

Transcription

UUA Candidates Forum

October 18, 2008

Rev. John Gibbons (Moderator), with candidates Rev. Dr. Laurel
Hallman and Rev. Peter Morales

REV. JOHN GIBBONS: Good morning, everyone. Good morning. My name is John Gibbons. I am one of the ministers at the First Parish in Bedford, Massachusetts. And I am also the chair of the UUA Election Campaign Practices Committee. And because Rick Warren, Gwen Ifill, Tom Brokaw, and Queen Latifah were unavailable this morning, [LAUGHTER] I will be moderating this forum between the two candidates [APPLAUSE] for the presidency of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Reverend Dr. Laurel Hallman of Dallas, Texas and the Reverend Peter Morales of Golden, Colorado.

The process of running for UUA president is a grueling one. And I think we are better as an Association for this contested election. And, yet, we owe a great debt of gratitude for their wiliness to put themselves through all of this. So let's begin by giving thanks to both Laurel and to Peter. [APPLAUSE]

Here's how this is going to work. Each candidate has been offered up to 20 minutes for an opening presentation. They both assure me that they will not take up that 20 minutes, but I say the same thing to my congregation and it's not true. [LAUGHTER] We then will have a 15-minute break. And at that time, if you wish, you may fill out a card with

a question for the candidates. There are cards on your tables, and there will be an opportunity to gather them or simply bring them up here. I must tell you that there are far more questions than the candidates can possibly address in this format. We'll do our best to move it along as we are able, but that will be difficult so I ask your forbearance. Except at the outset, after each candidates' keynote presentation and then again at the very end of this session after the closing statements, thou shalt not applaud or whoop it up or behave in an unseemly manner. [LAUGHTER]

So be it. By a toss of a coin it was determined that Peter shall give the first presentation.

REV. PETER MORALES: Can they whoop it up now? [APPLAUSE]
Thank you. That one [GESTURES TO GIBBONS] does a pretty good job at the moderating. [LAUGHTER]

I am Peter Morales and I'm senior minister at Golden, Colorado. You know, I don't get to go to church much. I mean, I do church an awful lot, but I very rarely get to visit other churches. I want to begin by telling you about a visit to a church that will remain anonymous but it was in the Northeast Region...I'll give you that much of a clue. And it happened some time back. And it was a Sunday morning when I was traveling and alone and had a chance to go to church. So I found out what the service time was and got there. And I like to get to church early, especially a strange one because I don't know about parking and that sort of thing. And I drove up. It was about this time of year. And it wasn't clear, when I got there, where to enter, but I persevered because I was determined to

go. And I found a door that led to another door and there was the sanctuary. And I walked in. There was no welcome table or no welcoming in particular. The minister was busy dealing with a ten-year-old about going over somewhere and getting something and noticed that a strange person was in the sanctuary and came over and said good morning. And started looking around for an order of service to give me, found one, and I made my way to a pew where I sat alone for the entire service.

And it was a fine service, well done. At the end of it, again being enterprising and having perseverance, I followed people to coffee hour. It was not obvious at all where coffee hour was going to be. It turns out it was around the back and in the basement, but I trailed a couple of folks and found it, proceeded to get a cup of coffee and stand with a solitary cup of coffee in the corner...and finally someone did deign to speak with me.

I was working as Director of District Services at the time. No one there knew that. But when someone asked me what I did, I mentioned it and then proceeded to harangue me for about ten minutes about something that some district executive had not done ten years before in a district far, far away, where he used to live.

I cannot imagine, were I not already a committed Unitarian Universalist, returning to that congregation. It was borderline hostile to me. And tomorrow morning five thousand people across the United States are going to come to our congregations. They come in need of something,

longing for liberal religious community because we are relational beings, and because we are not only, as Bill said this morning, better together. We absolutely need one another. And far too many of those people who come are going to feel ignored and rejected. I believe that the way we often treat people coming to us, seeking community, isn't poor manners, it's immoral. It's the equivalent of not feeding the hungry, the equivalent of not feeding the hungry.

Americans now, we know by all kinds of measures that social psychologists do, are the most isolated people who have ever lived. A recent study showed, replicating an earlier study, asked Americans how many people they know with whom they can share person information. Twenty years ago the answer given most often was three people. In the study done a couple of years ago, the answer given most often was zero. It was published in the American Sociological Review and publication was withheld for more than a year because the sociologists did not believe their own findings and redid it. They thought they had made some methodological error. So we live in a time when there is a deep hunger for community where people are isolated and they are coming to us in droves.

My best estimate is that about a quarter of a million people come to our churches every year, far more than we have adult members. Perhaps I will have in my epitaph the kind of smarmy line I gave once that the key to our future is to repel fewer visitors. [LAUGHTER]

Now, a reasonable question is, well, what does that have to do with the presidency of our Association and the future of our Association and its leadership? And my response is absolutely everything. I am going to talk about, and there is plenty of information there, platform and website, and I hope you go to it.

I want to emphasize three things this morning. The first is that we absolutely have to grow our movement. We must do that. It's a moral imperative. But, in order to do that, we need to change our behavior. A key role for the president is to relentlessly cast a vision of a more open and welcoming religious movement and to create and help sustain a sense of urgency about that, because our behavior only changes when we have that kind of a sense of urgency.

Another thing that we have to do, to be true to the best in our tradition, is to build on the foundation that we have. And I really have to compliment Bill Sinkford for this. He's lifted us to a level of public visibility that we have not had before. That needs to be the foundation for the next president. Someone who is passionate and articulate and can speak publicly about those issues that are key to us.

On that score, I bring I was a newspaper editor and publisher before I was a minister. Someone once asked me, actually it was when I was precandidating in Golden, whether I felt comfortable speaking out on public issues. I smiled and said you're talking to someone who's written maybe 500 editorials. I speak out on public issues in my sleep.

[*LAUGHTER*] And written editorials, actually, in my sleep or half

asleep. But I also want you to look at my current track record. I've been involved with UUSC leading, with Charlie Clements, trips to Guatemala, another trip to Chiapas from my congregation. I've been on the board of trustees of the Colorado Interfaith Alliance, head of its Public Policy Commission. A couple of weeks ago I and other religious leaders stood with the Governor of Colorado asking for civility in the debate over immigration. So I have a long track record of being a passionate public spokesperson.

The other great thing that we need to do, let me give a little background on this, we are in the midst of a historic demographic shift in America of which there is no doubt. And let me throw out -- I'm a recovering social scientist so I can fall into numbers -- but these are stunning. Of Americans who are 70 years of age and older, three-quarters are white European extraction Anglo. Of Americans who are ten and younger, one-quarter are. If not a single immigrant crosses our borders for the next generation, for the next 20 years, three-quarters of young adults in America in a generation are going to be African-American, African-Latino, Asian and some mixture thereof.

Also, if we look at our congregations, we are going to lose half of our parish ministers, probably during the next presidency of the UUA, and the great majority of them are those that serve churches that are midsize and larger. So, at the one hand, we are surrounded, we are creating and will be living in a new America. And, on the other, we are going to need a new wave of ministers to minister to this new America. It's a perfect storm and actually a wonderful opportunity.

One of the things that I will do as president is convene, very early on, key folks to develop a strategy for ministry for the next generation. Because if we don't do that, we are going to be in a desperate situation very soon. And that process has to go all the way to the level of recruitment. We need to recruit an outstanding, passionate and diverse professional ministry to minister to the new America that is coming into being.

One of the things that is absolutely clear is that if we continue on the path that we are on, we will continue to fade as a part of American religious life. While we are growing at about the rate of one person per congregation per year on average, that's far below the rate of growth of our population. Had we simply kept up with population growth since merger, there would be 100,000 more adult UU members than we have right now. The sad fact is that, as a part of American religious life, we are steadily fading. And, if we continue to be the kind of religious body that we have been and have a steady hand on the tiller and manage well, that is a prescription for certain disaster, absolutely predictable disaster. We have got to make some profound cultural changes as a religious movement.

So my intent, if I am president, is to project that message to bring a track record of management and leadership of having led profound changes in my own congregation, which has just about doubled in size in nine years, back when I was in publishing and before that in government, not only good management but management cannot be enough. We need visionary leadership that will lead the kind of changes that we need to

make. And they are at the cultural level. I want to lead that kind of change as your president. Thank you. [APPLAUSE]

REV. GIBBONS: Thank you, Peter. And now Laurel.

REV. DR. LAUREL HALLMAN: I too am going to tell a story. It's about a church that's in your area, and I will name it. It's in Yarmouth, Maine. I know about that church because a family from my church in Dallas moved actually to Falmouth and found the Yarmouth church and became involved. The children, the two daughters who I'm very fond of have now become people in the youth group in that church. And so I keep in touch with them.

The church had been, for quite a while, doing what we euphemistically call deferred maintenance, but really means not taking care of things. It had been found in, or the building was built in, 1860. It was a Universalist church. It remains a Universalist church. It was a break off from the congregational church, some say over dancing and others say over theology. Or, no, not theology, actually, it was abolition. But the break occurred and the church built the building. And it has been an historical building for many years but, as I say, with deferred maintenance.

And we all know why that is. There's never enough money to do what we need to do and priorities, present priorities take over long-term investments. And so they deferred most of the maintenance. They would touch up things. Lightening hit the steeple and they fixed that. And then

they did some painting about once every ten years, but nothing too dramatic.

One day a man in the church climbed up and discovered to his dismay that the steeple was leaking and water was pouring into the base of it and basically the base of the steeple was rotten. And so I'm sure, I won't ask for a raise of hands, but there are a lot of steeples up here so this is a cautionary tale. He came down and informed the others. They determined the steeple was dangerous. They got a crane and they took the steeple off. And some of you have seen it. The steeple sat right next to the church. So, if you drove down the main street of Yarmouth, you would drive facing straight. And I saw this, straight towards the church, here is the church and there is the steeple. [LAUGHTER] Fortunately, there were people, but they were distressed. And, as you can probably imagine, the discussion that followed was, could they do it cheaply?

One possibility was to just cap the steeple and not rebuild it. One possibility was to rebuild it but clad it in aluminum siding so that it would be less vulnerable to the weather and wouldn't need to be replaced probably for another hundred years. And the third was to restore it to its original design. And, after much discussion, they discovered it was going to cost \$330,000 to restore that steeple. And there was a great deal of discussion about the use of that money which could have been given to the poor, which could have been used for other very good purposes in the community. They decided to go for it. It was a huge, huge investment. And I will say that by way of somewhat confession, because we are all the UUA, the UUA people were called and advised not to do it. That the

money wouldn't be available, they couldn't possibly raise that much money in the church, and there wouldn't be much support from anywhere else.

Knowing the people there, though, that galvanized their determination [LAUGHTER] to rebuild that steeple. So, over a period of two years, they did what we do which is have pot lucks, have pumpkin sales, have events at the church, benefit concerts and to put the word out as far as they could put it to of their need. In fact, it got to Dallas and we sent money. I mean everybody sent money. And I believe the chalice lighters in the district sent money. And it ended up costing more than they thought, as it always does, but they managed to pay for it.

And they built, first they took the huge rotten -- there were six rotten beams, actually -- and they took them down. And they rebuilt the base and re-hung the bell. And the say they re-hung the bell, they put a cord on the bell into the church down the middle aisle and the children of the church lined up and rang the bell. That was the first major fabulous moment. And then eventually the rest of the steeple was put in place, and there was a huge celebration by all.

The Episcopal Church down the street took a collection over a month and sent them \$7,000 to help. Other groups joined in. Money came from places that were completely, completely unexpected. The other thing that happened, oh, I should have mentioned that one of the vulnerabilities of this church was their minister had just given them the word that he was moving. So this all occurred during a time the congregation was in

transition from a much beloved minister to an interim, to a search and a selection of a new minister. So all of that was going on while they were working on the steeple.

The children, one day in church, an adult brought in one of the old beams and talked about it. It was actually from a tree that had been cut in the early 1700s, they determined by the rings of the wood. And it was, so that mice had made their nests in it. The children saw how all that had happened over a huge long time when you're talking about church history.

In the meantime, they raised money to send the children on a trip to Guatemala to work with children in the city dump there in Guatemala. They sent money to their partner church in Transylvania. Their income for their own church rose. Their attendance rose. Their membership rose. They became a much more involved church with the rest of the community. So all of the goals that had been worried about, if they put their priority into this steeple, all of those goals were fulfilled.

One of the men in the church took one of the beams and did some wood turning and made about 65 chalices from the wood of the beam and they sold them as a fundraiser. *[PAUSE]* I want to light that chalice. *[SHE MOVES TO THE CHALICE ON THE TABLE TO LIGHT IT]*. He said they had to make little ones because the wood was cracking and it was hard to work with because of its age, but it's fine. It's just fine. I light that chalice as a symbol of the hope that I see among us for our future. I see small churches, medium-sized churches, large churches recalibrating

themselves for the opportunity that we have before us. We are the ones who know that theology, theological terms are not literal. We have the chance to pull up a chair at the religious table and speak the language of metaphor and truth through the symbol of religion and through theological terms, religious language. We are positioned, amazingly positioned to do that in this time when, as you know, literalism of religious terms and religious ideas is rampant. Diana Eck last year, a theologian at Harvard, said that we were the ones to do that. That we were the ones to step up to the religious table and be spokespeople for our future religiously, otherwise, those terms were going to go into misuse, disuse, lack of liveliness, and we would become a spiritually unhealthy country.

So, if I were to say what I need to do as a president, one of the things is share these kinds of stories, call us to new language, call us to depth in our lives. If you've noticed in my literature, it challenges us to all reach deeper, to not go over the old arguments and the old stuff the way we organize ourselves, to do that in a new way and to be faithful to our faith. I have faith in our faith. To be faithful for what it calls us to do in our time. And, as president, I believe I know what that is and can speak to that.

There will be much, much more to say about our future and how I would lead you in our future. But for now let me just say that it calls me. It has called me. People said to me last night, why are you doing this? I am called by my background, by my experience and by my hope for all of us,

to spend the next eight years as your president. Thank you.

[*APPLAUSE*]

REV. GIBBONS: Thank you both. And we will indeed take a break now. And we will resume at the crack of 10:30. So be there or be square.

[*A SCHEDULED BREAK WAS TAKEN, FORUM THEN RESUMED*]

REV. GIBBONS: I have received more questions than I know what to do with. I appreciate everyone's engagement. This is a little bit like the danger of asking my congregation their opinion on something.

[*LAUGHTER*] Promptly, I learned that there are many opinions. And indeed there are more questions than we are going to be able to address. However, I will see to it that both candidates receive all the questions. And I also would encourage you to visit the candidates' websites. There are opportunities to engage the candidates in that manner. And I am hopeful that all of these questions will be addressed in the course of the campaign.

One important initial question has to do with the nature of the presidency. What is this job anyway? Is there one eight year term asks one person? And the answer to that is no. There are two four year terms. And this election will take place at next June's general assembly in Salt Lake City. And those voting include our professional ministers, as well as delegates elected within your congregations. There is a process of allocating delegates based on the membership of your congregation.

Present in the room somewhere is Paul Rickter, and he is the Secretary of the UUA and he is the arbiter of all questions related to election processes. And I would direct such questions to Paul. [APPLAUSE] I think that it was John Maynard Keynes who said that the -- no, it wasn't John Maynard Keynes, it was John Kenneth Galbraith -- who said that the essence of leadership is addressing the anxiety of people in their times. I actually learned that quotation on a UUA website.

And so our first question, which will be going to Laurel first, has to do with the current anxiety of our times. This question comes from "John the Preacher." And he says, "I have a sermon to preach tomorrow and I need your help. [LAUGHTER] What would you, in a nutshell, tell Unitarian Universalists about the religious or spiritual or ethical implications of our current economic crisis?" And though this was to have been a follow-up question why don't you segue a bit into what do you expect the fiscal effects of this crisis to be on the work of our association and how would you approach any necessary spending or reductions? Laurel first.

REV. HALLMAN: In a minute and a half. That would be in a minute and a half, two minutes?

REV. GIBBONS: You can start now.

REV. HALLMAN: [LAUGHTER] It is a spiritual question because anxiety is at the heart of spiritual life so that we don't get kidnapped off

by our anxieties. It is hard to tell right now. As you know, the market goes up and down every day as we watch somewhat anxiously. The market goes up and down, but at least where I am we're not getting ourselves caught into gloom and doom. We are not sure yet where the market will end up. And the UUA, as I understand it, and I'm not officially there, but the UUA is watching very closely. Jim Sherblom is on my team for this district, this larger district, is the head of the Investment Committee, and they are watching very closely, as you may know, what's going on. They believe that we are in a reasonable position. Nobody is in a fabulous position.

The differences it will make, I think, is that we will have to put our benchmarks, move our benchmarks closer in our projects. In Dallas, we are about to start a building project, as you can imagine. And there is some anxiety about doing that. But what we've decided to do is just mark our benchmarks closer so that we can be agile as we make decisions about what to do next. So we're not committing ourselves to a four-year building project but a little shorter. And then we can say, well, let's stop here because we frankly don't have the money to move forward.

So I would say don't get lost in doom and gloom. We're going to have to worry about how to -- we've got to be realistic about what's going on and be able to perhaps make some alternative futures possible for us in our visions so that if we need to retrench, we can. We already know what our priorities are, we do it with some deliberation, rather than panic at some moment when we run out of money.

REV. MORALES: A couple of things on that. First off, I think that the national thing that we're seeing, as part of our religious and moral and pastoral response, is that this is the logical consequence of a kind of acquisitive individualism as an ethic of our culture. And we need to be in a position of critique of that and assert, once again, an image of a common good. And so that is our religious witness that we have to have in a time of public crisis. And also to remind folks in our congregations that this, too, shall pass. I mean there are recessions.

The implications for the Association are serious. It's impossible to be precise, but we're probably going to face a cut in the order of 7% or 8% for several years because we rely on endowment income. And the latest recommendations are we're going to have to take a smaller percentage of the value of the endowment. And the value of the endowment has gone down. It's a double whammy. And so what that really means is -- it ought to mean -- is not something across the board.

We need to take a hard look at what is most essential to our future, preserve that, do the things that we're doing well and preserve that. And the things that are less important and that we are doing less well has to be where the cuts are. A terrible mistake would be to do something across the board. I mean that's a way of, to use the farming analogy, of eating your seed corn. And it can actually be, as all crises are in life, an opportunity to focus on what is really essential and what is most important for us. And to concentrate on that and do that exceptionally well.

REV. HALLMAN: Can I add?

REV. GIBBONS: Go ahead, Laurel.

REV. HALLMAN: Thank you. I just -- milling here -- heard a story of a group of churches, or a group in a church, that realizes they are going to have to cut back on their heating costs and they are not going to be able to heat their houses as they would like or can. And they go together in the church and decided, because one of the implications was they couldn't pay their money for the heating for the church so they might have to close the sanctuary down. They got together and decided it was more important to keep the heat up in the sanctuary so that they could invite people in from the community who needed to be warm. That extended to a feeding program for the people that came in to get heat and created an incredible amount of community and service in the church.

So I would echo what Peter is saying that we need to look at our priorities, not just from a loss point of view, but how can we leverage what we have new ways so it's more effective.

REV. GIBBONS: I want to stay with this topic a little bit longer. I have questions here about every topic under the sun from public education to UU international engagement to issues affecting youth and ministers and anti-oppression and anti-racisms and on and on and on. One question puts it this way: "So much seems to be looming over the world right now, to get to the point, it looks downright gloomy. There are so many things in the world that need our focused attention. How do you pick and

choose? Do you have a process you would primarily use to guide the UUA toward addressing identified goals? And, if so, what is it?" We'll start again with you, Peter.

REV. MORALES: It's important not to overreact and it's also important to remember a basic message of ours that things need not be the way they are, that we are capable of changing those things. Now that sounds all kind of flowery, but that's a foundation from which we move. As you look at a process for that, again, it's important to focus on those things where there is a lot of passion and where we can make a difference.

It's easy to try to take on too much. In fact, one of the things, actually, a good model for that is what we've done in public witness over the past administration, which is to focus on a set number of issues. We need to take a look at, OK, as we address these things, where can we make a real difference and where is our passion and really focus on that.

REV. HALLMAN: The board right now, the UUA Board of Trustees and members of the board are here so I'm careful to speak, not overspeak, what they are doing, but they are going through a process of governance which will help us all set our priorities. We have a lot of different groups doing a lot of different things. And if we could align and pull all of that together we would be a formidable force for change. And the board leads us in that. They set the, in the terminology, the ends, the goals, the purposes of what we are doing. And then the president and the president's staff and the volunteers in the various group implement. So, as we move into this time, it's a very amazing thing that this is actually

happening at this time because we've just come from two days with the board, and they are working very hard at honing our priorities. So, as we make our choices, we look to our leaders to help us with the priorities.

And they aren't always what they seem. Sometimes a priority which looks like a frill is not a frill. And I point back to my steeple story. It turns out to be a catalyst for a lot of other things. So my first pass at what the practical things that need to be done would be what can we leverage to create the largest impact with the smallest cost? And we have the wonderful possibility of volunteers helping and leaders leading to help us hone all of that.

So, as we go forward, we can be together in what we choose. My job as president would be to help us all move down that same path together and not be either in little silos or not talking to each other about what we're doing so we can leverage our resources and our leaders.

REV. GIBBONS: I was going to come to this a little later, but as long as you're discussing governance, we do have a version of policy governance in the Association. Can you elaborate a little bit more about the relationship between the president and the moderator and the board of trustees?

REV. HALLMAN: Let me say that we've had policy governance in my church in Dallas almost since I got there. I brought it with me from Indiana, and we implemented it over a period of about eight years. And it is fully implemented now. The role of the president and the board is

what I just explained but maybe I can say it more clearly. The board sets the ends, the purposes. Why are we doing this? Why are we here? What do we think that we are doing and whom are we serving and why? Those are questions. Those are spiritual questions. And I would invite you to sit with those questions in your board meetings and in your private meditation because it will take you deeper into why we're here.

The board sets those ends. And your boards and your churches should be thinking about why we're doing what we're doing, who are we doing it for and to what end, what purposes? Then after those ends -- and they're very large, they're not very tactical, they're quite large and strategic -- the president then, with those ends and then with certain limitations, you know, you cannot go rob a bank to go implement this program, that's a limitation, there are other limitations. And so the board sets the limitations.

You can reach these ends and not do these things. But in here, in the middle, you can do anything you want to reach those ends. And so the board has the staff, they have volunteer leaders, they have people from congregations, they have programs which have sprung up among the whole Association and even beyond it to reach the ends. The president then creates the communication system, creates the environment in which we can actually reach those ends, so it's a very clear line. There's one line of accountability and it goes straight from the board of trustees of the UUA to the president and then down to everybody who is implementing.

REV. MORALES: If implemented properly and well -- and I think it will be -- it's a freeing and liberating relationship to build on the comments, because what it does is say, within this very broad scope, "make it happen." The real challenge for us, I believe, has been as an Association not so much agreeing on ends, although we have trouble editing them. [LAUGHTER]

But truly there is broad consensus on where we ought to be and move and what's important and what's trivial. What we haven't done as well and is especially a challenge in a religious organization and a religious culture is some of the kind of tough-minded stuff that needs to happen which is around evaluating what we're doing, evaluating it carefully and fairly and then making decisions based on those evaluations. That's an issue to me of stewardship. And one of the things that I would plan to do as president is bring in a new level of assessment, evaluation and accountability to what we do, so that we can get to those ends, so that we can make corrections along the way and not be in the position of really not knowing how well our programs are working because we haven't designed in any way to evaluate that at the outset. That is something that is very deep in our culture. We're really evaluation-averse as a culture, and it does not serve us.

REV. GIBBONS: In a number of the questions I received there was both anxiety and enthusiasm about growth. One person put it this way. "What will you do to support tiny New England congregations of less than 50 members?" You are both senior ministers of large congregations.

How is the Association going to address the needs as part of your growth strategy of those smaller congregations?

REV. MORALES: Well, first of all, when I was Director of District Services was when we implemented the first small congregation consultant in New England. And I am happy to say that she has endorsed my candidacy -- Jane Dwinell -- so I'm, I mean, most of our congregations are small across the country, not only in New England. And they have an important and special place.

Growth is not an end in itself. Growth is a measure of how well we are serving people and of the relationships that we create with people. Churches that grow are churches that do church well, who know who they are, what they're about and welcome other people in to join them. That can happen in a fellowship of 12 people as easily as it can happen at Jefferson Unitarian Church or First Church Dallas. Size has nothing to do with that.

We build our movement one relationship at a time, one Sunday at a time. And in some ways, actually, it's easier in a small church. You know, it's easier for a church of 50 to have 10% growth. I mean it's five folks. *[LAUGHTER]* And so I never want an emphasis on growth which is really an emphasis on being open and welcoming and engaging to be misunderstood as a bias toward large churches, because it isn't at all. There is a place for all of our churches.

REV. HALLMAN: I know how to grow churches. When I came to Dallas, we were 550 members and now we're at 1100 members. And I know what it takes to transform or to morph, I guess is the word, from one level to another and the kinds of structures you have to put in place, and I have deep admiration for congregations and ministers who can move from one size to another. It's hard and often we get stuck on plateaus.

I would agree with Peter that it's not growth in numbers. We count numbers and they are very important in a lot of the things we do. And we understand that if the numbers are going down we better pay attention. But even the Alban Institute -- the Alban Institute is a consulting firm to churches -- is not saying that you should measure growth not in membership numbers but in participation, so that they can evaluate how many people are actually participating in the church.

I would say that we need to measure our growth by the ministries that are established by the individuals and by the church both within and outside the doors of the church. That's one. Two, the influence for good in the community. It's hard to evaluate but it is measurable. And we can find out by asking what is needed in our communities and how we're doing as a congregation in our communities. And I define community as very large. And, three, how do we transform the lives of people we touch? Now, these may be people just coming through who come once to visit and we have no idea how we touch their lives. But how are we transforming lives is one of the most primary questions in terms of evaluating our growth because we want to be effective at the same time.

REV. MORALES: Can I make a quick addition? Programmatically the key is to individualize the way we deal with churches. We -- it's too often we do sort of workshop model where one size fits all and we have a kind of a default response of Saturday workshops to solve all problems in our association. But what really needs to happen is a field staff that understands how to assess where a congregation is and to bring the resources and help and put them in contact with the right people and create a relationship over time. That's the programmatic part of this.

REV. GIBBONS: I received a number of questions about the relationship between spirituality and social justice and leadership. One person said you aspire to be a spiritual leader. Will the emphasis be on spiritual or on leader? But I want to phrase this a little differently to you, Laurel. One person put it this way: "How will you as president provide leadership in bridging the common gap between the notion of spirituality and the understanding and practice of faith-driven justice making? Specifically, how will you proclaim how spirituality might be realized through faith-grounded social witness and advocacy, not faith-based charity but faith-based socially-just witness and advocacy?" And a somewhat related question is "would you use a language of reverence to promote Unitarian Universalism?"

REV. HALLMAN: Got it. [LAUGHTER]

REV. GIBBONS: I could add another two or three questions onto that if you like.

REV. MORALES: Can we get three minutes on this one?

[*LAUGHTER*]

REV. GIBBONS: Sure, you may.

REV. HALLMAN: There is a myth and there is some truth in it where there's always truth in some mythology about ourselves that if you're spiritual you're not an activist. And I would call you to Thich Nhat Hanh, I would call you to Thomas Merton, I would call you to Martin Luther King, Jr., who wedded their spiritual — proactive -- their spiritual life, with their call to justice and activism even to death.

The people that I know who have come from a center of strength because of their spiritual practice are able to have a steady core out of which they act. I remember Thomas Merton writing about the pacifists during the Vietnam War who were running around willy-nilly just frenzied in their work for peace and how odd that was to him. Because, in fact, he took them to task because he felt that we had to embody the quality of spirit that we were trying to live in the world, to make live in the world.

So, for me, there is not that separation. Many of you know, and some of you have been involved in my program “Living by Heart,” and you will remember that there is an activist part in that curriculum. And we show some photos of Harry Scholfield, with who I did this project, marching in San Francisco for fair housing and for equal rights and for many things. And he is quoted on the tape as saying that his -- he knew too many

people, he knew too many UUs who burned out on activism and became bitter in the end.

And I see that as a tendency among us to become so intent on our goal and realizing our dreams that we burn out. And so I think that spiritual practice and activism are absolutely wedded. I am right here speaking through this microphone because of my own personal spiritual life and my own spiritual discernment. So it's dangerous business, let me tell you, to start saying "what shall I do in the world and how can I be used to larger purposes," because you find yourself in places that are challenging and not where you expected to be. Does that answer all those questions? Yes, enough.

REV. MORALES: The opposition of spirituality and action is an absolutely false dichotomy. If -- because what all of us need, is a balance. And, if we are truly connected with ourselves, with our sense of what is sacred and are compassionate and empathetic, we cannot help to act in the world. We are determined to act.

And there is also a complicated piece of this because actually acting becomes a spiritual practice as well. The very act of doing something for somebody else, with other people who care, is a transformational practice. I would have you apply the standard on this, between us as candidates, of our track records and the way our lives speak.

When I was a newspaper editor and publisher in Oregon, I was speaking out in a lumber town on gay rights. In fact, there is a Beacon book about

that town where they've changed my name but they quote my editorials. I would have you look at my action with, as I said, the Colorado Interfaith Alliance. I've served on the UUSC Ministerial Advisory Committee. I've been to Chiapas and Guatemala, as I said. My congregation has six social action taskforces. We do everything from housing homeless families in our church to legislative things to human rights activities. We have social action weekends where we've had 450 of our people involved. It is absolutely integral to the life of Jefferson Unitarian Church. I invite you to go to the website and just explore that. So there is no difference. There must not ever be a difference or we will have lost the core of our faith.

REV. HALLMAN: I'll have to follow-up on that only to just, because there was an implication that I might not be that activist, so I, too, invite you to my website of my church and to know that there will be, you will see a video of me about a month ago speaking at Dallas Area Interfaith, which is our community organizing group, where I'm speaking on immigration reform in Dallas. I have a track record and it comes directly from my – from depth.

REV. GIBBONS: There were a number of questions about both ministry and youth programming and sometimes blending those two subjects asking how our ministry will develop attracting people who may be in our youth program. We may need to separate these out, but one question, for example, is to what extent will your vision of recruiting a new generation of ministers rely upon a national or continental UU youth program? The questioner says, "I myself am a young adult and a

minister who came to UU Leadership through YRUU.” Another person asked, “What do you propose to replace YRUU and how do you intent to implement that? If we need to separate these things we can do so.”

REV. GIBBONS: But take a whack at it, Peter.

REV. MORALES: I want up just a second to talk about our religious culture and something that has always actually been puzzling to me, is our difficulty with engaging our youth and how it's a challenge through our movement nationally. And it's part of American culture. And it's something that has always been a little puzzling to me because I did not experience it.

I grew up in San Antonio. I grew up in a Mexican-American family. I spoke Spanish before I spoke English. And so I never, I was never baby-sit once in my life. It was an experience I didn't have. All gatherings in my community were multi-generational gatherings. And then it's been a sort of weird experience watching how this is so different. So it's not only part of our religious culture. It's part of middle-class Anglo culture, and that makes it harder to battle. So I want to put it in that cultural context.

We don't do a very good job of engaging the natural idealism and passion and energy of youth. We've got to go so far beyond hanging out as a model of interaction for youth. [APPLAUSE] And they are hungry for that. Jumping to the other in recruitment, it would be my intent to recruit everywhere all the time. I mean, so yeah, among youth gatherings,

young adult, others, but there are fabulous ministers that do it in mid-life and past mid-life. I like to think I'm one of those. So the key is to try to bring people into the ministry who have a passion for leadership and leading change and are visionary and effective at doing that. We have got to then equip them and help them along. And I've been saved by the bell. [LAUGHTER]

REV. HALLMAN: I believe there is a new energy among our churches, both with and for our youth, at least in the churches that I've encountered. And I want to make a little parenthesis here that there are some myths about us that we keep, we hold, about others. You know, the myth, I was just saying to someone, the myth here that the churches in New England are dying. That myth lives in the Association, and it's not true. There will always be churches that die, but that's not true.

And I think that the myth that our youth aren't engaged, of course there are places they're not engaged. And hanging out with them, as Peter says, is exactly a problem. We have left our youth to their own just at a time when they're just ready for us to teach them a new level of our faith from when they've been in elementary school.

Now, coming from Dallas, I have a different view. And our young people come up here. In fact, yesterday at 25 Beacon, the Unity Church Unitarian youth from St. Paul, Minnesota, which was my home church, were at 25, and I cannot tell you how important that visit is to come up here. They are transformed by seeing how many churches there are here

and how different they are from each other, and they get a sense of their history.

So I think there are lots of ways that our youth are becoming engaged. We will be implementing more programs and more ways for youth to become connected to our churches. And I'm going to take a tiny bit of extra time before you ring the bell because I want to say that, in terms of recruiting youth, well, I'm not going to do it, but I really would like to find out how many of you grew up Unitarian or Universalist or Unitarian Universalist. In fact, raise your hands. [*SURVEYS THE RESPONSE IN THE CROWD*]. And now how many of you are ministers? [*HANDS IN THE AUDIENCE*]. All right. So you grew up UU. How many of you grew up UU and you are ministers? [*COUNTS HANDS IN THE AUDIENCE AGAIN*]. So we can build on that. We can build on that caring, involving, equipping process. It's commitment, long-term, to our youth both in our churches and in the larger Association, but it's happening and I'm excited about the possibilities for our next generation.

REV. GIBBONS: Let's take this a little deeper talking about ministry specifically. There are a number of questions about aspects of our ministry, community ministry for example, and increasing the diversity of our ministry, excellence in ministry. What would you most like us to know about your approach to the next generation or perhaps the current generation of UU ministers?

REV. HALLMAN: Well, let me say first that on my ministerial team, we have three ministers in my church. And Xolani Kacela who is a

newly fellowship UU minister is our minister of pastoral care. He is also a chaplain in the Air Force Reserve. In fact, right now, with the blessing of the board, is in his training, his time that he's away because our board president was in the Air Force and he said I wish "I wished I had met Xolani Kacela when I was in the Air Force as a chaplain. I would have spent a lot more years as a UU." So we are living in Dallas. We're living too, the diversity aspect and the community, actually, Xolani is doing all of this, diversity and his community ministry with the Air Force and then excellence in ministry.

Excellence is another word that we say and mean a lot of different things. We are looking for people who can transform lives, whether it's in a hospice setting or in a prison or in an Air Force chaplaincy or in the middle of a congregation. Now, I am one who believes that all of those people need to be connected to our congregations, that they are ministries that rise up out of our congregations. And the fact that Xolani Kacela is both in our congregation and in the community has been a great blessing both on our side and I know on the side of the Air Force Reserve.

Oh, 30 seconds. I thought she was finishing me. [LAUGHTER] So I might say another word about excellence, that we are looking at the ways that our ministers are trained. I came into this candidacy for the presidency having served on the Board of Meadville Lombard Theological School where we are really recreating and reexamining the whole process of the training of our ministers. And I know that's going across the board whether UU seminaries or other seminaries. We are re-

examining that. It's a very fertile time in terms of recruiting and training ministers for our next generation.

REV. MORALES: One of the things that we tend to do in looking at our professional ministry, is look at pieces of it, and too often not with the connections among all those pieces. I want us to re-envision ministry from the time somebody feels, thinks, senses a call, thinks about it, explores it, by the time someone approaches them and says have you thought about it, which is an important piece to do, all the way through to continuing education and skill-building.

And we are going to need to make some changes. I mean, I find myself often wishing that my own training had been different. It was far too cognitive and not nearly enough of it was of the practical things that make a tremendous difference in the day-to-day practice of parish ministry. So there's that piece of it, of taking that comprehensive look, doing the recruitment, getting the right people involved in ministry early on. Because after that, I mean there's no point in trying to teach me to play the violin. [LAUGHTER] I mean it's not going to happen.

We have to make sure that we have people that have the kind of personality and skills who are more likely to thrive, especially in parish ministry. And then we've got to develop -- in Mountain Desert District, we've taken on a new -- where we're actually making congregations much more responsible and parish ministers to working with and partnering with the students in that area since two-thirds almost of our students now are not coming from our own seminaries. We have got to involve our

congregations and the broad base of our ministers in the developing of our ministry. And I'm going to beat you to the bell.

REV. GIBBONS: I'm going to take this still one step further. There have been questions about our UU theological schools. And let's see if we can respond in an even briefer fashion to this. There were a number of initiatives over the last several years about the possible merger and some relationship between Meadville Lombard and Starr King. The UUA also contributed to a chair at Harvard Divinity School. How important is it for us to have uniquely UU institutions of higher education?

REV. MORALES: Me first?

REV. GIBBONS: Go ahead.

REV. MORALES: It's very important. And the way that those schools are going to, in the long-term, thrive is if there is an increasing demand nationally for ministers so that they can maintain student bodies of a certain size and that they do the steps that are happening happily at both of those schools to take a hard look at what they're doing and how well they're preparing people. Because if it's clearly known that those schools are the best places to go and are preparing the best ministers then people will flock to them and they will be healthy and they will be able to get the kind of financial support that they need.

There are some difficult choices to be made in this because what we cannot do is simply de-fund everything that supports things like UU history and UU polity and working with students all over the country at non-UU seminaries in order to subsidize our seminaries. There are some difficult choices in there. And we need -- it would be a tragedy for this movement -- for those schools to cease to exist.

REV. HALLMAN: I agree. I think we must keep our two UU schools in our midst. We've lost too many already. There were more and now there are only two. I say that for two reasons. One is they are not only the keeper of the tradition and the place where you go to learn the context of UU ministry, to say nothing of polity or history or some of the other very specific UU things that they teach, but more importantly those schools are the keeper of our theology, our theological work into the future, our way of staying at the religious and theological table, our history. All of those things are bound up as part of the traditions of our two schools. So we're not just having fragile places where students can or don't need to go, but it's very crucial to our movement that these schools become strong.

Now, as Peter has said, we have many students going to other schools. And our UU theological schools can support them with specialized courses. And the ministers around the other schools can support the students there. So we're talking about individual students and a lot of different possibilities. And both schools are also thinking about working on, in fact doing, online courses and other modern ways of crossing geographic boundaries to give theological education.

But the point I want to make is that this issue, I guess you would call it, which Bill Sinkford has been boldly working on and which has become very, very difficult to try to find a way for our two schools to live on, this issue has not been generated by the panel in theological education, which, in fact, took some funding. And it was frankly not much funding to start with. Took it away from the two schools and has distributed it differently. That is not the issue.

The issue is are we, that would be we, that would be us, are we going to support the theological education of the ministers of the future? There used to be a responsibility felt on the part of the churches by the fact that they were “using up a minister,” so that they should replace that minister with the funding for another one to be educated. And that was over a long period of time. We have shorter periods of time and we become disconnected. We think ministers are just going to show up whole cloth at our pulpits and preach and do everything we want them to do, and we don't assume responsibility for that. So we are going to have to fund theological education.

REV. GIBBONS: Somewhat to our surprise, the most questions on a particular topic submitted today had to do with international engagement. Again, to our surprise. And let me try to boil it down in this way. Those UUs who are engaged in international work have come to an awareness that successful partnerships and other international engagements require two things: a committed group of lay people, and strong support from the pulpit, from the ministry. Inasmuch as the president is a significant

presence in the UUA pulpit, will you be internationally engaged and how? And I'll go to you first, Peter, and then Laurel will follow.

REV. MORALES: Certainly, I would expect to be. And one of the, again, puzzling things about our movement is that our message in our approach to being religious is not a, should not be a North American phenomenon. There is no reason why throughout Europe, Latin America, for example, there are lots of religious liberals who end up discovering us on the Web or the encyclopedia informing little groups. I'm on a chat group of a Spanish language very active chat group. And there are people in Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Spain, Barcelona and Madrid, all over these pockets. That needs to be nurtured. And we have to be good partners with them. We can't make that happen.

But certainly as we cast a vision for the future, and as I would hope to do that, it is absolutely artificial that those principals of compassion and engagement that we have be somehow packaged in such a way that they are limited to the American, predominantly North American, experience. It ought to be universal of all things. What a concept. [LAUGHTER] So, yeah, I would hope to do that. You know, I've met with Spanish-speaking UUs. As I say, I track that. There is tremendous potential there.

REV. HALLMAN: It's true that we have historical relationships that have sprung up for a variety of reasons with people in various parts of the world. And, to name a few, the Khasi Hills, the Philippines, two different groups in Japan and Great Britain, obviously, for our history

and Transylvania. Those relationships need to be supported and nurtured. I like what Bill Sinkford has recently done in having a person, Eric Cherry, whose responsibility in the administration is to link up, to help the linkages of people in congregations, with some of these projects and some of these interests. I think this is a good way to go. He has also had ambassadors from the UUA to go to various places that I've just named to further the relationship, because these are relational connections. We overlap for reasons of money, the bequests and reasons of history and reasons of friendship and reasons of common purpose, and it varies from place to place. We need to continue to nurture those. They are sometimes tricky and difficult. There are other cultural implications that need to be -- people who are savvy need to be able to be ambassadors -- just as on the national level we need people who can represent us well with people who are into very, very difficult cultures.

I've been to Transylvania and have been very touched, changed, by the experience of meeting with our spiritual cousins in Transylvania. I just came back from doing a retreat, a "Living by Heart" retreat with the ministers in Great Britain. There is some new upsurge and interest and vitality in the Unitarian, and it would be just Unitarian, Unitarian churches in England. And, as Peter says, there is a transformation by the web. I'm sure he receives, as I do, letters from people from all over the world that are reading and listening to our streamed sermons on the web.

So, Wallace Robins said once, we dare not fence the spirit. We have to be prudent, we have to be careful, we have to be diplomatic, but we dare not fence the spirit.

REV. GIBBONS: A meeting in Worcester would not be complete without mention of Wallace Robins.

REV. HALLMAN: Oh -- I planned that. [*LAUGHTER*]

REV. GIBBONS: I'm going to try to get in two quick questions before we go to our closing statements. And that may take us just a little bit past the 11:30 mark, but I am hopeful that it will not be much beyond that. I'm reminded that once upon a long time ago when Ted Kennedy ran for president and was asked personal questions, he objected to them as couch questions. And this, perhaps, verges on being a couch question but it is this: "In the past, how have you responded to, evaluated and learned from mistakes, your own or those of your team?" Laurel?

REV. HALLMAN: Oh, I get to go first.

REV. GIBBONS: You do.

REV. HALLMAN: Thank you.

REV. MORALES: I get more time to think about mistakes.

REV. HALLMAN: [*LAUGHTER*] Mistakes. Oh, I'm running through them here. I'm picking one. I know that, and it's important for me to speak to this because I know it's out there in some ways, and that is the project that I was very much a part of, the Pathways Church Project in

the Metroplex, Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. And what I think is my mistake may surprise you, so let me tell you a little bit of the story.

We, the ministers in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, began to talk about places where we needed congregations and also about ways to help the congregations that already existed, what were the next steps? And as part of this conversation we began to talk about the fact that the ministry of the Horizon Unitarian Church in one of the suburbs had been, had come to Dallas at exactly the same time as I had, and we had started, First Church had been part of the starting of Horizon Church with 32 members, and the church now has 300 members. It's actually been one of the most healthy and important start-ups by the extension department of that time. And Denis Hamilton has been the minister of the church during his whole career, and he has done a magnificent job, a phenomenal job of moving from 32 to 100 to 150 and to 200 and then building, being in a storefront and building. But that is a lifetime, a minister's lifetime.

And so I began to work on the problem of how do we start new congregations, which we need to do, but fast start. I'm going to need more than 30 seconds, OK? How do we fast start congregations? And so the Pathways Project came out of that yearning, so that we would not have that slow, painful, inch by inch up to 100 where we stop and stay and stay and stay until we can do something else.

Now, if we fast-forward, we called the minister. I raised about three-quarters of the money in the Dallas church, and the rest of the money

came from Boston and also some of the money from our district, our North Texas NTAUUS, which gives grants. And we called a dynamic, wonderful, fabulous minister, and we spent money, some of that money, a significant amount training in fast start.

Now, I clarify we were not creating a mega church. We never intended to create a mega church. We intended to create a fast start church. My mistake was not in any of that. It was well-conceived the people who were the donors were very excited. We knew it was an experiment. We went off. The initial sessions and planning seemed very promising, but the benchmarks which the plan had set, and we did have benchmarks, the benchmarks which we had set almost from the onset were not met. And by that time I had let go of the project, and that was my mistake.

I firmly believe that had we kept the management of the project local, that we would have changed the benchmarks as we saw the project not performing at the level that we had originally anticipated, which was we now know somewhat grandiose. So the money was spent out, and then rather abruptly stopped, so when all the staff that we had to be fired except for a part-time minister, so the church really took a hit.

Now just to say a little bit about the end of that, that church exists. The minister who, Anthony David, who was called, is now the senior minister. He's been called to be senior minister of our large church in Atlanta, Georgia. I expect him to use all of those skills to make that church take off in a new and wonderful way. Pathways, people say how, why did it fail? Pathways is alive, it's growing, they've called a new

minister. It has the DNA which we wanted to put in it, which was dynamic, it still continues. But my mistake was letting go of it and I'm going to encourage people who have local projects to keep the management of them close.

REV. GIBBONS: Learning from mistakes, Peter.

REV. MORALES: Oh golly. I'll just give you a recent one and it's, happily it's smaller than that. But I wanted to talk about the way that the mistake was designed, implemented, and then I'm done. We've been a fast growing church, and we did an addition and remodel, which was completed four years ago and our growth continued, and we were past that kind of 75, 80% crowding level at both of our services.

And scratched our heads about what to do, we were not able to accommodate, RE was overflowing, our parking lot was full. And in looking at alternatives it looked like making better use of our existing -- there are no possibilities for expansion where we are of our existing location -- would be the best alternative. So we went to having three services on Sunday morning, 8:30, 10:00 and 11:30.

And the sad fact is, especially time went on, it became the perfect Goldilocks problem. We had one service that was too early. People tried it but trust me, you could not consistently get UUs to an 8:30 service, at least in Colorado you can't do it. They try it and they move to 10, a bunch, as it spread out, people decided that 11:30 was too late, it ran into

lunch, and it made 10 o'clock horrific. So we had two services that had decent attendance but not very high, and we were overflowing at 10.

The important thing is we stopped it, and it wasn't easy to say "Hey guys, this didn't work." We planned it, we looked at it, we gave it a good run, and we stopped it. We didn't keep pouring enormous amounts of energy into something that was a failed model.

Many of you have seen the membership videos that we did for the first UU University in Saint Louis. And one of the things that gets me now is it's used in training, is like, "e don't do that anymore," on part of it.

Because what I want to emphasize here is a culture of taking risks and trying things, but having in place ways to evaluate whether they're working, and admitting that something doesn't work, and stopping it. It's very hard for us to do, but one of the things I will bring in as president, is that sense that nothing significant gets implemented without an evaluation plan at the beginning, not at the end, but designed at the beginning, not being evaluated by the person who's implementing it. None of us wants to say that our child is not beautiful and smart. So that we develop that culture of being able to first take risks and try new things, but two, stop the ones that aren't working so that we can put our resources into those that are successful.

REV. GIBBONS: How many of you have not had your question addressed? [*LOOKS INTO THE AUDIENCE FOR HANDS*] I had been

hopeful at the conclusion that we might gather these various questions and --

REV. MORALES: Surely you didn't think you had exhausted questions, John.

REV. GIBBONS: -- shuffle the deck and there'd be one less hand, but I think in the interests of time we should move to our closing statements, and Laurel, would you please go first.

REV. HALLMAN: And do I have five minutes?

REV. GIBBONS: You have five minutes, yes.

REV. HALLMAN: Thank you. I hope you have seen some of my platform in my person today. It is to reach deeper, all of us to reach deeper into the core of our faith, reach deeper into the possibilities of what we can do as a people together, and some of that is just simply skill and new ways of doing things and reaching out, hospitality in a new way. One of my concrete proposals for as soon as I can, is if I'm elected president, is to open a welcome center on the first floor of 25 Beacon Street. It's time that we welcomed the people who are on the Freedom Trail which is our trail, and that could be a metaphor for our church, welcome them in the door.

Now I am keenly aware of security questions, and those are real. We've learned recently those are real. And I believe they're eminently fixable,

and that the first floor should be a technologically sophisticated welcome center for people who come by, for our youth who come to visit, and for people who are, like my congregants who come from Dallas, and they feel that there needs to be a there, there. I want to create that.

I want us to be a place where youth are transformed, a religion where youth are transformed and are, want to live their ministry whether it be in our ordained ministry or outside it in the skilled areas of the world. It is worldwide now, and let me warn you, you raise your children Unitarian Universalist, they'll go out anywhere in the world, you have to fly a long way to be with them. But I want that to happen because we have a lot of talent and skill that we leave at the doors of our churches, and don't admit to in a kind of reverse elitism. And I want to in my presidency find the people who can speak to our future and our history.

One small anecdote, I lived across the street from an American Studies professor in Bloomington, Indiana. He was the son of a Unitarian, the only Unitarian at that time, free merger minister. He had not been involved in a church, became involved in the Bloomington church, eventually became president, moved to another city and dropped out. He's out there and we need his expertise, and I intend to find the people in our midst, get them into congregations and use what they know to assist this denomination to be articulate, effective, certainly not just rerunning our old scripts, finding new ways to do things. And I can do that, I have done that, one of the strengths I have is drawing people toward me who can help with things that I'm not an expert on but they have the expertise. I will do that as your president.

I will manage the relationships, I will manage the evaluation. I have led a large church now for 21 years, and I know how to do it. I bring strength and skill, and if I might lay to rest some other things, tenacity that you might not notice in my size. There are other small people in the world who have done a lot of things very well, I intend to do that, I am tough. I bring my spiritual depth in my call to this office, and I ask that you elect me your president. Thank you. [APPLAUSE]

REV. MORALES: I began my presentation with a story about not feeling welcomed in a congregation, and drawing a picture of a movement that is sadly and frustratingly declining as a part of American religious life. And that fact simply drives me nuts, and it ought to drive every person in this room nuts. And it is also equally true that it need not be that way.

The capacity to change that, the capacity to revitalize this movement, to make it dangerous, to make it powerful, to make it include a broad spectrum of people. The capacity to do that is in our hands, it does not cost much of anything, it's about a cultural change in our movement. I have seen that happen -- the church I serve -- let me tell you just a brief story about that. It had been right at 400 members for 20 years, plus or minus 10 or 12, it was amazing to graph it, there was no movement. But we had a sense and leadership, it wasn't me, that this was not our potential, this is not what we could be on the west side of the Denver metro area.

And we did something that was very hard. We took a look at ourselves, we took a look at what someone experiences when they come to our congregation, and we didn't like what we saw. It was not the image that we wanted to project. We found that we had some terrible habits about being clubbish, about doing church business, about not paying enough attention to visitors, and we simply did some very simple things, beginning with my modeling it by standing outside, unless it's below about 40 degrees, and actually welcoming everyone who comes in, because as I'm fond of saying, we're a variety of apes, and this is how apes learn, is that they ape. And so if we want to create that change we have to model it.

And it began a process that not only grew our church, it transformed our spiritual community, because as we engaged with other people it changed us the way every spiritual practice changes us. It wasn't that we ended up doing it for them. We became genuinely more engaging, warmer, and enriched by all these people who came. That is happening in dozens and dozens, happily, of our congregations. It's not happening in nearly enough of them.

I believe the key for the next president is to create and help sustain a sense of urgency about the kind of cultural change that we need to make. Because it is cultural, it is spiritual, and it needs to be, for we will not change until there is a change of urgency that has spread throughout our movement. Because as President I cannot grow this movement.

Together, together, we can be, as I say, the religion for our time. The hunger for it is huge. There are a number of very practical things we can do at headquarters in working with the board and allocating resources, and all of that. But that is the technical part of it.

The key is to lead a cultural transformation in our congregations that will engage us as we engage others, that will make us stronger and more powerful. And in a time like this, when we see the kind of oppression and hatred and fear and anxiety, the need for our message – the need for our communities – is greater than it has ever been.

I ask you to support me. I ask you to support me, I ask you to join with me in making ours the religion for our time.

Thank you.

[*APPLAUSE*]

REV. GIBBONS: Thank you Peter, thank you Laurel, thank all of you for your engagement. Please visit the candidates' websites as well as the election discussion listserv that you may access through UUA.org at our main website. Thank you very much, and let's whoop it up for both Peter and Laurel.

[**END**]