger effect in the world than you may think.

When we donate to Gathering Change, the money will go to our local food pantry, which in turn helps hundreds of people of all ages each month. When we take part in the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's Guest at Your Table Program between Thanksgiving and the New Year each year, we are helping to fund social justice and emergency aid programs throughout the United States and the world.

When doing some research about Oxfam America and our UU Service Committee, I discovered that there is a lot of collaboration between those two organizations, as well as among many of the organizations that provide both short and long-term assistance to those in need.

In many cases, information and access is shared in emergency situations. And organizations often complement each other's efforts. For example, when the tsunami hit in 2004, one UU

church did a study and found that, while Oxfam was better set up to provide immediate aid, they also recommended contributing to the UUSC because they were planning to provide long-term infrastructure assistance to the area.

And, sometimes organizations will raise funds for projects being implemented by another organization rather than duplicate efforts. In fact, in 1998, the UUSC put out a call to all UU congregations to donate funds to be forwarded to Oxfam America to assist in its response to Hurricane Mitch. A single dollar from your pocket can travel far.

But even when we are helping very local organizations, our gift of time, money, or a meeting space can go much further than we might imagine. Next month, we are donating the use of our building for a number of events sponsored by WAAV, Wakefield Alliance Against Violence. Perhaps our small part in these events will mean that one person will have the courage to get out of a violent relationship and, eventually, go one to find a cure for cancer. Sure, that sounds corny, but it IS possible.

And, I would like to remind everyone here how much work folks from this congregation do in our local community, between nonprofit organizations, civic groups, and appointed and elected positions in our town government. We do a lot. And, I know that, for me, having this spiritual community helps me regroup and center before heading back out again.

We do a lot. We do more than we think, both in our local community and in the larger world, thanks to our personal work as well as by donating to the good works of groups such as Gathering Change and Oxfam America.

I think we DO give more than we think we give. And, I think we give more than we THINK we can spare.

There is always something more to be done, but, as the it says in one of the anthems sung by the choir this morning, “If we sing the song that fills our heart, all the world will be a better place.”

Blessed be.