NOW IS THE TIME

A CAMPAIGN TO GROW OUR FAITH

ASSOCIATION SUNDAY RESOURCES

for use in Association Sunday Services

Association Sunday 2007

By participating in Association Sunday, we will strengthen our connection and combine our resources, empowering us to *Grow our Faith and Numbers*,
because our religious values are needed to help heal a wounded world.

We are better together!

Dear Colleagues,

Association Sunday will be a religious experience. The Latin root of the word religion—"religare"—means to bring together for greater strength. That is what we are doing. Our coming together to affirm our common bonds and purposes as Unitarian Universalists will be a spiritual and empowering experience. We will feel the power of our connection, and extend our influence for good, as we *Grow Our Faith*.

Together we can help heal a wounded world. We can harness the power—both financial and spiritual—of our congregations across America and beyond in this affirmation of our faith and potential. *We are better together*. That is why we hope all of our congregations will participate in Association Sunday on October 14, or as close to that date as you can schedule it. Together we can deepen, and extend, *Grow Our Faith and Numbers*.

We hope the materials in this packet will be of assistance to you in organizing Association Sunday in your congregation. Included are an announcement for publication in your newsletter and order of service, suggestions for organizing, and resources for the worship service. These materials are available online at http://www.uua.org/giving/associationsunday/16307.shtml

Please let us know if you will be joining us in celebrating Association Sunday by registering your participation, if you have not yet done so, at AssociationSunday@uua.org. (You can see who has already signed on at our website - http://www.uua.org/giving/associationsunday/16312.shtml). For further information, or to request a paper copy of the resources, email us at the above address, call Cherisse Haakonsen, the Congregational Giving Assistant at 617-948-6544.

Best Wishes,

Stephan Papa
Special Assistant to the President
Congregational Giving and Growth Funding

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Checklist for Organizing Your Service

- ☐ Follow your congregation's process for the authorization of a service and special collection;
- ☐ Register by sending an email to AssociationSunday@uua.org, and request the number of donation envelopes, posters, and order of service covers needed;
- ☐ Schedule October 14, 2007, or a Sunday close to it;
- ☐ Put up the Association Sunday Poster;
- ☐ Publicize the service and special collection in the newsletter asking those who won't be able to attend to mail in their contributions;
- ☐ Contact members of the congregation about making lead gifts;
- ☐ Consider making a lead gift yourself, perhaps donating one wedding fee;
- ☐ Check out doing a pulpit exchange with neighboring congregations;
- ☐ Organize the service including lay participation;
- ☐ Ask for an average of $50 per member, and remind them that this Sunday's collection is special, an opportunity to connect and combine our resources for the future of our faith; ask them to give generously, to help us reach our goal of raising $1 million;
- ☐ Indicate that all checks should be made out to the UUA;
- ☐ Have a check made out for all cash collected; send all envelopes directly to the UUA within one week;
- ☐ Send sermons and other materials you used to us for sharing with others.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need Association Sundays?

Unitarian Universalist congregations are self-governing entities whose connections to one another sometimes seem tenuous. We need Association Sundays to strengthen the bonds of common purpose among congregations. Even more importantly, we need to combine our resources in order to make Unitarian Universalism a stronger voice of liberal religious values in the world.

We need to bring our congregations together to pursue our mission of affirming the "inherent worth and dignity of every person". These Association Sundays will strengthen our connection, and combine our resources, enabling us to have more of an influence on our country. *Now Is the Time* for our congregations to grow stronger and more effective because our religious values are needed to help heal the wounded world.

What are Association Sundays?

Association Sundays are a request by the UUA for all congregations to recognize and support, both in spirit and financially, the national work of the Association. We envision a day – an "Association Sunday" - during which thousands of UUs across the nation are simultaneously celebrating our shared commitment to Unitarian Universalism.

Like *Ministry Sunday* in 1995, (which was a request to support the financial needs of ministers and seminary students) and *Mind the Gap Sunday* in 2002 (which was focused on supporting Youth and Young Adult Ministries), each Association Sunday will include a worship service based on a particular theme and congregations will be asked to host a special collection to support the Association of Congregations.*

*Association Sunday is different from The Annual Program Fund (APF) and Friends of the UUA; those programs help to pay for the operating budget of the UUA. Special projects require additional funding and that's the purpose of Association Sunday.

When is Association Sunday, and what will its funds support?

The first Association Sunday is scheduled for October 14, 2007. Funds raised this year will support national marketing and growth outreach projects. A portion of the funds will be set aside for grants to congregations who wish to enable their own growth projects.

Four subsequent Association Sundays (one per year) will be devoted to the following themes: growth in spirit, growth in diversity, growth in witness, and growth in leadership.

UUA President Bill Sinkford believes strongly that "now is the time" to share our faith message with a national marketing campaign. An awareness campaign will help seekers looking for a liberal religious home to find us. This is an opportunity for us to support the work that

individuals, congregations, and the UUA are currently doing to share the "good news" of Unitarian Universalism in the larger communities we serve.

As planning for national marketing and growth outreach projects gets underway, the UUA will be providing congregations with many resources to help welcome newcomers. For example, the UUA is currently producing a new DVD explaining Unitarian Universalism to newcomers. The UUA will have this DVD ready for congregations to use this fall.

Note:

Resources are currently available on the UUA website in the "uncommon denomination" section to help congregations focus on hospitality and membership. Go to: http://www.uua.org/cde/ and http://www.uua.org/programs/congservices/uncommon/hospitalityhome.html. And, of course, District staff are available to assist with more resources and regional workshops.

How will the money be raised?

We ask that each member and minister contribute individually as part of a special collection during services on Association Sunday.

The Association Sunday staff will provide each congregation with pledge envelopes, talking points, worship materials and other tools to make it easy for congregations to participate.

Congregations that raise an average of $50 per member will be listed as *Empowering Congregations* in our Annual Report on Giving and at a special display at General Assembly.

If you or a member of your congregation wish to make a leadership contribution, matching gift, stock gift or bequest to benefit Association Sundays, please contact us.

How can my congregation register for Association Sunday?

Each congregation has a different way of managing special services and collections, so it is important that you check with your minister and Board before taking any steps to register. Once you have followed the guidelines set out by your congregation, please:

1. Have your minister or board President register with the Stewardship and Development Office by emailing AssociationSunday@uua.org by May 1, 2007;
2. Schedule Sunday, October 14, 2007, for your "Association Sunday" service;
3. Send us a picture of your congregation. We'd like to use it in our display at General Assembly and online.
4. Spread the word about Association Sunday among members of your congregation. Newsletter articles, pulpit announcements, and emails are all good ways to share your enthusiasm for this project. Contact the Association Sunday staff to request brochures, sample newsletter articles, and other publicity materials.

More about the Money

How was the money raised in prior campaign's special collections used?

- Ministry Sunday in 1995 raised $1 million dollars for ministerial scholarships, reduction of student debt, and support for retired ministers and for the families of deceased ministers;
- Minding the Gap in 2002 raised $1 million dollars for youth and young adult staffing, training, and programming, such as campus ministries;

How will the funds raised through Association Sunday 2007 be used?

- National marketing with print ads in national magazines, and other media, such as NPR and the Internet;
- Outreach for our ministers of color and the congregations they serve;
- Grants to congregations for Growth Outreach Projects.

How is this Sunday collection different from other collections?

- Our Sunday offerings indicate what we care about, and connect us;
- In most congregations, the offering is for the local church or fellowship;
- Some congregations have special collections for outside groups;
- This special collection is for our other congregations and our movement;
- Some of our congregations have greater needs than our own, and some have greater opportunities;
- This Sunday is different because it affords us the opportunity as individuals to connect with and support other congregations and our Association.

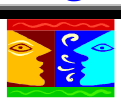
Why raise money for growth?

- We have the same number of members as we did at consolidation in 1961; the US population has increased exponentially; we have become insignificant;
- More UUs are needed to help heal the wounded world;
- Most people still don't know who we are, what we stand for, and how to find us;
- We have a responsibility to share our faith.

What should I ask for?

- An average of $50, which means some will need to give more because some will need to give less;
- Help to raise the goal of $1 million dollars to strengthen and extend UUism;
- An affirmation of our connection, purpose, and the spirit of generosity.

Talking Points for Association Sunday and the Annual Program Fund



- The Annual Program Fund (APF) supports the operating budget of the UUA. Our Association depends on these member congregations' annual contributions in order to carry out its mission. These funds support the budget for our ongoing programming, and are a sign of our covenant. These contributions are a matter of congregational responsibility, and therefore are a part of the congregations' operating budget.
- The funds raised through the special collection on Association Sunday (AS) are not for the operating budget of the UUA, but for new growth outreach projects as part of the *Now Is the Time!* comprehensive campaign.
- It is anticipated there will be five such annual Sunday services with special collections. However, these offerings rise out of a specific need (to grow), opportunity, and time (Now!); and we are asking congregations to participate only for the first year at this time.
- Congregations conduct annual stewardship campaigns for their operating budgets, and other fundraising activities such as special collections for special needs and visions. Experience shows that people set limits on what they will give to the operating budget, but will give something more for a special need or vision. (It is said, they find more money in their other pocket, where they were saving some.)
- Funds raised on AS are not to come from operating budgets, but from individuals who are motivated to contribute for this particular purpose (from their other pocket).
- We would not want a congregation to diminish its contribution to the APF because they give to AS. We know the success of the APF is essential to the ongoing work of our Association.
- We honor the decisions of individual congregations, but want to be clear that we do not want to make contributing to one or the other into an either/or proposition. We encourage congregations to do both, and believe that a clear understanding of their different purposes and processes makes this possible; we believe that our congregations can successfully support both the APF and AS.
- We believe that by affirming our common bonds and purposes, moving beyond a theology of scarcity, and continuing to develop a spirit of generosity, we lay a solid foundation for our faith for today and for tomorrow.

Announcement for Newsletters and Sundays

Plan now to be in church on Sunday, _____,
when we join with thousands of Unitarian Universalists across the nation
celebrating our shared commitment on *Association Sunday*.
In this service, we will strengthen the bonds of our common purpose and
combine our resources to make Unitarian Universalism a stronger voice for liberal religious values in our country. We are better together.

We increase our spirit and influence. We honor the "inherent worth and dignity of every person." Our values are needed to help heal the wounded world. So, we will be taking a special collection for the growth and vitality of our congregations. Funds raised will be used for a national marketing campaign and for grants to congregations for growth outreach projects. We hope each person will contribute $50. If you can't attend, please send in a check - envelopes will be available at your church. To donate online for Association Sunday, please visit us at http://www.uua.org/giving

Hymns and Readings from Singing the Living Tradition and Singing the Journey

Hymns: *Singing the Living Tradition*

114: *Forward through the Ages*
116: *I'm On My Way*
118: *This Little Light of Mine*
121: *We'll Build a Land*
145: *As Tranquil Streams*
188: *Come, Come, Whoever You Are*
287: *Faith of the Larger Liberty*
290: *Bring, O Past, Your Honor*
298: *Wake, Now, My Senses*
318: *We Would Be One*
347: *Gather the Spirit*
354: *We Laugh, We Cry*
361: *Enter, Rejoice, and Come In*
402: *From You I Receive*

Hymns: *Singing the Journey*

1014: *Standing on the Side of Love*
1018: *Come and Go with Me*
1020: *Woyaya*
1021: *Lean on Me*
1028: *The Fire of Commitment*
1053: *How Could Anyone*

Suggestions for Association Sunday Worship Services from Singing the Living Tradition

Opening Words

436: *We come to this time and place*
442: *We Bid You Welcome*
458: *Mindful of truth*
580: *The Task of the Religious Community*

Chalice Lightings/Affirmations

448: *We gather this hour as people of faith*
459: *This is the mission of our faith*
471: *Love is the doctrine of this church*

Prayers/Meditations

488: *Hold fast to dreams*

502: *Now is the accepted time*
661: *The Heart Knoweth*
723: *Flower Communion Prayer*

Responsive Readings

440: *From the Fragmented World*
444: *This House*
466: *Religion*
468: *We Need One Another*
576: *A Litany of Restoration*
584: *A Network of Mutuality*
591: *I Call That Church Free*
594: *Principles and Purposes for All of Us*
637: *A Litany of Atonement*
646: *The Larger Circle*
647: *The Eternal Verity*
651: *The Body Is Humankind*
728: *Blessed Are Those*

Closing Words

456: *Extinguishing the Chalice*
502: *Now Is the Time*
584: *A Network of mutuality*
569: *Stand By This Faith*
580: *The Task of Religious Community*
683: *Be Ours a Religion*
704: John Murray, *Go out into the highways and by-ways*

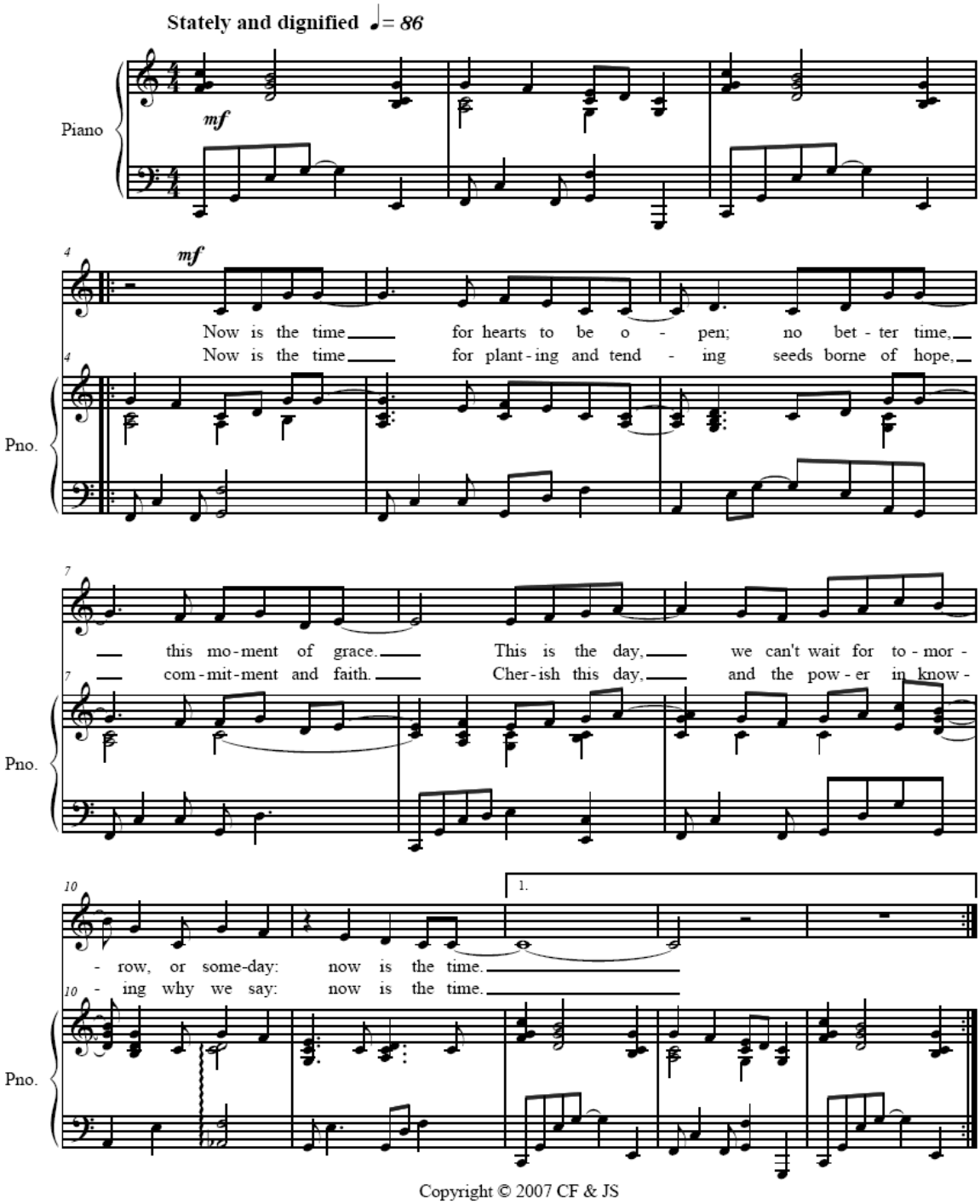
Note: Some readings function in more than one category.

For the UUA Campaign for Growing our Faith
June 2007

Now is the Time

Inspired by the words of
W.E.B. DuBois

Words and Music:
Connye Florance & Jason Shelton



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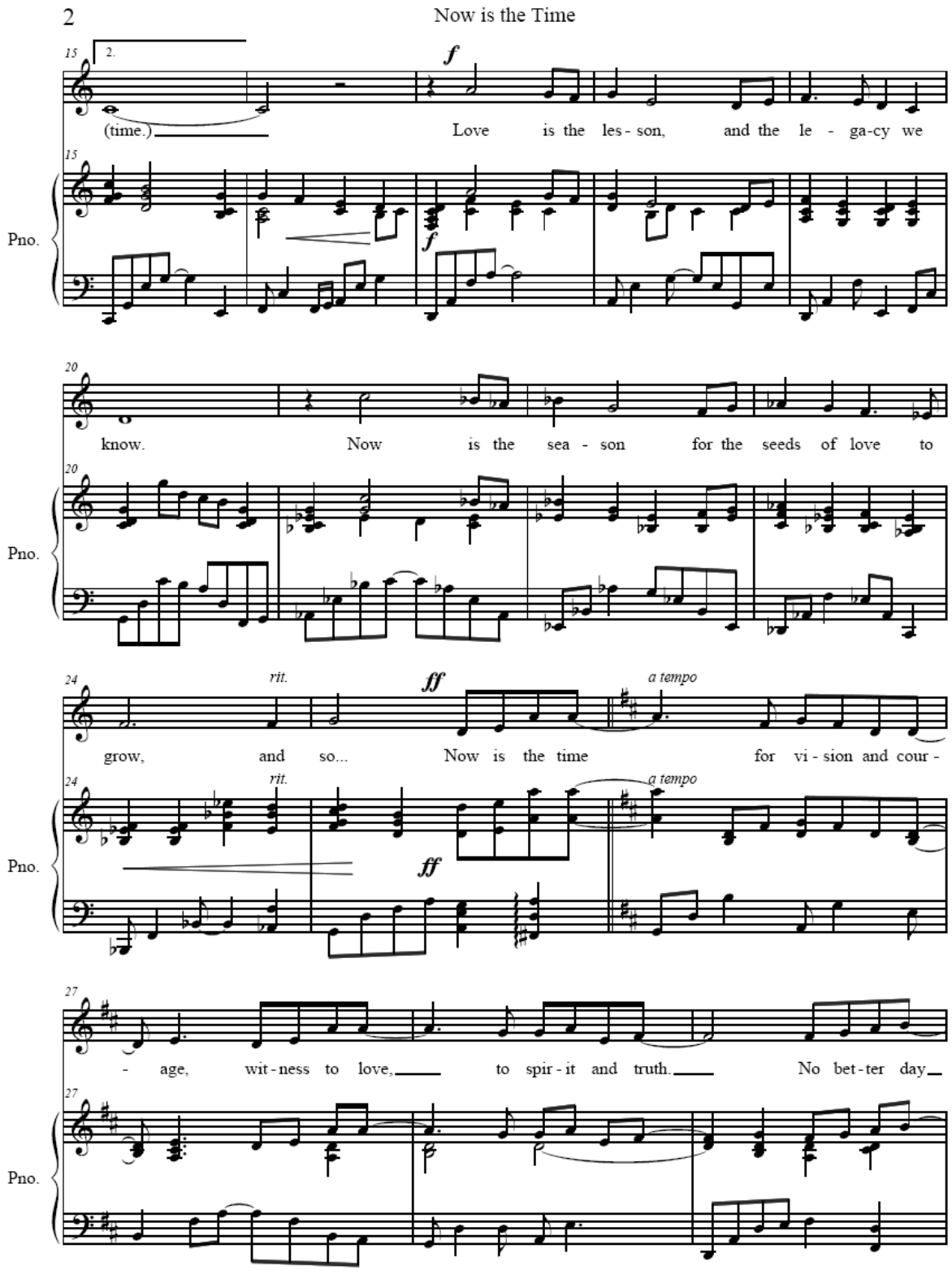
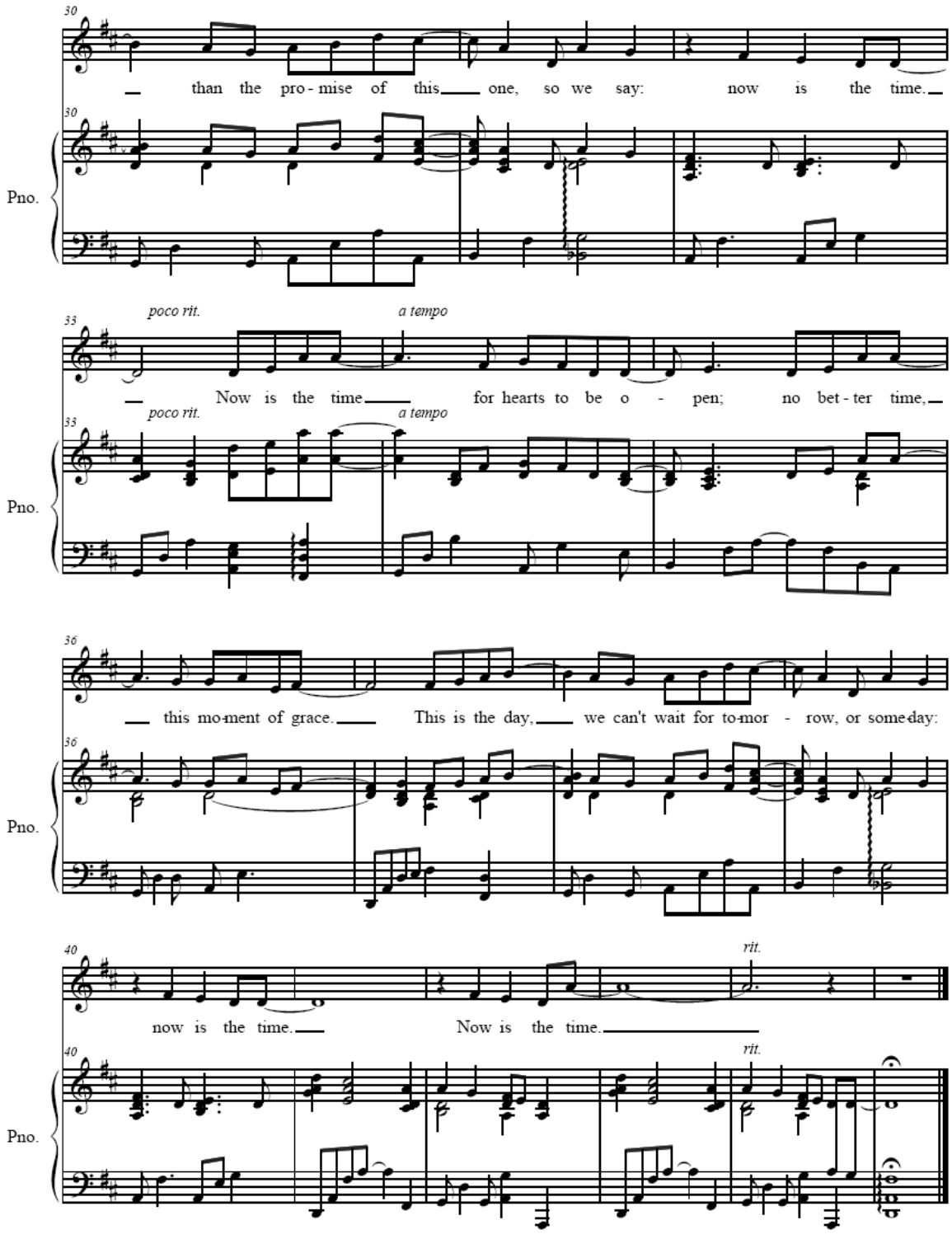

2
Now is the Time
15
2.
f
(time.)
Love is the les - son, and the le - ga-cy we
Pno.
20
know. Now is the sea - son for the seeds of love to
Pno.
24
rit.
ff
a tempo
grow, and so... Now is the time for vi - sion and cour -
Pno.
27
- age, wit - ness to love, to spir - it and truth. No bet - ter day
Pno.


30
than the pro - mise of this one, so we say: now is the time.
Pno.
33
poco rit.
a tempo
Now is the time for hearts to be o - pen; no bet - ter time,
Pno.
36
this mo-ment of grace. This is the day, we can't wait for to-mor - row, or some-day:
Pno.
40
rit.
now is the time. Now is the time.
Pno.

Quotations for Association Sunday

✍"The Unitarian Universalist Association shall devote its resources to and exercise its corporate powers for religious, educational and humanitarian purposes. The primary purpose of the Association is to serve the needs of its member congregations, organize new congregations, extend and strengthen Unitarian Universalist institutions and implement its principles."

Bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Article II; Section c-2.2.

✍"We are each other's business: we are each other's harvest: we are each other's magnitude and bond."

Gwendolyn Brooks

✍"The individual, if left alone from birth, would remain primitive and beastlike in thoughts and feelings to a degree that we can hardly conceive. Individuals are what they are and have the significance they have not so much by virtue of their individuality, but rather as a member of a great human community which directs their material and spiritual existence from the cradle to the grave."

Albert Einstein in Ideas and Opinions

✍"Universalists are often asked to tell where they stand. The only true answer to give to this question is that we do not stand at all—we move."

L. B. Fisher

✍"We live unavoidably side by side."

Immanuel Kant

✍"To grow, to be reborn, one must remain vulnerable…open to the possibility of more suffering, but also open to love."

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

✍"We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us…. And among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects. On a daily basis, we affect the web of all existence, just as we are affected by it."

Herman Melville

✍"Is there an image for the church community which includes the sense of family but also helps us make sense of conflict and diversity—an image that will allow community to educate us (that is, lead us out) into the public realm? I have been helped by thinking of the church as 'a school of the Spirit,' a place where God is continually drawing me out of myself into larger life."

Parker Palmer

✍"A strange necessity has been laid upon me to devote my life to the central concern that transcends the walls that divide and would achieve in literal fact what is experienced as literal truth; human life is one and all [people] are members of one another. And this insight is spiritual and it is at the core or religious experience."

Howard Thurman in the Creative Encounter, p 152.

Opening Words

Come in from the cold:
Make yourself a religious home,
If only for these brief moments –
In spite of time,
Which shall soon bear us away from one another.
Make this a family.
Treat us as your own:
Make us a religious family –
If only in this space,
Which we make sacred
By our connections here and beyond.
Come on in.
Make yourself at home.
Sing and love life.

Andrew Backus

"There are millions of Unitarians in America today, but not in Unitarian churches. There are millions of Unitarian [Universalists] who do not know its history. They do not know its basis. They do not know its purpose. They do not know that they themselves are Unitarian [Universalists]. If…[our] religion is to shape the world to peace and freedom, these people must be joined together to advance its cause.

Religions with worn-out creeds cannot do it. Ir-religion cannot do it. Confused religions cannot do it. If the strength of a free person's faith is to be the under-girding of the world tomorrow, a world so full of dangers, yet so rich in opportunities, and if the people of America must rise to take their place within this venture, then there must be hundreds of new churches, and multitudes of pioneers. This will come about partly if Unitarian [Universalists] will preach their faith, for there are many who are ready to hear it. But it will come about most surely if Unitarian [Universalists] are willing to live their faith…."

A. Powell Davies

In This Sacred Place

Into this place may we come
To share, to learn, to speak, to listen,
And to grow together in the spirit of peace and harmony and love.

Frances Reece Day

We come to love a church,
the traditions, the history,
and especially the people associated with it.

And through these people,
young and old,

known and unknown to us,
we reach out --

Both backward into history
and forward into the future --

To link together the generations
in this imperfect, but blessed community
of memory and hope.

Andrew C. Kennedy

We are called to gather in worship as a beloved community.
We are called to set aside distractions and anxieties, that we might touch deeper springs and be renewed.
We are called to seek and to share comfort for the hurts that afflict.
We are called to desire more love, more justice, and life more abundant.
We are called to truth, to mercy, to humility, and to courage.
Let us answer the call with the yes of our lives.

Kirk D. Loadman-Copeland

Our UU Values

We have come together today,
Not because we expect to find answers here,
But rather because we expect to be encouraged in our questioning.

We have come together today,
Not because we expect to find perfect people here,
But rather because we hope to find authentic people here.

We have come together today,
Not because we are certain of our own righteousness,
But because we are continually searching for the right, the good, the uplifting.

We have come together today,
Not because we seek absolution for our sins and failures,
But rather because we acknowledge that our imperfections and seek courage to make amends for those failures to ourselves and others.

We have come together today,
Not because we need to be told what to believe and how to act,
But rather because we need each other's encouragement to act according to our own beliefs.

We have come together today,
Not because we are hoping to find God in a scripture or a ritual,
But rather because we are hoping to discover the divinity within our hearts and within the hearts of others.

We have come together today,

Not because we believe that holiness exists within these walls alone, but rather to have our hearts and minds directed to the holiness in the world.

For all of these reasons, we have come together today.

Suzanne Meyer

We are here that we might have life
and have it more abundantly,
so that we might share it with others.
Come, let us join together
as a generous people.

John C. Morgan

We gather this day to seek in the midst of our fragmented selves the unity which enfolds us all; to summon in the midst of the everyday that secret taste of danger, that peace which beckons beyond the trifles and deepens the human heart; to open our self-righteous selves to that judgment which we have tried not to hear. We gather to worship that which is greater than we and which is our highest calling; to offer a gift of time for whatever God wants unfolded to unfold in our midst.

John H. Robinson, Jr.

Reflection on the UUA Purpose and Principles

We, the member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association,
covenant to affirm and promote:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person

We promote the first and most honored principle of our association by opening our pulpit to all. We affirm the dignity of every person when we value their thoughtful and heartfelt opinions enough to provide a forum to express them.

Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations

When our speech challenges the injustice and inequity we see and experience in the world, we are called to do so with compassion for the oppressor as well as the oppressed.

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations

It is often through words that we demonstrate acceptance or rejection of someone else's spiritual journey. By choosing our words carefully when expressing our individual beliefs, we can encourage others on their chosen path by intentionally acknowledging the multiplicity of spokes to the spiritual center.

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

How better to affirm and promote a free and responsible search than to provide a marketplace for those who are searching to share the fruits of their quest.

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large

Free speech is the cornerstone of democracy. When repressive regimes seize power, speech is the first freedom they crush. When people rise up, it is because they are emboldened by speech that is free.

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

This is our challenge: to broaden the sphere of our influence, to build a community of those outside these walls. If today strengthens our convictions, then we have done well.

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

We are intimately connected and profoundly dependent on one another. Not the least of what we need from one another is the infusion of new ideas, new ways of thinking, that help us to better understand each other and ourselves.

Michael E. Sallwasser

We come together for common purpose, to support one another and to proclaim the Good News of this liberal faith in this hurting world...

Let us promise us that our first words will be affirmation for one another, not argument.

Do we need to change ourselves, do we have to become something different to make a difference?

Who we are is not the question, the question is what we are called to do.

Our task is to know a religious life, a spiritual life ... with a commitment to make the Kingdom of God real in our world.

Either one without the other is incomplete...

We weave our lives into a tapestry made up of countless stories, where the warp and the woof hold both human triumph and human tragedy.

It is our faith that we weave into a tapestry of countless stories and that will bind us together and allow us to see pattern of community which can sustain us all.

We search for a time, and a way, to let hope and history rhyme.

Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? Who shall walk on that holy ground?

We are the only ones. There is no else. There never has been.

Amen.

Adapted from a sermon by William Sinkford (Where Race and Class Unite)

As we gather together this morning,
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.

Allowing our individual gifts to weave a patchwork of peace:
The soft deep blue of sensitivity and understanding;
The red energy of creativity;
The white heat of convictions;
The risky, fragile green of new growth;
The golden flashes of gratitude;
The warm rose of love.

Each of us is indispensable
If we are to minister to a broken and wounded world.
Together, in our gathered diversity, we form the whole.
So be it.

Bets Wienecke

Chalice Lightings/Extinguishing

In the flame from this chalice
We find the light of faith,
The glow of hope,
And the warmth of service.
May we ever grow in faith, hope, and service
As we kindle our own lights from its spark.

Wayne Arnason

We are not alone.
We are this flame, ancient as the stars, new as the vulnerable spark.
We are not alone.
We are this chalice, rimmed by the spiral dance of searching.
We are not alone.
We are the light soaring, the shadow deepening, the dance between them.
We are not alone.
We are the heirs of the tribes and their fires, the healers and their circles.
We are not alone.
We are here. We are here for ourselves. We are here for each other. And
We are not alone.

Michael DeVernon Boblett

Flaming chalice, burning bright,
Now you share with us your light.
May we always learn to share
With all people everywhere.

Eva M. Ceskava, Adapted

May the flame here lit
Be to us a symbol of the torch
That is passed from hand to hand, and life to life –
Of caring and concern and the passion of involvement
Which have marked the men and women of our liberal faith
For many generations.

Philip R. Giles

There is a core of light that underlies the little darknesses of our days.
This bright flame reminds us of the potential of our lives, and the dawning potential of humanity.
We gather in community to remember this core of light, and to count it sacred: within each of us, and at the center of the life we seek to build together.

John Gibb Millspaugh

As we kindle the flame of this chalice, we connect with all the Unitarian Universalists who have gone before us adding their light of truth and love to our community of faith.

As we kindle the flame of this chalice, celebrating Association Sunday, we connect and affirm our common bonds and purposes with all the Unitarian Universalists who are lighting chalices on the East-Coast, the Mid-West, the Mountains, and the West-Coast of our country.

As the flame grows, so grows our faith in life and love, and in the wisdom of our liberal way in religion.

As the flame grows, so grows our faith in the future, in one another, and in the good we can do together.

Let us grow our faith. Amen.

Stephan Papa and the minister who suggested the cross country chalice lighting to him at GA 2007

May this flame,
Symbol of transformation since time began,
Fire our curiosity,
Strengthen our wills,
And sustain our courage as we seek what is good within and around us.

Bets Wienecke

Stories for All Ages

"Hare's Gifts" – *adapted from a story by Ken Collier*

Hare:
Hyena:
Narrator:
(*Two large rolls of white paper over the wall to the floor and drawing markers).*

Narrator:
(*Hare Enters*)
This is a story about the Hare (*one of Rabbits relations*) and his (umm…) neighbor Hyena. Back in the old days, no one lived in towns or villages. Instead, everyone just set up a hut any old place. It was a trifle inconvenient, but it never occurred to anyone to live in any other way.

(*Enter Hyena*)
One day Hyena decided to set up a new hut that would be the biggest and grandest ever made. He searched out a good sight near sweet water and in the cool shade of an enormous baobob tree and set out to build the hut. (*Hyena draws hut on the paper and decorates it*). In time it was finished, and it was indeed grand. It was enormously tall and its walls were white and bright and decorated with the most wonderful designs - zigzags, spirals and circles.

Hyena was proud of his new hut and decided to have a feast to show it off. He went around to all the other huts and invited everyone – even Hare. And everyone came and admired Hyena's hut and then stayed to have a good time – that is, everyone except Hare who didn't bother to come at all.

Hyena: Hare! Why didn't you come to my feast and admire my new hut?"

Hare: Grand new hut! Bah! Why should I come to your hut? I could build a better one in half the time. And as for our feast, why should I come to your feast to be bored? I could give a feast that would make everyone forget yours!

Hyena: All right it took me a full moon to build and decorate my hut. You have a half moon. And your feast had better be a good one. As for me, I expect that my winter robe will be made of hare skin. (*Hyena leaves*).

Hare: (*to self*) You've really done it this time, Hare. When will you learn to keep your big mouth shut?

Narrator: And so Hare sat down to think about what on earth he was going to do. Suddenly he jumped up and ran to all of the other huts scattered across the land to ask everyone to come and help him.

Hare: If you come to help me I will give you all two marvelous unheard-of gifts and a wonderful feast when all the work is finished. (*Ask kids to come up and draw another hut*).

Narrator: In short, Hare managed to get everyone else to do all the work. While everyone else was working, he searched around and found a hollow log and a couple of sticks. And then he

spent the entire half moon fiddling around with his log and sticks. At the end of the half moon, Hyena came back, smiling and sharpening his skinning knife. Hare showed him the new hut. There it was, looking very much like Hyena's.

Hyena: And just how is this better than my hut? (*demanded Hyena, smiling even more and testing the blade of his knife*).

Hare: What are you, blind as well as stupid? Just look around, and you'll see.

Narrator: And there arrayed around Hare's hut were the huts of all the people, arranged in a circle, all facing east, to the rising sun. And there were all the people, going about their business, laughing and talking and helping each other.

Hare: My hut is better than yours because it was built by everyone, and everyone lives near it, where I can have my fun with them.

Narrator: The people, who heard all of this, looked around and realized that it really is sweet to live together, sharing, helping, and knowing each other. And that was Hare's first gift: the village.

Hyena: Hmmmph! Well…you also promised a feast better than mine.

Narrator: And all the people ran to get the food and drink that they had prepared. And because no one had to do it all, each could contribute what he or she cooked the best, so the feast had everyone's favorite foods. And that made everyone happy, which of course, let the storytellers relax and tell their best stories. In time, just before anyone asked about Hare's second gift, he came out of his new hut dragging his hollow log and sticks.

Hare: So far this has been a pretty good feast, but I want to make it the best feast ever given. And it's also time for my second gift. Be quiet and listen.

Narrator: With that, Hare picked up his sticks and began to tap on the log with them. (*drumming begins*). At first he beat out a simple rhythm, and then he warmed to more and more complex rhythms. Soon the people began to twitch with the rhythm and sway and move. Suddenly butterfly jumped up and began to swing her body and move in a circle around the fire, and before ling everyone joined her, dancing to the rhythm of the drum Hare had invented and given to them.

Now sometimes people folks argue about all of this. Some say that Hare really gave the people three gifts – the village, the drum, and music – while others claim that the music and the drum are really only one. But you know what I think? I think it hardly matters, though I'm sure Hare enjoys the argument.

"Hare's Gifts," *Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse*, Ken W. Collier.

Source Three: Wisdom from the World's Religions, Islam
Abu Kassim's Shoes

By Gail Forsyth-Vail

From the forthcoming UUA book, Stories in Faith,

Story Notes

This story, drawn from original Persian and Arabic versions, will leave you and your listener laughing as the troubles of a miserly merchant pile up. It is a preposterous tale about the consequences of being self-centered and tight-fisted. It invites us to consider the ways that we fail to be generous with loved ones and with the world at large. As we laugh at Abu Kassim and his troubles, we are gently prodded to consider our own fondness for material goods.

The story starts and ends with Abu Kassim's shoes, which symbolize his stinginess. When telling the tale, linger over the shoes, describing their patches and emphasizing how "heavy" the shoes are. Use a heavy, deep tone of voice when you mention the shoes and allow your shoulders to sag and your body language to suggest being weighted down. Encourage listeners to help you tell the story by acting out the weighted down posture each time the shoes are mentioned.

Abu Kassim's Shoes is a cautionary tale, one that warns us against a particular kind of behavior. There is nothing subtle about this tale! Children and adults alike will delight in imagining the absurd scenes as the tale unfolds, and will easily grasp the message that comes at the conclusion as Abu Kassim is transformed by his experience and learns to engage in the world as a generous and responsible person.

Story: Abu Kassim's Shoes

Once there was a merchant who was known throughout Baghdad. He was a clever merchant, perhaps the richest in the city, but he was known everywhere for being a mean old miser. He never gave even one penny away, and his family lived in a house with no furniture and had only the poorest of clothing.

Abu Kassim's stinginess showed in the way he dressed. He wore a tattered and patched old robe and a headscarf that was so faded that no one could tell its original color. He was known most of all for his worn, patched shoes. He had had them for twenty years, seeing no need ever to replace them when they wore out. He simply had the cobblers patch them, until the shoes were just a mass of patches sewed on top of patches, and so heavy with all the extra leather that he could barely pick up his feet when he walked. When people heard his shuffling step, they said: "There goes Abu Kassim and his big heavy shoes. A tighter-fisted man we have never known!"

Now it came to pass one day that he had made an unusually good bargain. He had purchased some lovely jars at a very good price and some nice perfume to fill them. Leaving the jars on his windowsill, he went off to celebrate by having a massage and a warm soak at the public bath.

When Abu Kassim came out of his bath, refreshed, he was amazed to find a brand new pair of soft leather shoes in the place where his had been. Thinking that someone had made him a present, and muttering to himself about the stroke of luck that got him out of buying new shoes, he slipped on the brand new pair and strode off down the road.

It was not long after that that the chief judge of the town came out of the bath and looked for his brand new shoes. Instead, he found in the corner some tattered and patched, stinking and fuming

old shoes. He knew instantly who had taken his brand new shoes, and ordered that Abu Kassim be arrested and brought to court.

"Abu Kassim!" shouted the angry judge. "You stole my shoes and now you must pay a fine of five-hundred dinars or go to jail."

No matter how much Abu Kassim tried to explain that it was all a mistake, the judge would not listen. Abu Kassim left the court five hundred dinars poorer, carrying his heavy, tattered shoes by the laces.

On the way home from court, Abu Kassim threw the shoes into the Tigris River. It wasn't long after that when some fishermen downstream pulled on their net, thinking that they had an extraordinarily big fish. When the net finally surfaced, they saw that it held Abu Kassim's famous shoes. The nails from the shoes had ripped holes in the net that would require a full day to repair. Angrily, they took the shoes and threw them through Abu Kassim's window, smashing all his little jars of expensive perfume. As Abu Kassim looked at the shoes sitting in the middle of a mess of broken glass and perfume, he resolved to get rid of them somehow.

He went outside to dig a hole and bury them. Now in the town of Baghdad, it was against the law to bury treasure. A neighbor who had never been fond of the tight-fisted man who lived next door reported to the authorities that Abu Kassim had buried treasure. The merchant found himself back before the same angry judge! "Fifty-thousand dinars fine this time!! You will not break the law, you stingy old miser!"

On the way home from court, Abu Kassim cursed the heavy old shoes and threw them into an open sewage channel that took away the town's wastewater. 'You belong with the sewage," he said to his shoes, flinging them away.

The shoes floated down the sewer pipes, from the larger pipes to the smaller, narrower ones. Eventually, they came to a stop, blocking the sewer pipe completely. The pipe filled with sewage, and them it backed up into the streets, and into people's homes. When the workmen came to fix the problem, guess what they found? Abu Kassim's shoes blocking the pipe. Back to court he went. "You and your shoes have damaged the whole town. I order you to pay five-hundred thousand dinars for the clean-up work!" Abu Kassim had to pay, but it took almost all the money that he had hoarded for all of his working life to do so.

Abu Kassim, desperate, decided to burn his shoes. He set them outside on the second floor porch to dry out so he could burn them. It wasn't long before a puppy came and started to play with them, dropping one onto the head of a passing woman and knocking her to the pavement.

"Enough," said Abu Kassim when the woman's husband had hauled him back before the judge.

"You may have everything I own! But please," he said to the judge, "Please write an order that allows me to disown any responsibility for what my shoes might do from now on." Trying hard not to smile, the judge agreed.

Abu Kassim was a different man after that. He paid attention to others, giving to the poor and helping his neighbors. He took proper care of his family's needs. And when his shoes wore out, he did not fail to buy himself a new pair!

Meaning and Wisdom for Unitarian Universalists

Finding a sense of calling

This story calls us to share what we have and to engage with our families, our neighbors, and the world. Abu Kassim, weighted down by the impossibly patched old shoes, unable to keep himself and the shoes from damaging everything they touch, calls us to a renewed examination of our own behavior. Where in our lives might we be more generous and more engaged?

Opening to new revelation

Abu Kassim reminds us that money is for spending. It is not an end in itself, but is rather a means of creating and sustaining that which we value – our families, our communities, and our own lives. The merchant was seduced by money and was unable to part with it for even the most basic of items, a pair of shoes. His old shoes, symbol of his stinginess, are impossibly heavy. The shoes and his stinginess make it impossible for him to interact with his neighbors, his family, and the world. This story leads us to ask what it is that is weighing us down and preventing us from engaging more fully and more generously with the world around us? What damage is being done as a result? How can we "renounce" that which weighs us down and invite a renewed spirit of generosity and engagement into our lives?

Finding wisdom and awe through our Sources and Principles

The wisdom contained in this story is wisdom from the Islamic tradition. The other "character" in the story, the one that suffers damage from his lack of generosity and engagement is the community at large. The shoes certainly afflict Abu Kassim, but the primary victims of those shoes and of Abu Kassim's stinginess are members of the community – his family, his neighbors, the fisherman, and ultimately the entire town. Abu Kassim is slow to learn that what is necessary in order to stop the ever-increasing damage is that he renounce his shoes and his tight-fistedness. The wisdom that we take from this tale is wisdom that Abu Kassim learned at a very high price. When we are weighted down with self-centered behavior, not engaged with our families, communities and the world, we suffer.

Connecting with our Lives

In our faith community

This story begs for dramatization. Help children make Abu Kassim's "shoes" by adding patches and other "weights" to an old pair of shoes. Assign roles as members of Kassim's community: neighbors, court observers and judges, fishermen, merchants at the bazaar, and so on. Perform the story; encourage children to invent more adventures for Abu Kassim and his shoes to add to the drama. Musical people could write a ballad telling the story of the shoes to accompany the play.

Use the story at the start of the congregation's stewardship drive, as a way to address generosity. Point out that Abu Kassim's wrongdoing was in not taking part in the community. He hoarded money and did not take care of those things that he was responsible for and to – his family, his relationships with neighbors, and the well-being of those who were less fortunate. Invite children to consider what they are responsible for and to and to name those things. Make a large poster that lists all of the ways that children contribute to the wider world and are generous in spirit. Some examples may include social justice work, environmental stewardship, and service projects

Emphasize the heaviness of Abu Kassim's shoes and his self-centeredness. Who is hurt by the shoes? Other people and the community itself are the ones who are hurt. It is when the community demands retribution through fines that Abu Kassim suffers as well. Invite children to invent stories in a similar vein about who is hurt by another's stinginess. Record those stories

on tape or act them out. Invented stories will allow children to share their own experiences in a non-threatening way. Following the invented stories, ask children how their stories would change if the people involved had been generous.

In our homes
Have a good laugh over this story. Fully imagine all of the scenes in the story and all of the ways in which Abu Kassim's shoes get him into trouble. As a family, have a symbolic ceremony and discard your old shoes, inviting each person to name a way in which they will be more generous as they discard each old pair of shoes.

Talk with your family about the "weight" of Abu Kassim's shoes. Whom did the shoes hurt most? Who is hurt when we are stingy? Talk about the ways in which stinginess hurt both Abu Kassim and those in the community around him. Share with your family your own financial and volunteer commitments and the reasons why you make those commitments. To whom do you donate money and/or time and why? Which causes, organizations, or communities claim the largest portion of your gifts and why?

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Other Resources:

☺ *On the Other Side of the River*, Joanne Oppenheim.

☺ "The Rolling Coin," *One Hundred Wisdom Stories from Around the World*, Margaret Silf.

☺ Indra's Net (Buddhist myth)

☺ "Eat My Fine Coat," at http://www.tolerance.org/storybooks/eat/index.html

Prayers / Meditations

O God, whom we know as Love,
Help is to recognize the love that surrounds us and in which we have our being.
Help us to see ourselves as the loving people we are and can be.
In silence, now, we bring our mind's eye the people who have loved us and continue to love us, people who are not here with us today, but whose love we carry with us.
People who are there every day, and whose love we sometimes take for granted.
People who might be within our circle of love, could we but extend it a little further.
In silence, now, we hold these people in our hearts.

(Silence)

In returning from silence, we ask that our hearts may be opened to all whose names and faces have crossed our minds and that the love we share with the people in our lives may be our abiding teacher.

Wayne B. Arnason

May we have eyes that see, hearts that love,
And hands that are ready to serve,
For we would take our part as good neighbors in this wide world.

Jackie Creuser, Adapted

For our community gathered here, for the spirit that called us together and drew us to this place:
We give thanks this day.
For moments we have shared with others; for times when we have reached out across barriers of distance and fear; for times when others have reached out to us; for moments when we have discovered another along our path:
We give thanks this day.
For this community of celebration and growth, introspection and solitude, and for those moments of "that peace which passes all understanding":
We give thanks this day.
For our gathering together out of distant places; for our weaving together out of many separate selves this hour of celebration and worship:
We give thanks this day.

Jane E. Mauldin

Gracious Spirit of creation
Dear God.
Be with us in these troubled times.
The way is often hard.
Our fears are too much with us.
The path to justice is never clear,
And the stakes are very high.
Help us find that ground of love
Which can support and nurture us.

Help us find that ground
On which we can stand
To help make hope and history rhyme.

Help us to know
That while we are the only ones,
We are not alone. Amen.

William G. Sinkford

As we sit here quietly, we are aware of our connections with each other in this room; we are aware of our connections with people of faith all around the world; we are aware of our connections with all of nature – in fact, the universe itself. May we truly experience and appreciate our interdependence with all life.

Rodney E. Thompson

Spirit of life, come to us to break down barriers; to widen horizons; to make us less judgmental. Help us to see the larger picture and the kinder conclusion; to love and let live; to embrace and forgive; to sustain and care.

Help us to reach out to our better selves, that we may love more and hate less, care more and reject less, that bound together by understanding we may sustain each other through trial and tribulation, through joy and happiness, through sickness and health.

Help us, O God, to be joined in a common purpose of hope and fulfillment. Renew and revive us. We seek a common, holy ground for one and all. Amen.

Rhys Williams

Readings

The congregation that primarily looks inward for the discovery of meaning, wholeness and service, and spirituality (and does not move out beyond its walls to visibly, live its religion in the wider community) will not experience growth and depth….An inward-looking church that does not empower its ministers and laity to take their faith to the streets in service to others is a church that cannot grow in numbers, responsibility, or depth.

Scott W. Alexander, in Salted with Fire.

In a world with so much hatred and violence,
We need a religion that proclaims the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

In a world with so much brutality and fear,
We need a religion that seeks justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.

In a worlds with so many persons abused and neglected,
We need a religion that calls us to accept one another and encourage one another to spiritual growth.

In a world with so much dogmatism and falsehood,
We need a religion that challenges us to a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

In a world with so much tyranny and oppression,
We need a religion that affirms the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process.

In a world with so much inequality and strife,
We need a religion that strives toward the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.

In a world with so much environmental degradation,
We need a religion that advocates respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

In a world with so much uncertainty and despair,
We need a religion that teaches our hearts to hope and our hands to serve.

Scott Alexander

"We deceive ourselves if we think we can be grasped by life's meaning, or a sense of the holy, before we find and are found by our fellow human beings. There is no sense of the sacredness of life, no sense of the holiness of sheer existence that does not come first through another person. Human encounter is common: human acceptance is rare. Religious community is people reaching through all the facades people carefully place around them—people embracing people where they live and struggle, what Henry Nelson Wieman calls 'creative interchange.' The most radical contribution religion can make to human living is that it enables people, to experience community as starkly as hunger…. Where life has a chance, we are in caring and in mutual need.

When we are most alive, we are in the presence of someone or something intensely with us…. Nothing is experienced except in relation. It is participation in a religious community that stabs our consciousness into this awareness in the midst of a society that knows nothing about it."

Raymond Baughan

"Unitarian Universalists sometimes spend so much time and energy worrying about and praising the autonomy of the individual that we forget that individuals standing alone have about as much strength as a bunch of stones lying around on the ground. It is only when a mason picks up these stones and builds a wall that they become powerful. And that is how it is with communities. Alone, we're not much; together we have power."

From Ken W. Collier in Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse.

"That's Our Good News"

We believe there is a place at God's table for each and every child of earth.
That's our good news!
We believe the giver of life has been given many names and loves the givers of all of them.
That's our good news!
We are more interested in getting heaven into people now than getting people into heaven later.
That's our good news!
We believe that religious scriptures are open doors rather than sealed vaults.
That's our good news!
We believe there is still some holy writ yet to be written.
That's our good news!
We believe true evangelism is more preaching practiced than practiced preaching.
That's our good news!
We believe peace and justice are not just words we form with our lips, but realities we shape with our lives.
That's our good news!
We believe in one race - the human race.
That's our good news!
We believe we are one with the stars and trees and tigers and rivers and all the stuff of life.
That's our good news!
We believe our lives are all about growing hearts that love, minds that seek, and hands that serve.
That's our good news!
Amen.

Rev. John Corrado

"We who now live are parts of a humanity that extends into the remote past…. The things we most prize are not of ourselves. They exist by the grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it."

John Dewey

Don't be stingy with your faith

There are a whole lot of people, in your town and in mine, who have not participated in a community of faith for some time. And they miss it. Jaco ten Hove and Barbara Wells ten Hove, in *Articulating Your UU Faith*, suggest that the individuals in that group are hungry for some unnamed something that is missing from their lives; perhaps their children have begun to ask questions that they cannot answer without the answers sticking in their throats; perhaps they went back to the religious homes of their childhood and found that they no longer belong there. Perhaps they have recently experienced a life tragedy. Consciously or unconsciously, they are searching.

Just a few short years ago, you might have been in that group. Now you *have* a religious community. But there are others, still out there, still searching for what you have found in our religious tradition.

Imagine that you're at work or at a party and you run into one of these people who is looking. You might not know that they are looking; they might not present themselves as if they are looking, but they are. They say, "Oh, you're a Unitarian Universalist. What's that?" How do you respond? Really, think about what your most likely response would be. Maybe you have tucked away a few thoughts for a moment such as this, and you share them. You talk about what Unitarian Universalism means to you. There are those who seek what we have here, and it is in our power to share it with them.

Unitarian Universalism saves lives, and I mean that literally. There are people right now who are alone and hungering for a place where they will be accepted for who they are. Not letting them in on the secret is a form of stinginess.

It is so easy to take a few minutes to figure out what you are going to say the next time someone asks you what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. You might paraphrase Erica Alston, whose words appear in *Articulating Your UU Faith*, and say, "It's a free-thinking liberal religion that is guided by shared values rather than a particular dogma or creed. This lets individuals claim their personal beliefs based on conscience and experience. At its core, Unitarian Universalism places an emphasis on the worth and value of every person and the interconnectedness of all things. UUs are encouraged to give life to their values, demonstrating compassion, respect, and justice, working together to make the world a better place to pass along to our children."

It would take three minutes to get that down, or a few minutes more to write something for yourself. Not taking the time to prepare ourselves to welcome other seekers into this faith, is, in a word, stingy.

John Gibb Millspaugh

This is the last Yearbook of the American Unitarian Association as such. It, therefore, augurs the beginning in the next year of the new Unitarian Universalist Association (of North America), including our 405 churches and 305 fellowships of Canada, the United States and Alaska (and 1 fellowship in Saudi Arabia), plus the 345 churches and 15 fellowships of Universalist background. As the Reverend David Rhys Williams said at our last annual meeting, it is both a sad and a happy moment when a grownup child becomes married. It is an occasion of memory and of hope. The spiritual father of Unitarianism in America, William Ellery Channing, counseled us to shun the spirit of sectarianism as from hell, and I am confident would rejoice in

our aspiration and expansion toward the Universal church. The most widely revered prophet among us today, John Haynes Holmes, testifies to his gratitude for having lived to see the hour of our greater inclusiveness, and urges us to banish bigotry and pride forever, and to establish brotherhood and love.

I believe we have been the greatest little denomination in the world. But we have been too little, and not great enough. We have produced leadership, in religion and letters and statesmanship and reform, way out of proportion to our numbers and have brought renown to the name of our Association for the character and the conduct of its people. But we also have been too complacent and too conservative. If the golden age of man is in the future and not in the past, then the palmy days of a rational religion and free faith were not in the early or mid-nineteenth century, but will be tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. A mature and dynamic liberal religion will hasten the coming of that golden age.

Looking back, we salute our fathers with profound respect, but looking forward, we make a pledge to our children's children, that real religion shall not die, but shall be re-born in our time, and, if possible, shall redeem our civilization.

Dana McLean Greeley

"The values, perspectives, and rhythms of our culture have obviated the extended family of past history and fostered social alienation. Within this context, a deep desire for community rises from individual spirits that shape human interchange. For decades, one of the primary answers to the question about what people are looking for in their religious experience has been to fulfill this quest for vital community. And the sense of community found in the healthy…congregation has make it an appealing place for satisfying this quest.

"Yet, the very success of the…congregation in bonding people together in specialized community has also been its nemesis. The depth of bonding many feels tends to produce an allegiance that blinds to all other possibilities. The oxymoronic expression of this is the enthusiastic desire to expose more people to the experience of such a community life without actually growing in membership. And many congregations live this ambivalence by an inviting/excluding posture that fulfills the need to share the good news while protecting the community from those who would respond positively.

"…by and large the membership does this unconsciously in instinctive protection of the community and actually wonders why the congregation is not growing.

"To move toward becoming an effective…congregation, consciousness must be raised…. To the possible rewards…. Acknowledgement of what will be left behind….And…exploration of what has to be done to make the transition.

"So, there will come a time when the majority of the congregation must assume the attitude that those who resist must either get on board or be left behind…. The congregation that wishes to move on with the transition in terms of fulfilling its religious mission must be willing to put the congregation's best interest above the agenda of individual members." (pp. 27-29).

"…Those who do not wish to grow are usually those most likely to be comfortable with being nothing more than a liberal social club. A religiously mission-driven congregation…would not even think of a comfortable social club for liberals as an option to being large enough to create social impact. Mission orientation is always preoccupied with generating the power that can

change the world that surrounds it. It does not view itself as an oasis, which constitutes an invitation to escape from the realities of its surrounding world. Rather, it views itself as a change agent in the world." (pp. 71-72).

"An interesting phenomenon in our religious movement is the simultaneous and contradictory love affair we have with smallness and the desire to be socially transforming… When we look around us it is obvious that the institutions that impact society are large enough to have the resources to draw attention to draw attention to their values.

"…The obvious message of our religious movement's behavior is that we would prefer to have small sized institutions in which to feel comfortable than to impact the world around us…. Small may be beautiful but it can also be impotent… What…will maximize our capacity to be a transforming agent in the world…?" (pp. 130-131).

Selections from Moving on From Folly Lane by Robert Latham

"Congregational growth is of deep concern to all of us committed to the future of our free faith. We have found something of great spiritual value, and we wish to share it with others. Traditionally the best way of accomplishing this has been through institutional growth. In a sense, if we do not grow, we are passing a terrible judgment on ourselves and the choices we have made. If our faith is truly wonderful, then this should be more widely recognized.

It is my belief that our hitherto lackluster growth record has been primarily the result of a dangerous institutional mythology. Perhaps the most dangerous of all myths is the belief that we want to grow. From personal observation I can attest that growth is the farthest thing from the minds of some liberal religionists. Many of our societies operate as private clubs open to members only. After all, if you have discovered "Truth," "Beauty," and "Right" and know that only a small elite can possibly attain that goal, then surely *you* do not want to be sullied by the intellectually, spiritually, or culturally unwashed.

We smugly congratulate ourselves on our rejection of proselytizing, grandly affirming a gracious tolerance of differing points of view. We then sit content with our small numbers, knowing that our way can only appeal to people who are truly superior, which is to say people just like us. After all, if small is beautiful, then tiny must be terrific.

Let us explode the growth myth once and for all. Let us recognize that there are many UU societies that do not wish to grow. This does not mean that members of such congregations are traitors to the cause. It simply means they are choosing a different way to live out their faith. Indeed, their way has been the norm for decades. Ministries of maintenance are enthusiastically embraced by many of our churches."

William Burnside Miller in *Salted With Fire*, pp. 150-151.

"Because we are individualist, we tend to distrust our institutions. Because we are Congregationalists, we tend to support associative action reluctantly. Because we are non-conformists, we tend to resist the lessons of the past, many of which warn us of mistaking rhetoric for substance and embracing an arrogant, if not excessive, individualism which can be destructive of the common good.

"Unitarian Universalism is an idea, a faith, an international movement, an historical institution whose expression is more than congregational, but other than hierarchical. The key word is *associative*. We work and worship in association with one another, which is to say, in partnership with one another. The Association represents our best effort to walk together in trust and respect with all who value a free but organized religion." (p. 195).

"The longer I am a part of this movement, the more convinced I become that the values and ideals of liberal religion can be effective only if they have a solid institutional base, and that means strong congregations and a strong Association. I know that we as a religious movement have traditionally been suspicious of a strong Association. We have been fearful that strength would mean power, rigidity, and control. But I am convinced that our Association can be both strong and flexible, an institution of which we can be critical while still being committed to it.

"We tend to be a contentious group of people. We are often harder on ourselves than are our fundamentalist critics. It is so easy to be cynical and mistrustful. But the UUA is what binds us together. It is a vehicle of our hope.

"Those years as president made me deeply aware of how much we need one another. It is only as we recognize our mutuality, honor our diversity, and reconcile our differences with respectful honesty that we can build a strong and vital religious community. Being part of and nurturing such a religious community is what ministry is to me….

"I have found that I need *you* in order to be *me*, that we need *them* in order to be *us*, that only *together* do we have a future. Could we but accept and act on this simple but basic insight, prejudices would be undermined, injustices denounced, and exploitation of nature and people condemned. The world would become *ours* and all women and men *us*."

Selections from O. Eugene Pickett quoted in O. Eugene Pickett-Borne on a Wintry Wind by Tom Owen-Towle (p. 207-208).

"Unitarian Universalists are proud of themselves for doing nothing to seek converts to their faith. A person's religion is a private inward thing, it is said, and we should in no way seek to influence another person to choose our way in religion. The underlying principle here is respect for the privacy and the integrity of the other, and such respect is certainly an admirable quality.

The problem with this stand we take is found in that premise about religion being a private, inward, solitary phenomenon. I submit that this idea is out-of-date. Rather, systems-theory holds…that there is no such thing as utter personal isolation. Not even in our inwardness is any one of us an island. Our personal spiritual orientation arises in a social context. The question, then, is: Shall the Unitarian Universalist way in religion be offered as part of others' social context? My answer is an unequivocal "Yes".

I don't intend to try to talk anybody into being a Unitarian Universalist. But I do want UU-talk going on in our community - a good deal of it, if possible. My reasoning for this is that on *any* given day there will be a number of people out there verging on a point of view very like the stance we Unitarian Universalists take. Left to themselves on their given day, they may well evaluate their dawning point of view as unacceptably eccentric and unworthy; or, worse perhaps, they may accept the mainline evaluation of their new outlook as sinful and may suppose there is something fundamentally amiss within them since they are coming to look at things this new way….

There are those out there who need to know there is a way in religion such as ours, that it has a long and noble tradition and that it is represented in our day by a lively community of faithful adherents.

For this reason…I am talking a good deal about our way in religion and I hope you are doing that, too. You never know who out there this very moment is in need of hearing about what we have discovered in religion. I say: Don't keep it for yourself and for a few others alone. Share the wealth!"

Roy D. Phillips

This being human is a guest-house, every morning is a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
Who violently sweep your house, empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

Rumi

When we hear the term "spiritual practice," most of us think of something radically different and more exotic than our everyday lives and actions. But I believe the Sufi poet Hafiz points to the heart of the matter when he says, "Everything is sacred." In other words, spiritual practice is what we do here and now with the intention of moving closer to what is most true and alive for us.

I want to suggest an approach to the ongoing question of how we welcome people into our communities that I call "the spiritual practice of hospitality." Practicing hospitality is not something we can appoint people to do, nor is it a set of techniques or behaviors we "use" on new people. Rather, it is an individual work of intentional action, action that creates the quality of relationships in our churches that will nourish newcomers and longtime members alike.

Practicing hospitality expresses our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of each person. Through our actions of hospitality we move towards creating a world in which we are all treated with justice, equality, and compassion.

It is easy to imagine that the spiritual journey is about something other than our daily life. But in fact, the spiritual journey is our everyday life. How do we choose to meet and live each moment? We are always practicing something. Everything we do has some consequence to our spirit, and as the existentialists tell us, what we do repeatedly becomes who we are. When our actions spring from our deepest truth, we become more alive and aligned. When our actions are out of step with what is most true in our core, we are left feeling disconnected and diminished.

Feeling the lack of something essential, we begin to look outside ourselves for something to grab hold of. But most religious traditions teach that what we are seeking is right here. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." Kabir writes, "He is the breath within the breath." Zen Buddhists say that we are already enlightened. So, too, does the spiritual practice of hospitality suggest that what we are looking for—the mystery of aliveness—can be found as we encounter each other. Rather than pursuing paths that lead us away from this moment, we can use our practice of hospitality to encounter ourselves and our world in all their vividness and particularity: right here, right now, with this person in front of me.

In a true encounter with another human being, we come face to face with the mystery of life. In some way, every other person, no matter how well we know them, will remain as mysterious to us as a country across the ocean we only read about in books. When we judge other people or other countries by our native standards, we miss the richness and texture of their life and wisdom. We need to learn to be good tourists—to be curious and respectful. We need to appreciate both what is the same and what is different.

Too often we get stuck in the trap of believing we already know who someone else is. But whenever we encounter another human being with respect for this essential unknown, we create the possibility for something genuinely new to emerge. In *every* interaction, whether it is with a stranger or our longtime partner, we can be surprised by what we have not yet seen or even imagined.

Zen teacher Uchiyama once observed, "Everything you encounter is yourself." Because we believe other people exist only outside of us, we forget that our experience of them is always a personal experience. We see them through the filters of our idiosyncratic experience, beliefs, and senses. The resulting picture becomes a combination of who they are and of who we are. In that sense, we are part of everything that we encounter. So this journey of hospitality is simultaneously outward and inward; we are always meeting ourselves in the form of the other.

It is possible to view hospitality as a duty, as something that imposes a claim on our attention from the outside. But I believe that as spiritual practice, hospitality becomes something quite different, an act of mutual beneficence undertaken in a spirit of self-discovery.

As I approach welcoming as an expression of who I am, I realize that as I greet you, I also greet myself. I am not doing this act for your sake only. In fact I should be grateful to you for giving me the opportunity to move deeper into my life, to align my actions with my deepest values, and to encounter the mystery of life in *this* moment. In true hospitality, we are both giving and receiving at the same time. The traditional hierarchy dissolves into something more equalitarian, and the "duty" becomes an opportunity.

The spiritual practice of hospitality is a radical act that requires a new way of being for those of us who wish to practice it. It requires that we go beyond being nice and polite. It requires that we break unwritten rules governing polite social interaction: "Smile but don't get too close." "Don't ask questions that might make you or the other person uncomfortable." "Don't name what is really going on." "Don't ask for what you really want." None of us really believes these unwritten rules, yet they govern most of our interactions and keep us from creating the deeper and nourishing connections we all seek.

Breaking the rules is never easy. Let me suggest three important things to do as a church if you are serious about becoming more welcoming to outsiders and to yourselves.

- The spiritual practice of hospitality cannot be "just another program" or it will fail. Only if you discover and articulate the relevance of this practice to your central purposes as a faith community will you be able to begin to break out of the gravitational field of "the way things have always been."
- If you decide that this practice of hospitality is at the heart of who you are called to be, you must acknowledge the gap between the aspiration of being welcoming and the reality of your practices. At First Unitarian Church in Worcester, Massachusetts, we realized that despite our best intentions we were practicing what we came to call the 'New England welcome.' It goes like this: "We sincerely welcome you into our church as long

as you know how to get here and know what to do and know your way around. We'll be happy to talk to you if you initiate and will promise not to bother you."
We were sincere, but we realized that if we really wanted to practice our values to include and invite everyone, we would have to learn some new ways of being.

- We must stop trying to figure out how to get other people to change and begin instead to look at our own actions. It's easy for members to believe that the church governing board or the minister or the welcome committee or someone else should be the ones to change how we do things, that "it's not my job." But each of us needs to begin to accept responsibility for creating the kind of church we want to be a member of. In other words, hospitality and welcoming becomes a personal choice, rather than an institutional issue.

In choosing this spiritual practice of hospitality, I live out the longing of my heart—creating a new reality for myself and the people around me. I reclaim my power to create the kind of world I want to live in. Gandhi was speaking of this kind of radical act when he said, "We must be the change we seek."

We may have little control over conflicts in another part of the world, but we can practice truly honoring the preciousness of all human life by how we enter into relationship with each other. If we are serious about creating a more just, equitable, and compassionate world, we have to start with the room we are in.

David Rynick

"We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been—a place, half-remembered, and half-envisioned we can only catch glimpses of from time to time. Community. Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Someplace where we can be free."

Starhawk

"The precious life that is in you and me is the same in all. Rich and poor, wise and simple, strong and feeble, we are joined together by a mystic oneness whose source we may never know, but whose reality we can never doubt. When one suffers, we all suffer.
When one hungers for bread, we all hunger.
When one tramps the streets in search of work, we all tramp the streets.
When one defrauds another, we are all implicated.
When one destroys a human life, we all share the guilt.
When one attains their heart's desire, we are all partners of their joy. This mystic identity of the one with the many was divined by Hosea, Buddha, Jesus and has been glimpsed by nearly all the great seers and prophets of humanity.
We are our neighbor's keeper, because that neighbor is but our larger self. Let a sense of our vital unity with all people everywhere possess our minds and hearts.
Behold, thou shall love they neighbor as thyself, because thy neighbor is thyself."

David Rhys Williams

Sermons

Excerpt from **Size and Power by Rev. Paul Beckel**

I…ordinarily…compare and contrast and offer both sides of an ethical or spiritual conundrum.

But today I'm *not* going to offer two sides to an argument. If the question is "Does Unitarian Universalism need to grow as a *movement* and within our individual congregations in order to carry out our stated purposes?" my answer is an unequivocal "Yes!"

I'm not saying that more is always better. There are 6 billion human beings on this Earth, so it's not a simple formula of size equals good power. And speaking of simple, if you've heard me preach about "simplicity" then you've heard me argue that in many cases, more is *not* better.
But let's not fool ourselves with arguments about overpopulation and over-consumption. Today I am speaking about growth in our congregations, and here, size matters.

Not that size is the only measure of growth. We can grow in effectiveness in carrying out our mission. We can grow in our relationships with one another. And we can grow as individuals in our spiritual maturity. These kinds of growth are surely as important as growth in numbers.

Each of these forms of growth lead to difficult questions about power... and our personal issues with power. Church growth brings up legitimate fears about proselytizing and hypocrisy. Should we decide to grow as congregations or an association of congregations, we will have to address some fears: fear that we might fail... and fear that we might succeed, and then just become numbers in a too-large institution.

My point is not growth for the sake of growth. Nor growth for the sake of diversity. Social and theological diversity can enrich and sustain us…. Diversity is good, but meeting demographic quotas is irrelevant. The relevant question is: is our door open? Do we grant *access* to whomever wishes to enter? And can we grow spiritually if we are consciously -- or unconsciously -- shutting people out?

In my vision of a healthy UU congregation we are constantly striving to enhance our access to the interdependent web. *Access to ideas* – so I can explore Taoism even if I'm a Christian. *Access to people* – so we can be a part of one another's' lives without regard to age, race, gender, class, sexual orientation, or physical, or mental ability. *Access to experience* – so even though I'm a humanist I can walk a labyrinth without people making assumptions about my relationship to the divine.

I would not promote growth because it feels good – because it *doesn't* always feel good. And I don't suggest that we grow simply to accumulate resources. Instead, I believe that we should *welcome* – go well out of our way to welcome – all those who might benefit from a community like ours. We could begin by expanding our assumptions about *who might benefit* from a community like ours. As a by-product of providing that kind of welcome, our resources *will* grow – not resources to store-up, not resources which will ease our individual responsibility to contribute – but resources which will keep moving.

I usually preach on balance, and making sure that whatever direction we go, we don't go too far. But today there are about 220,000 Unitarian Universalists in the U.S.: less than 1/10th of one percent of the population. In our lifetimes, it seems unlikely that our movement could ever grow too much. I don't think we really have to worry about getting too big, or too powerful. What would happen if we quintupled in size to maybe ½ of one percent of the population? Would that kind of power make America nervous?

I'd like to share… [some] more quick stories relating to size, access, and power: Until about 10 years ago, the Unitarian Universalist Association had a group insurance plan. Unfortunately, changes have led to no insurer being willing to insure our group at any cost. Of course church staff can go out and buy individual insurance like millions of other people have to do. But try, as an individual consumer, to buy coverage for your same-sex partner and his or her children. Were we a large enough group to have our own plan, we would have the clout to demand that *our policies reflect our values*. Disney, or American Airlines, or the City of San Francisco have the clout to make insurers do their bidding, and cover same-sex partners. Size matters. Economic clout can open doors where a prophetic voice is just blowing in the wind.

A few years ago when the Baptists re-iterated their stand that women were meant to be subservient to men--and take a back seat in all family decision-making--the media constantly reminded us that there were 9 million members in the Southern Baptist Convention. Today I hear women my own age – not even Baptists – who subscribe to this view. I abhor it, but I know that the stamp of the largest protestant denomination conveys authority far beyond its own ranks. Size matters.

I've been involved in ministers' groups and even public meetings in which prayers were offered "in Christ's name..." Or public statements would refer to Christian values. I think we are *finally* getting to the day when people realize how inappropriate this is. But part of the problem is that those of us who do not identify ourselves as Christian have simply been too few to be noticed.

Thanks primarily to increasing numbers of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus, religious diversity in America has become fairly obvious and is increasingly acknowledged. The question for Unitarian Universalists is: will we sink even further into obscurity as a religious minority, or will we take advantage of the new opportunities to make ourselves visible and thereby educate the public about our religious values?

Good news: The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that the so-called "patriot groups" – private militias with racist or anti-government agendas - are on the decline. However, if at their peak there were *5 million* Americans thinking about participating in violent action to enforce their anti-social fantasies, and now there are only 2.5 million, I can't say that I'm all that relieved. I think the world would be a safer place with more UUs and fewer "super patriots." Size matters.

Maybe it shouldn't matter, but I know that I preach better when there are more people in attendance. And when I'm at the service of the living tradition, at the UU General Assembly, with 3-5,000 UUs singing together, it is a uniquely powerful religious experience. In fact, even at evangelical churches I've attended, the gathering of all those people, singing together, has been a powerful experience for me.

It's tempting at times to say, "Forget it -- I can do just as much personal growth in my own home, without this demanding, messy, cumbersome institution." But over and over I find that I

and many others need the message of liberal religion in the form of a Unitarian Universalist congregation.

Some Liberal and some conservative churches offer *feel-good messages, and draw huge crowds* by telling people that they are fine just the way they are. Some liberal and some conservative churches offer *feel-bad messages and draw huge crowds* by telling people that they're pathetic and helpless.

Unitarian Universalism offers a more complex message, and draws a smaller crowd. I can accept that. But I cannot smugly sit back and say, "The Baptists and Catholics have the numbers, the Mormons have the money, but we have the quality." Or, "Aren't we just the best kept secret in town?"

We don't want to evangelize and be obnoxious. Having come to our own conclusions about religion, we abhor the idea of pressuring anyone else. But we are inheritors of one of humanity's unique and remarkable traditions, and we must not let it sit idle.

Like a Stradivarius violin, unless it is taken out, played, and enjoyed, it will diminish in elasticity and tone and it will lose its value. So let us meet play and celebrate. And if we stay toned and elastic, we will grow as we have…by living our mission, and by creating a place for transformation – for ourselves, and for others.

Sermon Excerpt
Gini Courter

Not an easy call, perhaps not even within our grasp, but so worth reaching for – authentic religious community. At our best, this is what we Unitarian Universalists can create. A community that's comfortable enough in the soul to pull up a chair or a piece of carpet, or sit on the beach, or in front of a campfire and tell our stories, share our lives, so that we remember that we are immersed together in the human condition, remember that this side of fear, we can find no rational basis to deny connection to each other, the many others.

Homily for *Carrying the Flame*- JPD Service by *Nancy D. Dean*
The Fiery Gem of Unitarian Universalism
March 17, 2007

Greetings from the UU Society of Mill Creek, Delaware, on the Delaware-Pennsylvania border.

Ever since the idea of borders was first thought about people have been drawing imaginary lines around the lands of the world, so much so that we tend to see divisions where none really exist. St. Patrick's Day reminds us of at least two of those kinds of borders, those that divide countries and those that divide religions. The English and the Irish have a long and troubled history, dealing with both of those divisions. My husband Tom Riley is Irish as far back on both sides of his family as time records, and my family's heritage is equally English. We always say that our happy marriage is proof that the Irish and the English can get along--but first they have to find neutral ground.

As we well know, our UU faith is often just such neutral ground for many who come from different religious backgrounds which are less amenable to neutrality of political or religious difference.

There is, though, one area of difference that we humans value and celebrate which has to do with those things we call jewels or gems. Jewels or gems are essentially rocks we like versus rocks we don't value so much. When I was at the Harvard Divinity School, I used to occasionally go to the Natural History Museum and spend an hour or so looking at the vast array of the earth's minerals on display there. I never ceased to be amazed by the color and variety, the vast array of colors, shapes, crystal formations, and so forth that make up the foundation of earth. Diversity in all its forms, which yet again reminds us that diversity in everything is so important, and Emerson spoke truer than he probably knew when he said that all we need to know of God is in the world around us. In which case, God clearly values diversity.

Yet, of all those hundreds of kinds of rocks and minerals, only some are considered gems, meaning they have special qualities of hardness, color, or brilliance that make them more valuable to people. The most precious of stones are those that have the greatest hardness, clarity, brilliance, and rarity. Some of those that are valued in the jewelry world, as gems, are diamonds, rubies, emeralds, but my favorites are garnets, tiger's eye, and especially opals. I love opals, although they are somewhat fragile and easily cracked, but they have such character, each is unique; and the best among all the kinds of opals are the fire opals, so called because of the fiery lights of red, orange, blue, and yellow that spark from their depths. They are truly fascinating stones.

Because most ministers are plagued by the curse of finding analogy to religion in everything we see, it was but a moment's leap for me to see that in many ways our UU faith is like a one of these beautiful fiery stones. Our faith is fascinating for valuing uniqueness over conformity, and valuable for all our differences of spiritual belief, experience, and practice we hold dear.

The thing that we must not forget, though, is that gems emerge from the pressures of the rocks around them. I grew up in Idaho, among salt-of-the-earth farming folk, and a religion both fundamental and evangelical. I see this as the bedrock of American religion, in a direct line from the religion of our Puritan forebears, and it is from this same bedrock that we UUs have also emerged. So we, like those precious gems, are formed, shaped, made stronger and more beautiful by those forces around us from which we came.

I know that many in our movement worry that we are small in number, concerned that we might not remain viable in the vast numbers of the other religions around us. Yet, like those fire opals, those fiery gems that qualify for jewelry, we are precious in our being as we are; for we are fiery in our thinking, our valuing of religious difference, and especially in our treasuring varied spiritual expression, and that is certainly not common.

Another important part of our human value for jewels is that we want to show that we have them. People don't as a rule stick their gems away in at the back of drawer and ignore them. Most people want to display their precious gems, and proudly. Look around. We wear them as bracelets, rings, tiepins, necklaces, gem-studded walking sticks, and generally make sure that people can see we have them; that we value that we have them. Of course, centuries of rulers have put them in crowns, diadems, tiaras, to create value.

So too should we show know how very precious this wonderful faith of ours is; we need to wear it, proclaim it, and in all the ways we can let people know that it is special to us; show that we have something of great value, the pearl of great price.

We are the fiery gem among religious jewels. May we show in all we do that we recognize and treasure this wonderful Unitarian Universalist faith, a beautiful and brilliant gem of religion.

Excerpt from **Unitarian Universalism and the Kingdom of God,**
November 14, 2004
Karl Haakonsen

Our church is a member church of the Unitarian Universalist Association. The UUA represents almost 1100 and some congregations in America which have a total membership of more than 100,000 people. Every year, around the end of June, the UUA holds what's called General Assembly. In 2003, GA was held in Boston, where the headquarters of the UUA is, and was attended by some 7,500 people. The Service of the Living Tradition was held at the Fleet Center and had almost 10,000 people in its congregation. Before the service started, the congregation did the wave. To sit in a church service in the Fleet Center with ten thousand other Unitarian Universalists was truly an awe-inspiring experience….

The main reason I wanted to talk to you all today is to inspire you, and to get you thinking about our place in the religious landscape and what we're here to do as a church. In addition to ministering to ourselves, in the words of Bill Sinkford, "our objective is to help change the culture. Our goal is to help the universe bend toward justice."

The Kingdom of God, or, as the Gospel of Matthew calls it, the Kingdom of Heaven is a sort of mystical concept that is interpreted by many to mean different things. I have come to understand it primarily as the kind of society that Jesus envisions and calls on all of us to try to create; a sort of universal "beloved community," where people freely live in peace and harmony with one another; a society of people who love their neighbors as they love themselves, forgiving each other and themselves of their transgressions; a place where people reach out to help those in need and where they honor the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

When I was in Long Beach in June, spending several days among thousands of other Unitarian Universalists -- a pluralistically religious bunch of people who are committed to bending society toward love and justice -- I couldn't help but feel like I was, at that moment, experiencing a microcosm of the Kingdom of God. This was society how I imagine it should be. It is how I imagine Jesus thought it should be. Wouldn't it be lovely if the whole of the world's people were like one big General Assembly? And I left, inspired to do what I could to move the world closer to that ideal.

I feel increasingly called to spread the message of inclusive and liberal religion outside the walls of this church. The following comes from a letter I wrote to the Boston Globe last week that never got published:

> A lot has been said since the Election about so-called "moral values" with respect to influencing people's decision in voting for president. Let's be honest. What people refer to as "moral values" is a packaged agenda that includes opposition to same-sex marriage and women's reproductive rights. While people are entitled to their opinions on these matters, they hardly represent a comprehensive list of moral values and whether they represent morality at all is purely a matter of opinion only shared by some. I, for one, am sick and tired of being cast as amoral because I don't share the only publicly stated religious opinion on these positions. If people who profess to follow a Christian code of ethics are so concerned with moral values, perhaps they should take out their Bibles and read the Gospels again… or perhaps for the first time. Jesus makes clear how we should treat the poor, the oppressed and the outcast (which, in our society, includes gays and lesbians). He says again and again that one is to love one's neighbor as one's self. I can imagine Jesus shaking his head in sadness as he sees the vitriol and hatred directed

> toward our gay and lesbian neighbors in the name of "moral values." Jesus' circle of followers included "tax collectors and sinners" (the outcasts of his day) whom he instructed in the way of generosity, healing and forgiveness. These are truly moral values that I find inspirational and consistent with the larger message of the Bible. The agenda of politicians who claim the moral high ground, favors the rich at the expense of the poor (and the middle class), calls for exclusion of our society's outcast (gays and lesbians, among others), doing unto others before they do unto us (i.e. Iraq) and then lying to us and manipulating our fears, especially our fear of people different from us to promote the whole agenda. And we're supposed to sit back and listen to reports that this agenda is approved of by people who claim "moral values" as high on their list of concerns. It is precisely because of my strong sense of moral values that I reject that agenda and actively seek to move our society toward the inclusive and compassionate Kingdom of God that Jesus calls us to do.

…When we think about the future of our congregation and any vision we may have for it, it is important to think about it in the larger context of the world we are trying to transform. We need to view growth in our congregation not only as healthy for the vitality of our church, but because we know, in our hearts, that this broken and often unjust world needs us. People need to hear our healing message of love, peace, inclusiveness, forgiveness and personal transformation and be inspired by it to transform society, moving it closer to the Kingdom of God.

As we look to the future, what vision calls us? Sinkford said that he hears the harmony of three melodies:

- growing our congregations with radical hospitality, claiming the good news of this liberal religious faith we love, and turning our congregations into truly welcoming sanctuaries for the stranger;
- inspiring the larger community with our liberating public witness, helping to bend the universe toward justice, raising voices with a liberal religious clarity that values the power of our pluralism and the possibilities of a genuine religious journey; and
- Strengthening our faith with challenging and deepening spiritual growth that calls us beyond our comfortable prejudices to a purposeful appreciation of religious diversity and depth, embracing both reverential language and scientific rationality.

This, I see is our call. To put ourselves out there into our community; to be a strong religious voice on the side of justice and love; and to grow as a congregation by welcoming strangers to hear our message and be transformed by it and thus enable them to help us, together with the rest of the Unitarian Universalist Association, to help transform society into one that is more just, compassionate and inclusive. May we be a mustard seed of the Kingdom of God.

An Excerpt from
Feed the Spiritually Hungry,
House the Religiously Homeless
Peter Morales

Our movement is in trouble…. We are in big trouble…. I want to share some statistics with you. First, let me say a word about numbers. I sometimes hear people say that growth is more than just numbers. Such a point of view is almost entirely nonsense. *Growth is about numbers*. However, we have to remember that numbers are not about numbers. Unless we are doing pure

mathematics, numbers are about real things. I am going to share some statistics. But remember that these statistics represent real people.

Let me also add that for me, growth is not really our goal. Our goal is to offer a religious home, to feed the spiritually hungry. Our goal is to make a difference in people's lives. Growth is not the goal. However, our growth (or lack of it) is the best measure we have of how well we are meeting the religious needs of people. And, sadly, the statistics tell a sad story.

- Since the merger of the Unitarians and the Universalists 46 years ago, our movement has not grown at all. During that time the national population has grown by about 50 percent. We began as a tiny part of religion in America. We are even tinier now.

- Actually, our numbers declined in the 1970s and have actually climbed slowly since then. We have grown at the rate of one percent per year for the last 20 years. This, however, is far below the rate of population growth. So even though our absolute numbers are going up very, very slowly, we continue to have a decreasing slice of the pie.

- While these numbers are true, they are misleading. When we dig into what is actually happening, we find that a tiny minority of churches account for most of our growth. When I served as the UUA's director of district services a few years ago, I looked at the membership numbers for every church in the movement for the previous 10 years…. *It turns out that 15 churches accounted for a quarter of our growth in the previous decade*.

- The 60 fastest growing churches in that decade accounted for about two-thirds of our growth. In other words, about six percent of our more than 1000 congregations accounted for two-thirds of our growth.

- This means that we have a relative handful of congregations that are growing at a healthy clip. The others are stuck or are in decline.

- The reason our lack of growth drives me crazy (and why it should drive you crazy) is that there are hundreds of thousands of people in America who long for liberal religious community. We have a staggering number of visitors coming to our churches…. Here we are a movement that has always relied on drawing our membership from visitors. Alas, we don't do a very good job of holding on to our youth. If we didn't have people who were not raised UU joining our churches, our movement would die in a generation. Visitors are our life blood….Almost all of our churches have more visitors every year than they have members…..

Please hear this: the secret to growing our movement and the secret to growing your congregation is to ***repel fewer visitors***. It is really that simple. We need to repel fewer visitors. Our problem is religious. The solution is religion. Let me illustrate what I mean by telling a story about the church I serve. The congregation I serve, Jefferson Unitarian Church in the Denver suburbs, did not grow at all for 20 years. Our church was stuck at 400 members.

In the last eight years we have grown from 400 members to 760 members. And you know what? We screw up all the time. I mess up all the time. You don't have to be superhuman to grow. I am not one of the great preachers in our movement. We face the same challenges you do. Our members are just like the people in your church. We struggle to keep our youth just like you do. We struggle to raise enough money just like you do. Yet we have managed to grow steadily. What happened? We got religion. Really. *The one growth strategy we have never tried as a*

movement is religion. And religion is the only growth strategy that will work. What do I mean by "getting religion"?

I'll tell you. But first we need to back up a minute. It all goes back to those hundreds of thousands of visitors we get every year…. Who are these people? Why in the world do they disrupt their Sunday routine to come to one of our churches? What are they looking for?

We need to understand what is going on in America today. Americans are lonelier today than they have ever been. This does not get nearly the attention it should in the press or in our discussions of the spiritual and emotional needs people bring with them.

About a year ago an earth-shaking research paper was published in the *American Sociological Review*. The research sought to measure changes in the close relationships Americans have. A key question in the study asked subjects how many people they feel close enough to that they feel they can confide personal information. An earlier study, done in 1985, asked the same question. The new study was designed to measure any changes over time. Here are the key findings:

- In 1985, the modal response (the response given most often) was having three people in whom one could confide. In 2004, the modal response was zero.

- The percentage of people who said they had no one with whom they could confide jumped from 10 percent in 1985 to 25 percent in 2004. That means that in just 20 years the percent of people who said they have no one to talk to went from one person in ten to one out of every four. This is simply shocking.

- Almost half of all Americans now either have no one or only one person with whom they can discuss important matters. The percent of people who either have no one or only one person has almost doubled in 20 years.

- If a person has only one confidant, chances are that the one confidant is his or her spouse. What this means is that relationships beyond the nuclear family are being systematically eliminated.

I know that this can sound like just numbers. Listen more carefully. Hear the cry of pain in these numbers. This study reveals a level of human isolation that is unprecedented in American life–and perhaps unprecedented in human history. Americans are lonelier than they have ever been. The close friendships that are so essential to us are being eroded at a frightening rate. One in four Americans has no close personal relationship at all. Zero.

We need a chain saw to cut through the irony here. We have cell phones and internet connections and instant messaging and call waiting. Connecting to others electronically has never been easier. Yet we have fewer people we can really talk to than ever before.

Let me throw just one more statistic at you…..One quarter of American addresses today has only one person living there.

You and I are relational creatures. We become fully human in a network of relationships. We desperately long to belong. We need community the way we need food and shelter. Yet, in our pursuit of a misguided sense of independence and economic opportunity, we have created a

society that systematically rips apart human relationships. Yet our need for deep relationship never goes away.

Who are these people who come to our churches by the thousands? *They are disconnected people who seek connection*. They are looking for relationships with people who share their values. They are starving for true community—for religious community. They are people who are seeking to transcend the soul-destroying banality of consumer society. They want the depth and meaning that comes from being faithful to a vision that transcends their lives. They want to sing together and worship together. They want to join with others to work for change and to bear witness to an image of human life that involves compassion and stewardship of the web of life. Many of our visitors have children. They are searching for a place where kindness, understanding and acceptance are taught—a place to join with others in raising their kids. They know it takes a village to raise a child. They come to us hoping we will be that village.

The seekers who come to our doors every Sunday do not come to debate theology or politics. The seekers who come to us by the thousands come to see how our church *feels* to them. The key question is emotional and spiritual, not intellectual. The real question, often not completely articulated in their minds, is: *Are these my people? Do I truly belong here?*

And what do we do when they arrive at our door? All too often, we treat these seekers very badly. How many of you have visited one or more UU congregations other than your own? How many of you have had the experience of being ignored? Now imagine what it is like for people who are brand new!

This is not a matter of good manners. I am not talking about being polite. I am talking about true religious hospitality. I am talking about being truly, honestly, welcoming. I am talking about realizing that each visitor is a vulnerable human being who is reaching out. *True hospitality is a spiritual practice*. It comes from deep inside. Religious hospitality is more than being superficially friendly. Religious hospitality involves being open to the dreams and the pain of each visitor. Religious hospitality means offering the newcomer the real human connection he or she is seeking.

For you and me to ignore a visitor is the moral equivalent of not feeding the hungry and not housing the homeless. Every Sunday hundreds and thousands come to us seeking a spiritual home. If we do not offer them deep hospitality we have acted immorally. It is wrong. It is sinful.

And you know what? A good spiritual practice transforms the people who engage in it. Just as the practice of meditation makes us more aware and more at peace, so too the practice of hospitality makes us more open and compassionate. The practice of hospitality has made us more caring, more aware, less self centered.

True hospitality begins with a warm welcome, but it goes far beyond that. A culture of hospitality includes creating a space for the newcomer in the totality of congregational life: in worship, in religious education, in small groups, in social action, in leadership, in music. A true religious hospitality invites the newcomer to share her gifts.

Genuine religious hospitality is not a means to some end. We are not hospitable in order to grow. Genuine openness to others is the practice of our religion just the way seeking social justice is. Ultimately, we grow because we are hospitable. And we are hospitable because we care about all the lonely people who come to us seeking liberal religious community.

Our little movement is in trouble. The numbers should be a wake up call to all of us. Yet we can change the course of our movement. We can transform our congregations into places where tens of thousands of new people—people just like you and me—find a vital, engaging, transforming religious home.

The answer is religion. It always has been. It always will be. The spiritually hungry and the religiously homeless come to us every week. They come by the hundreds and the thousands. Our challenge is to feed the hungry and house the homeless.

May we find the courage and love to do that. The spiritually hungry and the religiously homeless are coming to our churches next Sunday. And every Sunday. They need us. And we need them. Let's reach out to them. And let's start right now.

Talking Points for a Sermon
Stephan Papa

● Today we celebrate Association Sunday to affirm our common bonds and purposes with UU congregations across the continent.

● We connect in order to feel the power, and to empower others.

● We are better together as individual congregations because we assist more people more effectively; and we are better together as an association of congregations because together we can have more of an influence on our country, which dearly needs more inclusive, spiritual values.

● Unitarian Universalism has served us well; it has ministered unto us and made a positive difference in our communities.

● But there are many more people who would benefit from our empowering way in religion.

● We are not serving them, and we are not growing as the US population is growing; consequently we appear insignificant, and are not having as much influence as we should.

● To do so, we need to "Grow Our Faith." Grow our faith in the goodness of life, in ourselves, in Unitarian Universalism, in the UUA, and in our influence for good.

● As President Sinkford has said, "Now Is the Time…. to `Grow Our Faith….' To let the world know we are here, and to welcome those who seek our community of peace, justice, and love. Now is the time for our congregations to grow stronger and more effective because our religious values are sorely needed to help heal a wounded world."

● To do this effectively we need to connect, feel the power, affirm our common bonds and purposes, and combine our resources to "Grow Our Faith," to "Grow Our Numbers."

● To do this effectively we need each person to contribute an average of $50.00.

● Today as part of the UUA's comprehensive campaign, you have an opportunity to shape the future of our faith, please give generously.

"Growing Our Faith through Growing Our Numbers"
by Rev. Dr. Stephan Papa

In the year 1887 in Manchester, Massachusetts, something very sad happened. Twin infants, Samuel and Elizabeth Bradford died. As a memorial gift, their parents gave the First Unitarian Church of their town this silver communion decanter. The Bradford's loved their children; they cared for their church too. Unfortunately, that church no longer exists; it also died. The only thing left is this lovely communion decanter, a lonely vestige of the love of the Bradford family and the consoling value of their religious community.

One family alone cannot save a church. It takes the commitment of many people. One congregation alone cannot change a country, but together we can make a difference. Just as individuals need families to survive, and families need communities for support and encouragement, so a church needs an association of congregations to be strong and influential.

Today we celebrate Association Sunday to affirm our common bonds and purposes with our Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. We are better together as individual congregations because we assist more people more effectively, and we are better together as an association of congregations because together we have more influence on a country that dearly needs more inclusive, spiritual values.

The Unitarian Church in Manchester, Massachusetts no longer exists. I'm glad this church exists, and I am certain you are too. I'm glad that our other congregations exist as well. For example, the First Universalist Church in Wausau, Wisconsin--because that congregation changed my life for the better.

When I was a teenager in the 1960's, the songs of Bob Dylan had a lasting influence on me. It was a tumultuous time of change, as Dylan sang, "The old road is rapidly fading. So, get out of the new way, if you can't lend a hand, for the times they are a-changing." For many, adolescence is a time to question the status-quo; it certainly was for me and my friends. We questioned everything: our parents, teachers, the government, the socio-economic order, the War in Vietnam, the draft. Another Dylan song declared: "You are either busy being born, or you're busy dying!" At that time, I wasn't sure which I was going to be doing.

Fortunately, it was also a time of idealism. President Kennedy asked us to consider what we could do for our country, and President Johnson invited us to imagine a "Great Society." We did. We imagined "a world without war"; we came together and recruited others; we marched and protested; and eventually we brought that war to an end.

It seems to me that once again we need to "Grow Our Faith," in the goodness of life, in peace, in others, in ourselves, and the good we can and should do for our country and world. Bob Dylan's songs gave me hope because they proclaimed that love, peace, justice, freedom, and reason were the right values to affirm. My discovery of the First Universalist Church of Wausau, Wisconsin did the same. The members of that congregation took me in, and kept me "busy being born."

That church accepted me as I was, a non-believer in traditional theology, but they also challenged me to stay open to new possibilities in religion, society, and myself. That church gave me freedom, a sense of purpose, and hope. I chose to go into the UU ministry because I wanted to help make the world a better place as well as to keep growing intellectually, morally, spiritually. The good people of the church taught me about the possibility of registering as a

conscientious objector. (My earlier religious community had not mentioned that possibility.) I cannot say for a literal fact that the Unitarian Universalist Association saved my life, but I know it has saved others and that it encouraged me to believe in life and to get busy—making it better.

I am grateful for that First Universalist Church, and it is incumbent on me to support the growth of our liberating movement. Unitarian Universalism empowered me; it was here for me when I needed it, and I believe we have a responsibility to offer its sustaining and empowering influence to more people, and to our country. Unitarian Universalism encouraged me to grow; it calls us all to grow; in fact, growth is integral to our way in religion.

Unitarian Universalists acknowledge human responsibility to save the world. Most of us do not believe in a supernatural omnipotent deity that will bring peace to earth without our cooperation. The purpose of our religion is moral development rather than simply personal salvation. Unlike other religions that claim they have the one and only truth, we say everyone has some truth. We come together to share ours, and learn from others. We come together to grow.

There is a story my memory says was written by one of our ministers, Clinton Lee Scott, as one of his "Parish Parables." It is told about a religious leader who noticed one of his members was no longer attending services at the temple. He sent a messenger to inquire why. The man told the messenger that he wasn't coming to services anymore because the clergy's comments only caused him to have more questions. He said our minister leads us out into deep waters and then leaves us there to drown. When the religious leader heard this response, he sent the messenger back to him saying, "Tell he who stays away from the services that the temple does not exist as a life preserver, but rather to teach people how to swim."

That's us. That is what we try to do: encourage people to keep learning and growing. That opportunity is one reason most of us came to this religious community. We did not find the traditional answers efficacious, so we came to a community where we could be honest, and free to learn and to grow. It's who we are as individuals and as a people of faith.

The Unitarian spirit is exemplified in the words of a young girl, quoted by Bruce Southworth, one of our ministers. She "returned from her first day at kindergarten, and her parents asked what she learned. 'Not enough, not enough. I have to keep going back." "Revelation is not sealed," as one of our hymns proclaims. We know truth takes a lot of work to be revealed; we believe in the need to keep learning, growing.

Personal growth is integral to our way in religion. Why not institutional growth? Why not share the faith and increase our effectiveness when in fact the world needs us? Larry Peers, who once served in our extension department, wrote, "We live in a time that has the largest number of unchurched people than in any previous time. When this unchurched population is interviewed, it is discovered that many of them would be interested in a faith much like that of Unitarian Universalism, if they but knew it." (*Salted With Fire*, p. 70)

Don't we have a responsibility to let them know we exist? The liberal religious community accepted me and helped me develop. Unitarian Universalism encourages us, and challenges us, not only to accept, but to reach out to others.

Our country and our world today seem even more turbulent, conflicted, and dangerous than it did in the 60's. A religion that encourages a rational response, an inclusive reaction to

diversity and conflict is needed now more than ever. The religious right has grown, organized and influenced our political process. Compared to them we are "missing in action."

The world does not need more partisans who proclaim the supremacy of one ideology over others. It needs more people who acknowledge "the inherent worth and dignity of every person," and who have "respect for the interdependent web of all existence…." I believe the world would be a better place with more people affirming the values and principles of Unitarian Universalism. I imagine you believe it too…and yet we seem reluctant to share our faith.

Scott Alexander states the problem clearly in his book encouraging UU evangelism: "Unitarian Universalists are notoriously spiritually silent. Because we demand to think for ourselves, are respectful of human differences, and don't appreciate it when someone else tries to ram their own beliefs down our throats, we tend to shy away from even cautiously and respectfully sharing with others what it is we believe, and how those beliefs help us strive to be better, larger people. It is hard for some of us to talk back to fundamentalism by 'talking up' our own faith, but I passionately believe we cannot afford such a self-imposed silence in dangerous and divisive times such as these." (pp.39-40.) He continues to say, "If we are not bold and caring enough to stand up in the public square and (without arrogance or vitriol) affirm what it is *we* believe and what dreams command *our* loyalty—then by default it will be the beliefs and dreams of *others* that will influence and instruct the shape of our society…." (p. 4.)

So there are several reasons why we should all work tirelessly to develop and extend Unitarian Universalism. One, we are all people who believe in learning; two, growth, spiritual and ethical, is integral to our understanding of the purpose of religion; three, there are people who need our supportive, and empowering community; four, the world needs us if it is to become more equitable and peaceful. And, fifth, as Bob Dylan put it: "You're either busy being born, or you're busy dying!" Which is this religious community doing? Which is our Association of Congregations, "Busy being born or busy dying"?

There are fewer Unitarian Universalist today than there were one hundred years ago. In the 1850's there were more than 500,000 Universalists alone, by the time of merger in 1961 there were only 68,000. At that time, we had 1035 congregations; today we have 1042. We have close to 160,000 members today, which is just slightly more than we did in 1961. For about the last 20 years our numbers have been increasing a tiny amount; last year we grew by ¾ of 1%. We are, however, deceasing as a portion of the US population, which has grown exponentially; we have become insignificant. The average size of UU congregations is just over 100. The average UU is over 55 years old, and we only retain about 10 percent of our children. If we don't get "Busy being born," we are going to be "busy dying."

The First Universalist Unitarian Church of Wausau, Wisconsin changed my life, made it better, made me better; it helped me grow. I don't want to stop growing now. I don't want my church, your church, our Association of Congregations, which have ministered unto us, sustained and empowered us, to stop growing now. And, I hope you don't want them to stop growing either.

The First Unitarian Church in Manchester, Massachusetts was also the last. This silver communion decanter is all that remains of that community; it did not grow its faith. We need to grow our faith in the goodness of life and the human potential to make it better. There is a better world waiting to be born; it is waiting for us. We need to grow our faith in ourselves, in Unitarian Universalism, in the UUA, and in our influence for good.

Unitarian Universalism gave me freedom and faith; it gives me hope. I was almost lost, but I was found; certainly there are many others with similar values and beliefs waiting to be found. Let us get busy being "born-again" Unitarian Universalists. Because creating a more welcoming and a larger, religious community would both deepen us spiritually and extend our influence for good. Let us affirm the vision of our caring communities serving more people whose faith development can occur best through us. Let us affirm the vision of ourselves as spiritually empowered people having more influence on our society by living our faith into the world.

For, as President Sinkford has said, "Now is the time for us to live up to the promise of our liberal religion, to let the world know we are here, and to welcome those who seek our community of peace, justice and love. Now is the time for our congregations to grow stronger and more effective because our religious values are sorely needed to help heal a wounded world."

To do this effectively, we need to connect, to affirm our common bonds and purposes, and to combine our resources. We are better together. We need to have faith in one another. So I ask you to contribute generously to a special collection. We are asking everyone to try to give an average of $50.00. There are envelopes in your orders of service. We hope to raise one million dollars from your congregation and hundreds of other UU congregations across the country, and to use that money for new growth outreach projects.

Imagine 3 million UUs in the US and more throughout the world. "The times are a-changing," and we must change too to make them better times. We need to grow individually, as congregations, and as an Association of Congregations. Let us "Grow Our Faith through Growing Our Numbers," NOW! So we can "help heal a wounded world!" May it be so. Amen.

Our Good News*, by Rev. Daniel S. Schatz, Carry the Flame Service of Celebration*
Philadelphia-Wilmington Metro Growth
March 18, 2007

I used to live in a little village in New Hampshire called Tamworth – home to one summer theater, one inn, and two stores – the Village Store and The Other Store. The Other Store, we used to say, "is the kind of place where you can go in and get a plate of scrambled eggs and a bucket of paint."

What Tamworth didn't have, and I what needed, was a mechanic.

When you live alone in a rural area, a good mechanic is essential. And its helpful to have one nearby, because if you have to wait very long while your car is being fixed, there's nowhere else to go and nothing else to do.

One day when I was sitting at The Other Store, with Susan, Bill and Edith, bemoaning my need for a nearby mechanic, somebody asked if I'd heard of Hidden Automotive. "Hidden Automotive?!"

"Oh that's the place to go around here," said Bill.

"I took my car there last week," said Edith.

And so, as soon as I got home, I looked up "Hidden Automotive" in the phone book and found nothing. Nothing even close – no mechanics at all in Tamworth village.

"Oh, they're unlisted," they told me when I asked at The Other Store the next day. A week later I finally made my way to a tiny garage, set back into the woods a mile and a half up the aptly named Great Hill Road. I missed it the first time and had to drive back. Hidden Automotive, I thought. Then the mechanic walked out and introduced himself. "I'm Sam Hidden," he said.

Sam didn't talk very much, but he was by far the best mechanic I have ever had. He didn't need any more customers than word of mouth would yield, so he was content to remain in practice, as well as name, hidden. As for the needy car owners – well, you can always find another mechanic, although I did have to go through grief therapy when I moved away.

I liked Sam Hidden, for all his taciturn efficiency. I also like the Unitarian Universalist churches and fellowships I see again and again that are so warm and welcoming, spiritually uplifting and intellectually challenging – if you can ever find them. I like visiting them, feeling the closeness of the community, even the question asked again and again – "How did you find us?" There's almost a sense of surprise when people ask that, as if it's a wonder that anybody could have managed to find us at all. Sometimes I feel like saying, "Once I negotiated the labyrinth it was a simple matter of fighting the Yeti and I was in."

The truth is that Unitarian Universalists as a rule are among the most welcoming people you'll ever meet – but we do tend towards a certain kind of complacency with being hidden. We have our listings in the yellow pages, we have web pages online, and anybody who knows what they're looking for can find us. It's passive but it has brought some new people to our faith – many of you came to us that way and you've been welcomed warmly. Like my Tamworth mechanic, it's hidden, but not unfriendly.

The problem is that while you can always find another mechanic, if not as good a one, you can't find another religion like Unitarian Universalism. There is no other religion like Unitarian Universalism. There is no other religion with our particular emphasis on diversity, freedom, spiritual growth, integrity and community. There is no other place where Humanists and Christians and Pagans and Theists and Buddhists and others all worship together, all learn together, all work together for the common good. There is no other Unitarian Universalism.

When we remain hidden, people who are desperately searching for something like us come up dry. They simply have to do without, sometimes for years, never knowing the treasure within minutes of home. It is said and I believe that there are millions of people who would jump at the chance to become UUs, but have never heard of us. How many times have you spoken to someone, who had lived in your town for years – perhaps a lifetime – but knew nothing of your church? How many times have you heard that story?

We need to do better. We need to stop being the hidden religion and begin to let our presence be known. We need to speak with a voice that is firm, unabashed, respectful and proud. There are people out there who desperately need what we have to offer and they have nowhere else to go.

I'm talking about evangelism but not classic evangelism – so you can all start breathing again. Too often "evangelism" gets away from its root meaning of "sharing the good news" and instead focuses on bad news. I used to be a hospital chaplain and one of my duties was to dispose of the religious leaflets well-meaning missionaries would leave around. In the men's room on the first

floor I kept finding pamphlets on the urinals that queried, in huge letters, "DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING?"

I'm not talking about that kind of evangelism. I'm not talking about condemning anybody's religion and I'm not talking about proselytizing. I am talking about sharing our good news, because we have genuinely good news to share. We don't have to be intrusive. We don't have to be rude. But we also don't have to be silent anymore.

It's hard to change, I know. Even the most basic steps can seem like agony if we fear that sharing our faith would mean giving up our character. But we don't have to be afraid. We don't have to be afraid that if we start speaking up as Unitarian Universalists that our tradition of religious tolerance will end or that we will care more about converts than people. That is not and will never be who we are. We don't have to be afraid. We don't have to be afraid that growing would mean losing our closeness. When my home church reached 900 members for the first time, they hired a growth consultant who discovered that the number one concern in the congregation was that if we got to more than 1000 members, we'd lose that intimate feel. In fact, the opposite had happened – as the congregation grew there were more adult religious education programs, more activities, more small groups, so that the feeling was closer than it had ever been. We don't have to be afraid. We don't have to be afraid that we will sacrifice substance for style or that we will cease to be a spiritual community or that sharing our faith would mean losing our integrity. It isn't true, and we don't have to be afraid any more.

All of us know that there are enough people in our cities and towns and neighborhoods – so many people not very far away at all – so many people who would love to become part of a community like ours – every Unitarian Universalist congregation in North America and beyond could not have packed a sanctuary every week, at all three services. We merely need to lift our voices, tell the world our good news and be ready to make welcome.

I feel passionately about our need to grow, not only because Unitarian Universalism has shaped my life and the lives of so many around me, but also for another, more important reason.

We need to grow because human beings suffer. We struggle with addictions. We wrestle with bad habits. We lose people we love. We become ill. We endure hardship and go through change. We struggle with relationships. We hurt. It's not always that way but in every life it sometimes is and that's when we need religion. For some, the traditional answers from traditional religions are adequate to the task, and that's good. But for others those answers ring hollow. These people need to question. These people need to find their own way, and need support in that journey. If only they had a religious community that was as open to questioning as it was to care, think about how much better their lives would be. Remember how much better your life became when you discovered or rediscovered Unitarian Universalism. What a tragedy if people in real need were to live and die never knowing that all along they too could have been part of such a religion. It is for these, more than any others, that we ought to make our presence known.

We can do it in many ways, but we can't do it effectively without some effort. We can't sit with our web pages and phone listings and expect that the people will come. We have to be intentional. We have to come together as congregations in our area and let the world know something of who we are. The precise methods are not what is most important.

What is most important is that we no longer remain hidden. We have good news to share, and there are people near every congregation in our region in desperate need of our good news.

There are people in each of our lives that have been waiting for our good news for years and years.

And we have the good news!

We have the good news of a faith that embraces questions.

We have the good news of a faith that stands for justice and compassion and equity.

We have the good news of a faith in the inherent dignity of every human being, no matter who you are – and we live that faith.

We have the good news of a faith of the free,
of seekers,
of people of substance
and of depth
and of feeling
and of openness
and of diversity
and of acceptance
and of celebration.

We have good news! It is our faith to live and to share! We have good news, and long may we grow!

"Growing into Excellence"
by Michael A. Schuler, 1st Unitarian Society of Madison

…Even when conditions are favorable for the growth of progressive, inclusive faith communities, a real effort needs to be made to get people's attention and elicit their commitment.

As a movement, we have a lot of work to do. A recent survey of all our congregations shows two-thirds with fewer than 150 members. Less than 5% have over 550 members, and only five congregations out of 1042 have attained four figures. Ours is, then, a movement where small, often scarcely visible, congregations predominate. In most American cities, the average citizen is likely not to have heard of Unitarian Universalism, or is unaware of the presence of a UU group in the immediate area. With disappointing figures like this it's unlikely that the culture at large will be significantly affected by what we say or do.

And that's what it's really all about, isn't it? As I see it, there is really no point to growing congregations that merely consume resources and take up space – that put on a good show but are ambitious only for themselves. We grow in order better to serve--individuals, human and natural ecologies and the greater cause of honest, responsible spirituality.

…As religious liberals, our best opportunity to shape and redeem the future lies in generously funded, highly motivated, dynamically active, strategically placed faith communities like the ones you and I serve. Conservative leaders of the so-called *Third Great Awakening* have waged war against sensible family planning, the teaching of evolution, basic biological research, ecological restoration and the legitimate rights of same sex couples. They show startlingly little sense of responsibility for society's most vulnerable members and practice a bellicose brand of

Christian exclusivism that undermines attempts to bridge differences and promote international understanding.

Frank Lloyd Wright, who was a bit of a prophet as well as a world-class architect, challenged our institutional complacency in 1946: "The Unitarian Church," he wrote, "…always a leader in the ethical thought of humanity…must resolve to lead, or we will all be led to destruction."

…Spirituality can not be for us a merely personal interest or private indulgence. Too much is at stake for us to allow our talent and our potential to be wasted in the pursuit of anything less than excellence.

An excerpt **From the Monograph Unitarian Universalist Culture: The Present and the Promise, by *Marilyn Sewell***

"*We need not think alike to love alike."*

---Francis David (1510-1579)

…I can't imagine a faith that speaks more to our times than Unitarian Universalism. This age calls for a faith precisely like our own. I see the movement of time opening to who we are and what we offer….

…The question that puzzles me is ***why haven't more liberal religious folks become Unitarian Universalists?***

On the surface of things, we would be a logical choice. In a world which grows smaller each day, ***we are a faith that is familiar with and respects many different religious traditions.*** Even the most liberal Christian churches are limited by their Christo-centric nature—for them, the answer still comes down to Jesus, in a world in which it is clear to every one who travels or goes to the movies that other cultures have had their Godness revealed to them in other forms. So for many thoughtful folks, Jesus is quickly becoming *an* answer, not *the* answer—a Christology completely compatible with Unitarian Universalism.

As Unitarian Universalists, ***we are a movement which emphasizes as one of its basic tenets freedom of conscience***. We encourage our people to think for themselves and make choices that are congruent with their beliefs. Surely this in itself should draw progressive types to us—the same thoughtful individuals who question their government, want to make decisions about their health in co-operation with their doctor, are not afraid to challenge their lawyer.

We are a faith that has always emphasized the creation of the Beloved Community on this earth, rather than preparation for the next. To that end, ***we are contemporary in our emphasis,*** and our moral and ethical framework is held up against the very real issues of our day. This emphasis on the present makes our faith relevant to the moment and to the issues which face us as people who are attempting to live with some integrity in the specific time and place into which history has thrust us.

And we are not an "up-start" religion with no historical and theological heritage. Our movement goes back to the left wing of the Protestant Reformation. ***Our spiritual ancestors were the first to proclaim religious freedom***, at a time when such freedoms were unheard of….

So if we have this worthy heritage, this contemporary relevance, this congruence with a culture that increasingly knows and values other religious traditions, and this firm grounding in a free faith within a liberal religious culture that is fast discarding received religious truth, then why are

we losing ground? And losing ground we are. Between 1970 and 2000, our Association lost over 12,000 adult members, a decline of more than 7 per cent, in real numbers. During those years, the population of the U.S. increased by more than 37 per cent, and so in relation to population, we have declined more than 44 percent. There is no sure way to show cause and effect, but it would behoove us to ask ourselves why a faith which would seem to be planted in such fertile ground is not bearing much fruit. I would like to suggest some avenues of thought.

Like any human personality, our religious movement has its history, its evolution through time, its influences, its themes, its relationships. And like a person, the very qualities we admire most about it, the strengths we revel in, often have a shadow side that are its weaknesses, and can be its undoing…..

…We have a real strength in the sophisticated analysis and keen intelligence we bring to all matters we engage. The shadow side of this intellectual prowess, however, is a distrust of and disengagement from the body, a fear that emotion will lead us astray, a suspicion of all we cannot readily understand—in short, a peculiar lack of heartfulness for a people so intellectually impassioned.

We say we want diversity in our churches. We already have an amazing diversity of theological belief and sexual orientation. We find race and class more of a challenge. If we truly want to open our churches and fellowships to people other than middle class and upper middle class white, well-educated people, we have to relate heart to heart. We have to learn the wisdom of the body, of feeling, of intuition. If we really want a diverse population in our churches, we will have to be willing to make some changes. Our music has to change and become more inclusive. Our worship services will have to speak to the whole person, through ritual and poetry and image.

I suggest this perspective not just to attract a more diverse mix of participants to our churches, but to bring a depth and richness of experience to our worship services. Information and analysis alone do not transform lives. A few days ago I heard a Unitarian Universalist activist say, "You know, we keep thinking that if we just give the facts about global warming over and over again, people will finally get it, and they'll change. That's not how people's lives change." And she's right….

…But as a people Unitarian Universalists happily idle in the realm of words. At our best, we are thorough and patient, hearing all voices, and moving through to a conclusion based upon our best thinking. At our worst we set no limits, and let a few insistent voices dominate the community's time, and end up accomplishing little. In regard to justice work, one of our ministers quipped, "We think that if we've said it, we've done it." But talking doesn't make it so.

There is a phenomenon in our churches which one might call "fear of the sacred." It is right and good to give no credence to the supernatural, to pull back from the emotionalism and manipulation of some religious groups, to insist that our religious beliefs not deny scientific truth…. However, this is not to say that the spiritual dimension itself must be suspect, and I sense that with many Unitarian Universalists, it is….

The void at the heart of American culture is a spiritual one, and the void in the hearts of seekers today is also a spiritual one—people visiting our churches may not want the dogma of their childhood faith, nor the fear of hell and damnation, but they do want to grow spiritually, and they want to apprehend the spiritual dimension when they enter our churches and fellowships. If a seeker visits one of our churches and senses an ambivalence about its identity as a religious

institution, what is he to think? Why would he risk his deepest questions and concerns with such a group? If he wanted a secular institution, he would join the Humanist Society, or go to lectures at a nearby university. He is coming to a church because his soul needs feeding….

Our movement has had of late some bit of controversy about "the language of reverence," a term which Unitarian Universalist President Bill Sinkford introduced several years ago. I heard Bill calling us simply to understand that we are a religious people, and to use language in our churches and fellowships which acknowledges the spiritual dimension. I did not hear Bill saying that there is no room in our movement for humanists. I did not hear him say that one must be theistic, or believe in a personal god, or believe in God at all. I heard him imply that we are—not a social organization, not a debating club, not an ethical society, not even "a community of like-minded people"—***we are a religious movement***. Our long and noble history tells us that. Martyrs out of the radical Reformation died for their faith. These were our forebears. They did not die to free us from religion, but precisely to free us for a true religion—for a religion that is congruent with the truth of our minds and hearts….

Yes, our deep respect for the uniqueness of each person in our midst is one of our great strengths. On the other hand, the shadow can lead us into a kind of radical cult of the individual. Elevating individual freedom is a national trait, to be sure, but it is magnified and sanctified in our movement. This assumption about the relative value of the individual versus the value of the community too often prevents us from coming together around a mission greater than keeping our individual members satisfied, in a "consumer church" model.

Too often we bend to a fault, and when we do, we allow the neediest among us to demand an exorbitant amount of time from our ministers and lay leaders; the most narcissistic among us to dominate the discussion; the most controlling, to lead. When we do not set boundaries on behavior that is inappropriate, because of a misguided "respect" for an individual, we are not doing that individual a favor, and we are selling out the needs of the many for the one….

One of the most difficult institutional problems that Unitarian Universalists face is the shadow side of our freedom—it is our discomfort with authority. In fact, one of our favorite bumper stickers reads "QUESTION AUTHORITY." We attract highly intelligent, highly individuated people, many of whom find it difficult to play in an orchestra, so to speak—they are likely more comfortable as soloists. The problem is that when you want to build a well-functioning community and a strong institution, you need some semblance of structure and leadership. Leadership, of course, brings with it that bug-a-boo authority….

…To function as a leader, whether ordained or lay, it is imperative to have the trust and support of the congregation. When the laity do not covenant together to support one another and the minister, the church strains under the stress of power struggles and ends up neglecting its mission. It becomes self-marginalizing in a day and age when our values have never been needed more.

[What then is our mission?] ***It seems to me that the major thrust of Unitarianism is religious freedom, and the main thrust of Universalism is love*****…..**
How then, do we "love"? What does loving look like…?
…In short, it is the living embodiment of the Beloved Community.
And how do we arrive at such a place? We don't of course ever arrive, but we know our destination, we travel in that direction together. We invite others along on the journey, because it is good to be moving and to have companions along the way….

The Beloved Community, then, is the gathering of us all together, to make the wholeness that we could not make alone….

But the question comes to mind, can a movement have a "mission"? Each church or fellowship will choose a different emphasis, according to their history, locale, size, etc., but we all do share a similar basic reason for being. Yes, we want to build community, we want intellectual stimulation, we want to be with like-minded people. But these are not the core reasons for the existence of our religious institutions. ***We exist to foster spiritual growth in our members, and out of that spiritual grounding, to help heal our hurting world.***

…We must take a long hard look at what is holding us back from growth and holding us back from being a potent voice in the public discourse. So long as we have a culture that is ambivalent about religion, we will never be a compelling religious movement. So long as the individual's needs continue to take precedence over the well-being of the community, our churches will remain small and divisive. So long as we revere the mind but suspect the heart, then we will continue to attract a very narrow segment of our society.

…Churches need to learn how to become high-commitment institutions, where congregants understand the connection between their passion for their principles and their support, financial and otherwise, for the institution that embodies those principles….

The costs of being passive, or spiritually arrogant, or divided, or unfocused are just too great. Let us leave our foolish ways, and rise to be the people we are called to be. The times demand it.

Closing Words

Humbly we stand in the face of death,
Confidently we stand with Life.
Our strength is the strength of many.
Indeed, it is the strength of all humanity throughout all time
Because we share one fate and a great compassion.

May understanding go with us, and peace too,
That we may live together in charity, compassion, peace, and joy.
In this spirit let us – individually and together – go forth to live and to love.

May we share this journey together towards greater wholeness as a congregation and as a religious movement, with hope and with love.

Edward Searl

If we are proud of this spiritual community, let us make it a higher personal priority.
If we are concerned for its future, may we help to realize its vision.
If its values resonate with ours, may we live them out with daring and devotion.
This church cannot prosper, nor fulfill its high purpose
Without our faith
Our support
Our witness.
Its destiny and its bright promise
Depend on the many, not just the few.

Michael A. Schuler

As we bring to a close our tribute to the journey we have made through the years, let us be mindful of the enduring bond that keeps us together.
Let us remember those who went before and paved the road for us to travel.
Let us remember our pioneers with admiration and gratitude, with honor and with joy. Memories are for us to cherish and to share; the future is for us to mold together.
Let us be about that work.

Priscilla Murdock

Reminded that we are part and participants of the Universe, let us go forth from the quiet of this hour encouraged to strive toward faithfulness to the best in ourselves, in others, and in the whole creation.

Norman V. Naylor