

“Helper’s High” or the Win-Win of Giving – 1/25/2026

This message was part of the “Stewards of the Two-Way Gift” service on Sunday, January 25, 2026 at UU Waterville.

My name is Sarah Seder and I’ve been coming to this church for about 35 years.

I was asked to say a few words about the giving and receiving aspect of my relationship with the church, and I am happy to share a few of my reflections on that. I am proud to currently volunteer for this church by serving as President of our Board of Trustees.

When I first came to this church in 1990, I was a bit of a lost soul, looking for help. I was nearly 40, brand new to the Waterville community, working full time, parenting two toddler sons and trying to find my way in a difficult marriage. When I was 18, I had left my parents’ Protestant church and I hadn’t missed having a church. But as a parent, I wanted to find a church-like experience for my kids. I had heard about UUs and had an idea I might like Unitarianism. I was looking for something to nourish me spiritually and emotionally. I was in “taking” mode, or “feed me” mode. I wanted to be taken in, even be taken care of...to be welcomed, to be spiritually inspired, to sing, to belong to a group of people whose values I shared and to find a place where my kids could be cared for and even learn something, while I was getting “fed” good stuff upstairs. I got all that, and so much more here. What I didn’t realize is that it would be so easy to give back.

At the time I didn’t feel I had much to offer the church besides bringing a snack to coffee hour once in a while. But after just a few months, my first opportunity to contribute to the church arose. As the mother of toddlers, I was asked to volunteer in the nursery one Sunday every other month. I was happy to try helping in that role. I learned a lot and my confidence increased. As my kids outgrew nursery care, I was soon promoted to join the RE teaching team for the 5- to 7-year-olds classroom. That required I co-teach one Sunday a month. It took a little time to plan those lessons, but it was fun. And I continued in that RE Team Teaching role for older kids ‘til my kids started going to the Youth Group. Thus began my church volunteer resume.

Also, within two years of attending church regularly, the church founded two or three Women’s Groups and I joined one. I don’t remember if we called them “support groups” but that’s what they were, and still are, all these years later. We met bi-weekly, shared our joys and concerns, and we formed strong friendships...a much-needed connection when so many of us had small children and worked outside the home. A few years later the church organized Small Group Ministries and Dinner Discussion Groups. I signed up for all of it!

Then I volunteered to be on the Worship Committee and did that for at least five years. I was then recruited to be Board Clerk for two years, Board VP for one year and President for two, COVID Task Force Chair for two years, and now Board President,

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again. And I was a Lawn Sale Team member all the while. OK, THAT was the most fun volunteer job.

And all this time the church ran an annual pledge drive -- the Stewardship Campaign...And I was happy to give what I could to support this church that was giving me so much. It actually felt like a small price to pay for all that my family and I were getting. And the getting grew and grew each year.

As I was reading about “giving” I came across this concept of what’s called the ‘Helper’s High’ and it spoke to me. We all know that helping someone usually makes you feel good. It turns out that giving your time, talent, and treasure to an organization that you are proud to be a part of, can make you feel REALLY GOOD! It can actually improve your outlook on life. In other words, acts of generosity trigger the brain’s reward system, releasing chemicals like endorphins. Giving back can improve your life satisfaction, lower stress, and strengthen your relationships. And in a way, it also makes you feel like a part-owner of that organization.

Generosity is of course a relative term. At different points in our lives, we are more or less able to give of our time, talent, and treasure. I started out giving mostly time and not many dollars. But gradually as my income grew, I was able to give a little more, and then a little bit more. And later, as I started retirement planning, my advisor asked me if I wanted to put aside any \$ for charitable giving? Yes! I wanted to be sure I had enough income to contribute to the church every year -- it has always been my top charitable contribution. And as I drafted my will my lawyer asked me if I wanted to consider any bequests to any organizations? Yes! I included a final gift to the church.

I hope you will reflect on what some of the gifts are, that you have gotten or are getting from your experience of this church and the people in it. And then go for that ‘Helper’s High’ and give what you can. Thank you!