

Service November 14

Chalice Lighting

UUA Leadership Council

A vision for Unitarian Universalism in a multicultural world

With humility and courage born of our history, we are called as Unitarian Universalists to build the Beloved Community where all souls are welcome as blessings, and the human family lives whole and reconciled. With this vision in our hearts and minds, we light our chalice.

—“A vision for Unitarian Universalism in a multicultural world” by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Leadership Council, adopted October 1, 2008 (adapted as a chalice lighting May 2009)

Opening Words

Prayers

Christine C. Robinson

(Adapted)

Autumn Prayer

Spirit Autumn, help us to live  
with the grace of falling leaves  
the enthusiasm of the flaming Aspens  
with the serenity of the old trees, whose roots reach deep into the earth.

Spirit of Autumn, help us to know  
that living and dying are one  
that life is precious, and beautiful, and limited.  
that nothing good is ever lost.

Spirit of Autumn, help us to see  
in the ways of nature a way for ourselves.

Joys and Sorrows

Ron Phares

Disembodied Dreams

Let us pray.

We come here today to be nurtured by one another,

with hopes of hearing a healing word, of singing a song that helps us, of celebrating, of walking back into beauty.

Our lives are fraught with trouble, and actions that miss the mark and cause damage to ourselves or to others.

But our being here confesses our awareness of our imperfection and hopes that such an awareness must necessarily understand and thus forgive the failings of others as well as of ourselves.

Just as our joy is a beacon, so too can our sorrow be a guide.

Let this awareness be the seed of empathy then, and this fellowship be the soil to nurture that empathy, so that its fruit can feed many.

Amen.

Offering

Offertory Reading

Unitarian and Universalist

We give thanks today for the gifts of our Unitarian faith:  
That human beings are powerful and good  
That we are capable of making joy in our own lives  
And in changing the world around us for the better.

And we give thanks today for the gifts of our Universalist faith:  
That we are upheld by an irresistible force of love  
That all the universe is a single creation  
And that all existence will eventually find its way to salvation.

We give thanks for a faith that affirms our power, when we feel powerful,  
And that offers us comfort and strength from sources beyond our own when we're feeling  
weak and afraid.

With thanks for a faith sufficient to all the times of our lives, we go forward today into our lives,  
equipped to live lives of peace, love, and justice, in every situation we find ourselves.

May it be so.

Reading

(from a Chalice Lighting)

Stephan R. Papa

Fruit-bowl, salad-bowl, or chalice

Is it a fruit-bowl, a salad-bowl, or a chalice with blended juices or fine wine that holds us  
together in our religious community?

Is it our humanism, our progressivism, or our mysticism we have in common?

Is it a denominational label, a liberal spirit, or a noble history that connects us?

Is it our values, or our principles and purposes, which bind us?

Is it our way of being religious, our devotion to social justice, or our love of discussion that  
unites us?

Is it our free will, evolution, or is it God that holds us together as a spiritual community?

It is all of these and more that connect us.

Our faith grows stronger as we come together to light our chalice with many other Unitarians  
and Universalists around the world on this Sunday morning.

## Talk

After the Rebellion of 1837, Lord Durham wrote that French-Canadians were "a people without history or literature." It was a scathing comment informed, or rather misinformed, by the arrogance of the British conquerers.

The years that followed Lord Durham's comment were a period of vigorous intellectual and creative activity in Québec. Whether the comment was a wake-up call or whether Lord Durham was simply wrong can be debated. But the work of historian François-Xavier Garneau, leading up to his monumental history of Canada is believed to be a reaction to the Durham report.

Canadians of both official languages share the Unitarian Universalists' concern with identity or our lack thereof. Our Unitarian and Universalist history and theology are under-appreciated. Because we consider many of the words we need to use to develop an understanding of who we are and what we share, we tend to discard the ideas along with the words. Many of us do not have a long personal history with UUism. Let's take a survey:  
how many of you define yourselves as UUs? Keep your hand up if you have defined yourselves as UUs for more than 5 years. 10 years? Keep your hands up if your parents were or are UUs.

However we define ourselves, and whether we call our understanding of life as theology or philosophy or something else, though, each of us has a way of looking at the world, of searching for answers to the big questions, of fulfilling our unique purpose, of understanding the meaning of existence, reality and what lies beyond them. Our deepest roots are formed by the beliefs we have about the nature of life, humanity, and spirituality.

The tree on the cover is taken from a UU website. I like the image of roots and branches, of a growing, changing, living, organic being to illustrate our faith group. The roots of the tree can be used to illustrate the earliest sources of our faith. The trunk is the central or core history of Unitarianism and Universalism. The branches are the more recent evolution of religious liberalism and humanism (I think I would have put them on the opposite sides). Transcendentalism is there, and in the many and diverse branches and the leaves of many colours are Unitarian Universalists today. Us.

If we look at our sources, you'll see many of the theologies on the tree represented. Let's go through them and see which roots and branches we can identify.  
Now let's gather the collective wisdom of the people who are here today. We'll mention one thing that we know about each of the sources.

If you think about the sources and look at the tree again, you'll notice there are some things missing. What are they, and where would you put them. (World Religions, Paganism) Where would you put them?

Now let's work our way up to the top of the tree.

Christianity (Doug Mulder)

I've been in far too many discussions (in UU churches) where Christianity was the unmentioned elephant in the room. Most of us, I think, live in some kind of tension with Christianity. Some of us miss it. Some are running away from it. Some feel alienated from it or oppressed by it. And some, like me, feel all those things at the same time. But like a dysfunctional family with a secret, we seem to have an unspoken agreement not to bring it up.

On those rare occasions when we do discuss it—on the Internet, in discussion groups, or informally at coffee hour—too often we just debate whether Christianity is good or bad. We talk about it as if it had been defined once and for all by some distant authority, and is not definable or re-definable by us. But if Channing, Ballou, Parker, and their contemporaries had looked at Christianity that way, there would be no Unitarian Universalism.

How they struggled, I think, still has a lot to teach us. Channing, Ballou, and Parker did not take the Christianity of their day as a given and argue for or against it. Each found elements of unspeakable wonder in Christianity, encrusted by doctrines and theologies gone horribly wrong. Channing looked for the “essential” in Christianity, Parker for the “permanent.” Reading them, I picture Christianity as a statue they have dredged up from an ancient shipwreck, with only a gleam here or there betraying the promise of what lies beneath. The UU founders did not seek to pass on unchanged the religion of their teachers, but to remove the encrustations without shattering the statue to fragments.

I want to know if it's possible for me to separate the vibrant vision of the Kingdom of God—a place where love and generosity (rather than grasping and suspicion) are so abundant that they constitute a practical strategy for living—from the cumbersome and contradictory theology I rejected as a teenager.

I don't plan to turn my back on the Pagan, Buddhist, and Humanist parts of my journey, but this Christian work of discernment is going to be at least a part of my religious struggle for many years to come.

Liberal religion:

In fact, religious conservatives and liberals share more concerns and beliefs than either commonly admits. Both have loyalties that go beyond self and the convenience of the moment. Both reject the materialism of popular culture. Both seek something more substantial than the momentary satisfaction of desire or the endless striving after status. The committed life is a different way to pursue these goals, not a denial of them.

But the committed life requires freedom, because only voluntary commitment has meaning. We give our members the freedom to doubt and encourage them to question their beliefs not so they will see all beliefs as whimsical and contingent, but quite the opposite: We find that hard-tested and hard-won beliefs are more likely to withstand the challenges of modern life. A marriage whose every assumption and duty has been freely negotiated is not a house of straw, but rather a house whose every brick has been carefully laid. The freedom of liberal religion is an invitation to engage with the most significant issues of human life and society, not an excuse to fall into a shiftless and vacant hedonism.

## Humanism

A version of Christianity that recognized human value and human dignity.

Erasmus (human beings can choose whether to seek salvation) vs. Martin Luther (no free will in matter of salvation)

1853 American Unitarian Association -- Executive Committee's creed: belief in Divine authority and Divine origin of Jesus Christ  
vs. Theodore Parker : universality of religion

Defrocked for heresy by the Presbyterian Church in 1911, the Rev. John H. Dietrich (1878–1957) became a Unitarian minister. With the Rev. Curtis Reese, Dietrich introduced the notion of “Humanism” to the American Unitarian Association in 1917. He was minister of First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis from 1916 to his retirement in 1938.

John Dietrich: Humanists put first a study of Human Beings and the necessity of performing our duties towards other human beings;

Theists: Human beings have a direct relationship with God, and put first a study of God and the necessity of performing our duties towards God. Theists do not question the existence of an ultimate reality, sometimes defined as an infinite energy; they are more concerned with understanding its nature and our relationship to it.

Humanists often call on Theists to give evidence of God's existence, but do not feel called to give evidence of the impossibility or uselessness of God's existence.

Theist definition of God: that being than which which nothing greater can be conceived

By James Ishmael Ford

The task of Humanism is to unfold the personality of men and women, to fit and qualify them for the best use of their natural powers, and the fullest enjoyment of the natural world and the human society around them. It conceives of religion as spiritual enthusiasm directed toward the enrichment of the individual life and the improvement of the social order.

A humanist's definition of religion might be

"that which strengthens one's inner life, which enhances humanizing values, or which builds up the soul". Religion should be holistic; heart as well as the head; how to become a whole person

## Transcendentalism

The Transcendentalist movement which began flourishing in the early 19th century America, especially in New England, was based on some of the concepts of European Transcendental Philosophy but did not strictly follow it.

The formation of the movement was in 1836 with the establishment of the Transcendental Club of Boston, Massachusetts. The early transcendentalists included the essayist and poet

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the feminist, social reformer, and author Margaret Fuller, a minister Theodore Parker, and the naturalist and author Henry David Thoreau.

One early Transcendentalist defined the movement this way: "Transcendentalism... maintains that man has ideas, that come not through the five senses, or the powers of reasoning, but are either the result of direct revelation from God, his immediate inspiration, or his immanent presence in the spiritual world," and "it asserts that man has something besides the body of flesh, a spiritual body, with senses to perceive what is true, and right and beautiful, and a natural love for these, as the body for its food."

The transcendentalists' concept of a spiritual, inner body within the physical body of man was termed the oversoul, the conscience, or borrowing from the Quakers, the inner light. "Their emphasis on the innate worth of the individual was thought as a logical spiritual extension of the political principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence."

The vigorous seedbed in New England for transcendentalism during the early half of the 19th century was among Unitarian ministers who were disappointed in Unitarianism at that time. Emerson was among them since he had resigned the ministry of the Second Church of Boston in 1832 because he felt uncomfortable administering Communion. Emerson, like others, rejected the narrow definition which the term "Christian" implied when referring to God. They preferred the term "theist" which seemed to them a more universal designation of the divinity. Emerson also opposed the "cold intellectualism" that pervaded American Unitarianism. The Transcendentalists were searching for a philosophy with a more broad moral and aesthetic appeal. They discovered in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and the German transcendentalists of the 18th century, and borrowed ideas from Hindu texts and Confucius, French Enlightenment writers and the 17th century metaphysical English writers.

The American transcendentalists seemed to reject the narrow orthodox Christian concept of God. Theirs was a broader view of seeing God in his creation, in the physical world, and not only as the Creator no longer present in it.

#### Unitarianism

Unitarianism, although it reflects a universal human impulse toward intellectual liberty and freedom of conscience, begins historically as an early European, Christian "heresy". The earliest "Unitarians" were passionately believing Christians. They did not call themselves "Unitarians" at that time, (at least that we know of.)

#### "Michael Servitus" & the "Convivencia"

The name "Unitarian" does not appear in manuscript form until the Reformation, in association with the Spanish astrologer/theologian/martyr, Miguel Servet. We can find the unmistakable roots of Servet's Unitarianism in the Iberian/Sephardic/Islamic culture of the "Convivencia," a rich, multi-ethnic, poly-religious culture made up of Moslems, Christians, and Jews in Spain that modeled religious toleration and existed from roughly the end of the 8th century until 1492 when the "Moors" and Jews were expelled from Spain by royal edict. We owe our knowledge of the ancient Greek and other Classic authors to this rich, cross-cultural mix, which preserved knowledge of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Ptolemy, and the whole intellectual heritage of the ancient world which had been lost during the so-called "Dark Ages" in Europe, because it was in this context that the classical heritage was preserved and

reintroduced it into Western thought through Arabic translations.

### “Unitarians” at the Earliest Christian Church Councils

Centuries before Servet, (centuries even before the initial Islamic conquest of the Iberian peninsula), the earliest “unitarians” may be discerned in the historical record, clearly espousing the same principles, and revealing the same attitudes that mark Unitarians, even today - (not the least of which is that they/we have always tended to be intellectually proud and terminally over-educated.)

These early unitarians came to the earliest Church Congresses established after Constantine and questioned the validity of the Trinity based on their superior scholarship. They said, in effect, “We have read Q Source’ in the original Aramaic, and you folks are only fooling around with corrupt Greek translations, and those translations are particularly unreliable in those passages that purport to suggest that God comes in three parts’. We believe, on the basis of our more careful and accurate reading of the Scriptures, that God comes only in One piece...” (The “unit” in “Unitarian” refers to the unity and singularity of the Divine, as revealed in the canonical Biblical narrative.) Perhaps one of the reasons they lost the debates is that triads seem to be deeply ingrained in human consciousness. We think in terms of the past, present, and future. Not only are there the late-developing “Father, Son and Holy Ghost”, but there were the much older “Maiden, Matron, and Crone.” It turns out over and over again that “Trinitarianism” holds more energy, and commands more loyalty, than any coldly intellectual refutation of its “validity” in any particular text or translation...

The heretical history of Unitarianism has meant that two golden threads are interwoven throughout our movement: those of religious freedom and the primacy of individual conscience, which result in the refusal to demand that members adhere to a creed or any one belief system.

### Universalism:

As well as UUs, there are Universalist Hindus, Universalist Moslems, Universalist Zoroastrians and Manicheans, Universalist Jains, Universalist Jews, Universalist Buddhists, and so on. What binds the Universalists together out of all the various traditions from which they come is a train of theological thought that goes more or less like this: “If you are really thinking about God, (and not just about “some aspect” or “limited attribute” of the Divine, but attempting to focus on the Divine Itself, in all its ineffable fullness), then it is impossible to imagine anything that does not come from God... (God is, after all, by definition, the Eternal Source and Support of ALL), and for that reason, it is equally impossible to imagine anything that does not return to God in the end... ” Therefore, salvation, either in terms of the afterlife or the essence of life (salvation means health, or wholeness), is universal.

[Rebecca Parker](#) (President – [Starr King School of the Ministry](#) and one of our leading theologians) provides a short and pithy summary of our implicit theology of salvation. “We offer salvation from those things that deny life or make life less whole.”

### The First Bible Published in North America

Many of the earliest European Universalist colonists of North America were printers and



publishers by trade, and the first Bible printed in North America was published by Universalists, on a press brought over in pieces by refugee Universalist families expelled from Berlinberg, Germany. To escape religious and political persecution, the Berlinberg Universalist communards dismantled their press, and each family brought pieces of it across the Atlantic as part of their personal baggage. When they all gathered again in Pennsylvania after the arduous ocean crossing, they reassembled the press and proceeded to print the first Bible published in North America - an edition of George deBenneville's polishing of Martin Luther's translation of the New Testament, with all the proof-texts demonstrating the promise of universal salvation underlined in red!

Starting from the opposite direction and reaching the same point is the story of Reverend Kirby Hensley and the Church of Universal Life in Modesto, California, considered by some to be the "Lost Tribe" of Universalists. Reverend Hensley became known nation-wide for his willingness to officially and legally ordain anyone who asked, for free, and without any tests or obligations. It is worth noting that Kirby Hensley was raised purposely by his parents (for radical egalitarian theological reasons) to be illiterate, As a boy, he was forbidden to learn to read, something he did only when he became an adult. Instead, he was encouraged to learn the entire New Testament by heart, and to preach by telling Bible stories in the "oral tradition" in the community of believers in which he was raised in Appalachia. Interestingly enough, his habitual preaching texts turn out to be exactly the same as those underlined in red in deBenneville's Bible.

## What Makes Me / What Makes You / What Makes Us

So what do we do with this history?

First we can use it to understand who we are. There's an art project on line in which people are invited to make cube-shaped collages online to illustrate three different things: What Makes Me, What Makes You, What Makes Us. History is part of what makes us. Our family history and religious heritage, our individual journey, our common congregational story.

Second, we can use it to orient our future, to decide how we want to "do" religion.

Posted by Rev. Ricky Hoyt at 5:53 PM

Ricky Hoyt:

I was invited by Douglas Muder of Free and Responsible Search to help him extend a discussion posed by a UUA task force on Lay Theological Education. The question is what do UUs need to "go deeper?" My glib answer is that what we don't need is "theological education." What we need is spiritual experience. We don't need more talking about religion, more discussion, more reading and research. What we need is to do religion: hands on social justice work, pastoral care, prayer and meditation, ritual, personal connection, pilgrimage, worship that is really worshipful.

Thom Belote, in his sermon "Standing on the Side of Love" (which you may recognize as a campaign slogan for social justice), suggests that we use our history as a framework for our social action. He writes,

"I am convinced that our religious tradition is growing up and that we are becoming less stuck on trying to tell the world who we are. Instead, we will show the world what we do as a people of faith and as a people of love.

What we do in and for the world: we stand on the side of love.

If you are new to Unitarian Universalism, one of the things you will learn is that we are extremely proud of our history. In truth our history is full of great things but it also has its share of shameful moments and embarrassing episodes. But, we can trace our history and list the myriad ways that we have stood on the side of love. In the Northeast in the 1800s prominent Unitarians were effective at convincing the public of the inhumanity of slavery while in California Thomas Starr King was primarily responsible for keeping The Golden State in the Union during the Civil War. In advocacy for abolition, we stood on the side of love.

We were the first denomination to recognize the ordination of a woman. It was in these Unitarian and Universalist congregations that recognized the religious leadership of women that the women's suffrage movement was born. Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Olympia Brown are our religious forebears, but our congregations played a role as well, opening their doors for the suffragettes to organize inside and deliver stirring speeches. In standing for equal rights for women, we stood on the side of love.

During the Civil Rights movement, when Martin Luther King issued his call to Selma, Unitarian Universalist ministers and laypeople across the country answered his call. One layperson,

Viola Liuzzo, and one minister, James Reeb were martyred in Alabama. In Selma we marched on the side of love and our blood was shed by violent hate while we stood peacefully on the side of love.

Most recently, Unitarian Universalists have stood on the side of love for marriage equality. The tides have shifted. Love will win out over fear, love will win out over bigotry, and love will win out over homophobia. But were it not for the powerful organizing of Unitarian Universalists in Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Iowa, the equal marriage movement would be ten years behind where it is today. By standing on the side of love, we have sped up the realization of equality and dignity for more people in our country.

If you've ever stood on the side of love, what motivated you? What inspired you? What swelled up within you and gave you the moral clarity and discernment to take a stand on the side of love? I am and remain profoundly grateful to all those who have over the years shared their stories of what had led them to stand. I am grateful to Holly Near, a singer-songwriter for peace, who described that day when she passed the group that was standing for peace, the group that always stood for peace, the group she had always dismissed with cynicism and deeply rationalized realism. And then, one day as she walked past, Holly Near asked herself the question, can there be any justification for my being here and not with them? I remain grateful to Kim Crawford-Harvie who entered into the ministry in the 1980s just as the AIDS epidemic in the United States had grown most virulent and before any medical institution or any church for that matter would develop a compassionate and merciful response. I am grateful for Kim's testimonial of compassion and presence, as she tended the sick and stood on the side of love.

And so, I turn again to ask the question that James Luther Adams asked himself, "What in my own past experience would constitute a pattern or a framework for resistance?"

Whether it is standing on the side of love with immigrant families; whether it is standing on the side of love for marriage equality; whether it is standing on the side of love for health care that is more equitable, more available, and better serves human need; whether it is standing for peace with Julia's Voice; let us ask ourselves from whence we derive the motivation, the courage, the commitment to stand on the side of love rather than standing on the sidelines of love. Can we stand on the side of love rather than taking a position of a detached observer on the side of love? Can we stand on the side of love rather than having a discussion group on the side of love?

I am convinced that our religious tradition is growing up and that we are becoming less stuck on trying to tell the world who we are. Instead, we will show the world what we do as a people of faith and as a people of love."

Holly Anne Lux-Sullivan turns the idea of the purpose of religious history on its head. Instead of asking what U\*U religion can do for us, she explores what U\*Us can do for religion. Here is her list:

What We Can Do for Religion Today

**Making peace with our religious history is what we can do for religion today.**

**Being hopefully realistic in the face of adversity is also what we can do for religion today.**

**Recognizing hypocrisy and working to eliminate it from our own lives and interactions is what we can do for religion today.**

**Reaching across the political and philosophical gulf in religious and public discourse is what we can do for religion today. It is what religion needs us to do.**

**Adding our voices to the collective voice of people of faith is what we can do for religion today.**

We must declare our liberal religious beliefs as we take political action instead of simply cringing when we hear those on the religious right make sweeping statements about religion that don't apply to us. We can recognize the ways our Unitarian Universalism shapes our lives and then make sure others see that, too.

Make it well known that the way you live your life is based on Unitarian Universalism. We're already in our communities, ministering in dozens of ways - volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, working at rape crisis centers, writing letters to the editor. We can say, "I do this because I'm a Unitarian Universalist and I believe that we are all interconnected and that every life has value." Whatever is true for you, however your Unitarian Universalism affects your daily activities and interactions, tell people!

**Recognizing and celebrating our common values is what we can do for religion today.**

I encourage each of us to sit down with the principles and purposes and see what we think about them. Do I agree with them? Which do I take to heart more than others? Let's figure out what we believe so that when we are actively shaping our liberal faith in the world, we know what it is we're shaping.

And while we're figuring out what we believe, consider this: We pride ourselves on being a faith that is welcoming to many beliefs and theologies, as we should. But in doing so, we also often emphasize what makes us different from those in the pews beside us, instead of emphasizing what brings us together. As we examine our personal faiths and learn to better articulate them, we can look for commonalities in them - those elements of our individual beliefs that weave us together in the fabric of Unitarian Universalism.

May it be so.  
Blessed be.