

“Voices of a Liberal Faith” DVD Transcript
October 2007
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

MALE SPKR: People often say that we’ve always been Unitarian Universalist, but we just didn’t know what to call it.

FEMALE SPKR: We were mixed marriage-- Jewish and Congregationalists, and we just tried Unitarianism. And we came for our children, and we stayed for ourselves.

MALE SPKR: I grew up in Texas to a Muslim community. And so a lot of the community life was centered around the Mosque. I feel like with Unitarian Universalism, I’m able to get that really strong and important, I think, feeling of building beloved community.

FEMALE SPKR: Everyone here knows who I am. They know who the woman I’ve been in a relationship of 15 years is. They appreciate that relationship and they respect it. And I am encouraged to come and be me. And that is the first place I’ve ever been able to be me.

FEMALE SPKR: I invite you to join me in appreciating the unspeakable beauty of what happens here week after week.

FEMALE SPKR: When people ask me: “What is Unitarian Universalism?” I like to pull out the first principle of the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

MALE SPKR: We have a spectrum theologically that runs from Christianity and Judaism to atheism, agnosticism...

FEMALE SPKR: We’re not the kind of church that says: “If you don’t believe in our God, you’re going to hell.”

MALE SPKR: People who come out of a variety of faiths can come together here knowing that their particular way of understanding truth and meaning will be appreciated and accepted.

FEMALE SPKR: This is a place where you're welcome, where you're invited into a fuller relationship with yourself, with the spirit of life, with other people, to build a better world and to build a better you.

FEMALE SPKR: You walk in the door and it's like: "Hi, who are you? Come in!" And immediately you feel that you have inherent worth as a person.

FEMALE SPKR: It's just the most amazing thing to be nourished body and soul by a community.

MALE SPKR: People in my generation, they'll say they're spiritual but they're not religious. They don't like organized religion. And the UU church -- I mean, yeah, it's a church, but it's non-creed oriented. It's -- it's open. It's welcoming.

FEMALE SPKR: I can bring my atheist mother here and my Catholic ex-husband and my Modern Orthodox-trained Jewish children, and we're just all loved.

MALE SPKR: This liberal religious tradition has a very distinctive message, and it is attracting people that haven't been hearing it elsewhere.

FEMALE SPKR: It was liberating. It was freeing. It was challenging -- all those things that I was looking for in a religious place and religious community.

FEMALE SPKR: Once you start to have children, it's nice to have someone else trying to teach them similar moral values. You know, it's really nice to have it reinforced by a community in which you feel comfortable and you feel like those values are truly shared and important.

FEMALE SPKR: My oldest is now in third grade and so she's starting to get into more of the conversations about social justice, about neighboring faiths, about what other people believe, about starting to identify what is important to her and what is her beacon.

MALE SPKR: We kind of believe in community outreach and helping us become better by helping the community.

FEMALE SPKR: In Unitarian Universalism, we have a responsibility, which is to provide people the opportunity to do the work that it takes to figure out what their beliefs are.

MALE SPKR: We also want them to have respect for the inter-dependent web of all existence, so that will be a part of our religious education. We want them to have respect for themselves and for their bodies, so we *do* do comprehensive sexuality education with children which we feel is a part of their spiritual growth.

FEMALE SPKR: It gives you like a whole new perspective of how other people think and how other people feel, and it just -- I think it just makes you a nicer person.

FEMALE SPKR: The trend more recently is for us to name our religious education "Lifespan Faith Development" because we recognize that it's a process that occurs throughout our lives regardless of our age and stage.

MALE SPKR: One of the things that people don't understand about our movement is that it does really have a very rich historical past, not only roots that go back to the beginning of the Reformation in Europe, and a very rich history in the United States and colonial America.

MALE SPKR: I think what I want folks in our congregations to know is that, if there's a candidate for the great American faith, it is us. Take a look at who signed the Declaration of Independence, and you see our names there. Three of the first six American presidents were Unitarian, and I'm pretty proud of the country that we helped build.

MALE SPKR: This faith, the more I learn about it and discover, is ingrained in the values that

the American Constitution was put together with. It's about acceptance and tolerance and liberty and freedom to believe, which I think is inherent in who we are as -- as citizens of this country.

MALE SPKR: Most of the idea of Universalism, although it had some roots in England, is really indigenous to our own country. Very simple, plain folks, mostly farmers and trades people, who really did believe that a loving God wouldn't ban people to hell. Unitarians, although they also believed in a benevolent God, put more stress on what William Ellery Channing called character. He called it salvation by character. He said what matters isn't what you believe; it's how you live your life. And Ralph Waldo Emerson and all those other luminaries from the 19th century and the Unitarian side of our movement made that kind of assertion.

MALE SPKR: For both the Unitarians and the Universalists, people in the church had a moral obligation to reform society. And so it wasn't simply about getting *your* soul right with God. It really had very much to do with helping your society live up to its highest principles. So by the mid-20th century, the Unitarians and Universalists saw that they had more and more in common, and in 1961, they formed the Unitarian Universalist Association and brought their two traditions together.

MALE SPKR: Our philosophy is: be out in the world six days a week, and then come in here and tell us how that informs your faith.

MALE SPKR: We are about trying to improve the conditions in which a lot of people live and -- and make the world and our community a much better place.

MALE SPKR: Unitarian Universalists sent more ministers to Selma to join Martin Luther King in the civil rights march then, than any other denomination.

FEMALE SPKR: One of the things I love about my church is that, you know, activism and social justice are a part of the principles but then they are really looked at.

MALE SPKR: Fighting classism, sexism, homophobia, working on environmental justice -- really kind of creating the world we want to create.

MALE SPKR: I think that there are folks who are coming to us right now in larger and larger numbers because they're looking for faiths that really respect the earth and have a stake in the environmental movement, and that's always been one of our values.

MALE SPKR: Our elected leaders will be able to hear us if we can speak from our hearts.

FEMALE SPKR: We're really trying to move forward as a congregation or as a community, and so it's really exciting to be a part of something that is very progressive and that is engaged and active.

FEMALE SPKR: This church, from its inception, has been interested in -- in changing the world.

MALE SPKR: "I don't have a minute to hate," she cried. "I'll pursue justice for the rest of my life." May we go and do likewise.

FEMALE SPKR: If you want a tradition-- a religious tradition -- that respects you and challenges you at the same time to be your best self in everything you do in your life, then this is a tradition for you.

MALE SPKR: Let us commit ourselves to living out *our* theology. Let us celebrate being part of a reasonable and a passionate faith, a faith that requires us to engage deeply with moral questions. This work is difficult, and the discoveries will be different for each of us, but we must always remember that it is through our most human quality, the ability to love, that we can touch the divine. So may it be and Amen.

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