

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany  
**“Articulating our UU Faith”**  
Sam Trumbore January 27, 2008

Sermon (notes – available as audio file for complete sermon)

There was a Unitarian Universalist once who was attending an awards dinner and was seated next to a big man with a loud voice. The man noticed the UU was wearing a chalice pin on his lapel and asked, “What does your pin represent?” “Why my religion is Unitarian Universalist! One of our symbols is the chalice” he replied. “Never heard of it, is that some kind of Protestant Christianity?” “Not exactly, though some of our members are Christians.” “Well then, what do Unitarian Universalists believe?” asked the big man in a booming voice as he started to eat his salad. The table grew quiet as everyone listened for the answer, intimidating the Unitarian Universalist.

“Well, um, people believe different things, ah, we’re a non-creedal tradition.”

“Non-creedal, that’s new on me. Okay, do you believe in God?”

“Some people do and some people don’t.”

“What about Jesus. Is he your personal savior?”

“Well, not exactly, but I suppose he could be to some people.”

“This is a very strange religion of yours.” said the big man, chewing on a bread stick and frowning. “Do you believe in the Bible as the word of God?”

“I suppose you could but most of us think some of it is and some of it isn’t.”

“Every answer sounds like an equivocation,” the big man finally said in exasperation. “is there anything that you all agree about?”

The Unitarian Universalist brightened. “Oh yes! We all agree that it is very hard to explain Unitarian Universalism!”

Ever felt like this? I know I have.

Learning to explain Unitarian Universalism is an acquired skill

- part of seminary training
- elevator speech MFC question
  - o 10 floors to entice someone's interest in us

#### Problem: Different way to do religion

- Universalist minister L.B. Fisher said, "Universalists are often asked where they stand. The only true answer to give to this question is that we do not stand at all, we move."
- not about beliefs, sacred texts, doctrines, creeds
- not about internalizing external belief system
- problem of language
- wrong questions (analogy?)

#### Why learn how to talk about Uuism?

- different from talking about what we believe
- UU has specific common identity across congregations
- Purposes and Principles attempt to describe common identity
  - o List not the best way to capture someone's interest

#### Here are four ways to articulate Uuism to the uninitiated

1. Describe core values we share
2. Describe variety of beliefs found here
3. Describe characteristics of members
4. Describe the benefit of participation

#### Core UU Values

- Shared values not shared beliefs
  - o Channing called, "Practical Religion"
- unique value and worth of each individual
  - o access to truth within
- value diversity of opinion and belief – revelation not sealed
  - o "The freedom of the mind is the beginning of all other freedoms." - Clinton Lee Scott
- value learning, education, growth – collective process balances individualism
- value interdependence, the natural world
- value democratic process, shared power, source of power congregation
- value peace, justice, fairness
- value kindness, compassion and love
- value sustaining a nurturing, caring community

- Dr. Albert Schweitzer wrote “Sometimes our light goes out but is blown into flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have kindled this inner light.”

Who might want to come here? Need to develop UU Radar – Detect ways of thinking/believing - Here are some ideas:

- Someone who thinks socks are too formal for a Summer service.
- Someone who knows at least 5 ways to say - Happy holidays!
- A fellow whose idea of a guy's night out is going to a N.O.W. rally.
- Someone who thinks eating unleavened bread should be part of an Easter Brunch.
- Someone who has the urge to express their personal theology with interpretive dance.

What kind of believer or unbeliever might be at home here?

Home for unbelievers

- no lying, profess what you don't believe is true
- not required to pretend to believe

Home for religious exploration

- great place for agnostics
- stimulation of sermons, adult ed, conversation

Home for unconventional believers

- see Jesus as teacher/healer not Lord (son of God)
- reject traditional conception of God
  - like better, Force, Love,

Home for religious pluralists

- mixed marriages, jewish-christian, atheist-anything,
- multiple religious affinities
  - my multiple connections to UU, Sufism, Buddhism, Christianity
- draw from all, don't fit into any one

### Characteristics of UU's

- like to read, great place to find book discussion group
- like to think, use their minds
  - o willing to take responsibility for using their minds
- like to talk and listen to each other
- comfortable not needing to dress up for each other
- welcoming attitude
- care about this world today, people in it
- care about future of this planet, all world's people

### Benefits of Participation & Involvement

- Community respectful of difference (rare experience!)
  - o Adlai Stevenson, a lay Unitarian, "I think that one of our most important tasks is to convince others that there's nothing to fear in difference; that difference, in fact, is one of the healthiest and most invigorating of human characteristics without which life would become meaningless."
- Differences that stimulate connection rather than alienation
- Inspiration on Sunday morning
  - o music
  - o message to kids and adults
- Participate in shared identity (esp. kids)
  - o Serves important social need to belong
- opportunities for Growth and Development
- stimulation/example of walking our talk to make a difference
- Great segue to talk about your experience of involvement.
  - o UU minister Mark Belletini, "We are a liberal church community which has not only dared to preach freedom but to live in freedom as well, which has not only prophesied a more just day to come but has dared to live prophetically right now."

Sound like our congregation?

Don't believe we have the answer for everyone

- many people don't want responsibility for faith
- "Just tell me what to believe pastor."
- Want a magic and ritual based religion
- Many ways to satisfy religious impulse
- No one size fits all

Why risk talking about UU to your friends?

- Experiment: How many of you are here because a friend invited you?
- If you've found value here, way to give back to community
- best way to sustain health of institution, word of mouth
- give someone else opportunity to receive what you've received
- 3 reasons to talk to people about us
  1. Could be: UU without knowing it?
  2. Could know a little about UU -- but have wrong ideas?
  3. Could have right ideas -- not know experience of coming?
- What they want to hear is your personal experience

NOT proselytizing – not converting people

- Important to respect people's faith, especially if satisfied with it
- Seeking people who didn't think there was anything out there for them.
- Giving people opportunity for religious community – living water for a thirsty soul.

Don't expect us to ever be a religion of the masses (big guy at awards dinner not going to be happy with us)

- Can do a great job of serving our religious niche of free thinking individualists
- I know there are many more people who would fit in here than are members
  - o Don't know what they are missing
- You are the ones who can find them and bring them in.
- You are the ones who can spread the UU message best!

Hone and practice your skills – Come to the workshop February 9 with Leah and me!

Benediction

William Schulz, former President of the UUA wrote

Unitarian Universalism affirms:

That Creation is too grand, complex, and mysterious to be captured in a narrow creed. That is why we cherish individual freedom of belief. At the

same time our convictions lead us to other affirmations . . .

- \* That the blessings of life are available to everyone, not just the Chosen or the Saved;
- \* That Creation itself is Holy -- the earth and all its creatures, the stars in all their glory;
- \* That the Sacred or Divine, the Precious and Profound, are made evident not in the miraculous or supernatural but in the simple and the everyday;
- \* That human beings, joined in collaboration with the gifts of grace, are responsible for the planet and its future;
- \* That every one of us is held in Creation's hand -- a part of the interdependent cosmic web -- and hence strangers need not be enemies;
- \* That no one is saved until we All are saved, where All means the whole of Creation;
- \* That the paradox of life is to love it all the more even though we ultimately lose it.

Go in Peace. Make peace. Be at peace.

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