

THE UNITED CHURCH OBSERVER

Lee Simpson - Qs & As

- 1. It's the season of Lent and many people decide to give up a small thing. But you chose to do away with a big thing: shopping! How did you come up with this idea?**

My concern is that I not contribute to a kind of buying pattern that I considered to be damaging to my personal health and my family. I was inspired by a pair of young people in Calgary who I read about who did a version of this but they were at a different acquisition part of their lives. But since we're talking about Lent and it's meant to be about reflection, the chance to stop and reflect whenever I don't purchase something is a part of my motivation.

b) Why are you deciding to share your experience by blogging about it on the United Church Observer's website?

I decided to blog about it due to my friendship with David Wilson. Dave is the publisher of The United Church Observer. I mentioned it to David and he said people want to watch you wriggle for the year – you can't just write about it when it's all said and done. The United Church Observer is the denominational magazine for the UCC and my background as a semi-retired church minister led me to believe that this was the right option for the blog. And as the magazine reaches across the country, it made sense to share it there.

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2. Is absolutely *everything* off limits in terms of purchasing...is there anything at all that you are allowing yourself to buy?

Everything edible is ok, I can buy food for family purposes and I do so each week...but just because I go to the grocery store doesn't mean that I can buy everything. I don't buy paper products or plastic things. Anything that isn't edible is off the list. My husband and I also permit ourselves a meal out once a week. But I'm not buying any clothing, toiletries, cosmetics, or craft supplies.

3. I understand that you prepared a bit for this challenge by stockpiling some supplies. What will you do should you run out of stock?

Yes, I did because toilet paper was non-negotiable in our household! The things that were stockpiled were laundry detergent and dishwasher detergent. If I run out of stock I will rely on lemon juice, vinegar and baking soda to help with household cleaning.

4. You were once the publisher of Chatelaine magazine but you are now an ordained Minister in the United Church of Canada. Chatelaine of course is a publication that encourages women and readers to buy. So were the reasons behind your decision to stop purchasing a partial protest against materialism?

As publisher of Chatelaine, I did play a role in promoting products to women across the country and some of them were fine products. But there is a pattern of purchasing that modern media now pushes that is over the top. We really don't need a wardrobe of lipstick. We don't need three shades of pink t-shirt. We have to be mindful of resources getting scarce and how much we are contributing to the depletion of the world's resources. I took an oath as part of becoming an ordained minister to live with respect in creation. Laying off our over consumption of resources is a huge part of that.

5. What has been the easiest and the most challenging part of the process?

The easiest part has been not buying books and because we have such a wonderful library system. Everything that I want to read is available at the library. Every new book is also easy to access. The most challenging has been the instinct for absent minded purchases. It's hard to break the habits of a life time and not pick up that item that you happen to see and want to grab.

6. How do you manage gift giving for loved ones for birthdays and other celebrations?

I am a crafter so I can make cards, or a water colour and share those. I also enjoy baking and I'm finding that I have been more creative since this year of no buying.

7. As more and more people learn about your story by meeting you and reading, seeing or hearing about this, you must have received quite a response. What kind of feedback have you received from those who are intrigued or incensed by what you're doing?

By and large, the response has been positive. There are some people who have a healthy interest in what I'm doing. Lots of people have come up to me as result of the media coverage. I've been congratulated and asked to speak at a few organizations and people are by and large both curious and complimentary.

Some people are cynical and wonder why I'm doing this and there are people who are nosey and have an unhealthy interest in it and have actually pawed through my grocery cart to see if I'm keeping my word!

8. What have you learned as you've been through this process?

I've learned that buying is a high that we can learn to do without. For me my personal passion is cosmetics and toiletry related and for now I am trying to avoid going into a store that offers those temptations.

9. What are you hoping people will learn from you when the year is done?

My job is not to teach other people. The objective is to stick to my rules. If people choose to follow my example – and some people have already told me they are going to do that for a day, week or month – that's fantastic. If I complete the year and learn all of the lessons that 365 days of intentional not buying have to teach, then I will be satisfied.