

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Consumerism

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, by Terry Berge, December 2004

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting: From Rev. Bets Wienecke, UU minister

“As we gather together this evening,
may we learn to recognize and affirm
the pieces of possibility – the bits of good – we bring.
May we encourage rather than control;
love rather than possess;
enable rather than envy.”

Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer (approximately 30 minutes)

(The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.)

Focus Readings:

◆From *The Psychology of Happiness*

by Michael Argyle, founder and former chair of the British Psychological Society —
“Any relation that does exist between happiness and income is relative rather than absolute. The happiness people derive from consumption is based on whether they consume more than their neighbours and more than they did in the past. The upper classes in any society are more satisfied with their lives than the lower classes are, but they are no more satisfied than the upper classes of much poorer countries, nor than the upper classes were in the less affluent past.”

◆From *Let the People Prevail! The Authoritarian System of Education in Pakistan*

by Sibte Hasan, Senior Subject Specialist (Social Studies), Punjab Textbook Board —
“The throw-away culture negates rootedness (sense of belonging), lofty feelings, or love for people and the motherland. It trains people to find satisfaction within the very conditions society imposes upon them. As one of Ibsen’s characters says: ‘He can do anything he wants to do because he wants only what he can do’. This is the essence of consumerism: it rewards mediocrity and domesticates people to attain its ends.”

◆From *Mad Magazine* —

“The only reason a great many American families don’t own an elephant is that they have never been offered an elephant for a dollar down and easy weekly payments.”

◆From John Berger; novelist, painter, art historian —

“The poverty of our century is unlike that of any other. It is not, as poverty was before, the result of natural scarcity, but of a set of priorities imposed upon the rest of the world by the rich. Consequently, the modern poor are not pitied ... but written off as trash. The twentieth-century consumer economy has produced the first culture for which a beggar is a reminder of nothing.”

◆From William Stringfellow, theologian and activist lawyer —

“When money is an idol, to be poor is a sin.”

Focus Questions:

How does consumerism affect you?

Have you ever felt, or been made to feel, guilty for having “too much” or more than “the rest of society”? If so, what was that like?

Have you ever felt, or been made to feel, inadequate for having “too little” or less than “the rest of society”? If so, what was that like?

How do you feel when you see someone who has more (is “better off”) than you? What perceptions do you have about that person? Why?

How do you feel when you see someone who has less (is “worse off”) than you? What perceptions do you have about that person? Why?

Why do you buy things at the holidays?

Checkout/Like and Wishes

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussions of logistics.)

Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice: From Galatians

“So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.”