

Future of Faith: Unitarian Universalism and the Millennial Generation

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Preface

This writing project started as an answer to the question of how we can reshape our faith to become a home for the Millennial generation (those born between 1982 and 2001)—a question that I regularly get asked and have also asked myself nearly every day since I came to work at the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) as Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries. As I have digested literature and research on my generation and its unique relationship with religious institutions, it has become clear to me that the imperative to respond to the shifts in the American religious landscape that are being led by Millennials is of the essence for our future, or any church's future, as a religious body.

By looking at what it would take to become a faith community that attracts Millennials, we can see a universal design principle at work; the key to securing our relevance and vitality as a faith is to enact our core mission and values beyond the limits of the traditional congregationalism, which, statistics show, is not attracting younger Americans.

I hope that this paper will serve as a foundational resource for anyone who is interested in engaging these issues from a UU perspective, as well as a preamble for the visioning that my office at the UUA will undertake this year for projecting our aspirations for our faith in the near future.

Finally, this paper should be a reference point for a conversation that is already going on in our faith and across all mainstream Jewish and Christian denominations. It is an expression of my professional expertise to tie together a series of empirical points, so this paper reflects my own viewpoints and not necessarily those of other UUA leaders.

I welcome any and all feedback, suggestions, thoughts, comments, revelations, constructive criticism, barely related but interesting tangents, and, of course, high-fives. I love exploring these questions and discovering new possibilities, and I hope you will join me.

Executive Summary

The ground beneath us as religious leaders is shifting. The expectation that Americans will go to church on Sunday has been eroded by politics, scandal, and an overall decline in our confidence in institutions, while the social role that religion has played in marking life transitions and reinforcing geographically and culturally similar communities is a mismatch with the world of the Millennial generation. As a result, more than a third of those under age 30 do not have any religious affiliation, and religiosity across all demographics is in decline. These trends in both practice and affiliation are led by Millennials, *even as they report theological beliefs that are similar to other generations*'.

While Unitarian Universalism mirrors these broader societal trends, it faces a unique challenge in that many of our members are those who have left more Mainline Protestant or conservative Christian faiths. But today, rather than finding our congregations, these people are leaving religion altogether. This is complicated by the difficulty we UUS have had in retaining the youth who grow up in our congregations, once they become adults. Though not as disastrous as it is sometimes reported, nor unique to Unitarian Universalism, this trend among UU young adults may share a common cause with the national disconnect between Millennials and religious organizations in general—namely, the gulf between our values and our practice.

At a time when disenchantment with religious conservatism has driven so many from church, it might seem that Unitarian Universalism has a unique potential in the American religious marketplace. We certainly share many of the values of the religious “nones”—those who report no religious affiliation. However, we have struggled to have our message break through the media noise and clutter.

A good place to start might be updating our communications approaches—for example, by leveraging high-profile UUs to better articulate how their faith informs their life, and by engaging with multimedia, social media, and viral media. We must also continue our efforts to become more welcoming of people from different backgrounds in our religious communities, which is a high priority for the diverse and open Millennial generation.

But in addition to getting better at projecting who we are, we need to reevaluate whom we consider to be a UU at all, given that the Millennial generation is a mobile one with multiple allegiances and identities. The traditional dichotomy of member/non-member could be expanded to include a continuum of membership, with a range of ways to be involved to accommodate different levels of availability and comfort, and with ever-increasing opportunities to make a deeper commitment to our faith. We might look to political or advocacy campaigns, or even UU camps and conferences, for good models of this type of participation.

The ways that we relate to one another as UUs have been the subject of deep conversation over the past few years, often under the umbrella term of our “covenant.” If we understand this conversation on covenant as one that helps us focus on our priorities and practice rather than as an internal, theoretical discourse, then it may be able to help us translate our values into the lived experience of our congregations. This is the key to standing out in the crowded American media sphere and to attracting Millennials who are attuned to authenticity and hypocrisy.

There is some excellent research on what religious communities who embody the open, integrated, and principled character that Millennials value look like. Both qualitative surveys of UU and liberal Christian young adults and case studies of congregations of different faiths with strong young adult representation show us what is possible. Indeed, there are many examples of UU faith communities and congregations succeeding in the same way. Some of our most prominent projects, including the Standing on the Side of Love campaign and the Our Whole Lives lifespan sexuality program, share these values and, though they are not congregations themselves, present tremendous opportunities to appeal to spiritually inclined Millennials.

In the coming decades, religious institutions will likely continue to grow unevenly. Congregations who excel will grow and flourish on one end of the spectrum, while innovative modes of spiritual engagement will proliferate at the other end. These two types of faith communities will thrive because of their success in helping people live and exemplify our deepest and most compelling religious values. However, many more congregations in the middle who are not outstanding or exemplary will probably find it hard to sustain themselves as their long-term supporters in older generations age into new stages of life.

Outreach and support for the Millennial generation in Unitarian Universalism has largely resided in programs for youth and young adults, areas that are vibrant but inconsistent ministries within our Association. Even as we continue to support youth and young adult ministries, there are strategies we can implement to prepare the wider faith to welcome and reach out to the Millennials and to push more of our communities toward the two fertile ends of the faith spectrum. Some strategies we might consider:

- *Accelerate innovation by empowering innovators.* We do not yet know what will be the most effective approaches for adapting our faith to the realities of the Millennial generation, but the UUA should and indeed has already started to be the “wind beneath the wings” of inspired innovators in our faith communities.
- *Encourage congregations as hubs of innovation.* Congregations are ideally situated to be launching pads for faithful experiments large and small, in ways that actually reinforce the core of their membership. Helping local congregational leaders learn how to surf the tides of change is a critical skill for our faith movement.

- *Help committed faithful communities evolve.* The niche that each congregation can fill will differ based on its regional and social context. We should remain open to congregations serving new roles in their communities, while we continue to inspire and assist our congregations with embracing new ways of doing business. The UUA can also mirror best practices by adopting an open-source, curated approach to getting valuable tools and resources into the hands of congregational leaders at the right time, and using a variety of media and online platforms.
- *Tell our story.* We are more similar in structure to Mainline Protestant faiths than we may realize, but they are not our competition for membership and participation. Instead, we are competing with an infinite number of meaningful secular groups and activities on Sunday mornings or weekday evenings. We need to be on the same page about our story and purpose as UUs and what we have to offer the world. Proclaiming *who we are*, rather than telling people they should join our churches, will be how we attract interest and attention.

This paper focuses on Millennials within Unitarian Universalism because this large generation poses particular challenges for religious institutions. However, the changes that would make us more attractive for Millennials, such as aligning our values with our practice, projecting our identity into the world, and embracing new forms of spiritual expression, are ones that are hungered for by UUs old and young alike. Beyond self-preservation, it is our call as people of faith to find new relevance in the changing American religious landscape and to spread our healing message for generations to come.

The World We Live In

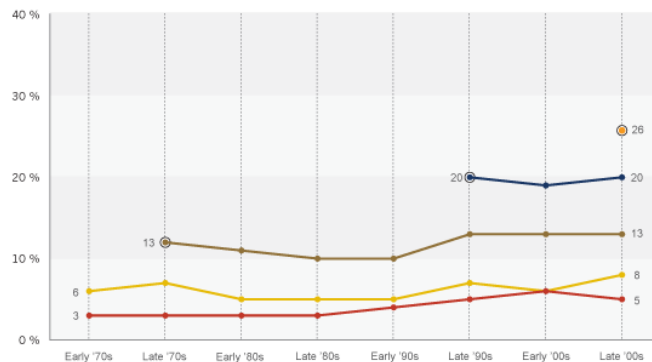
Over the past few years, the national conversation on the changing nature of religiosity in the United States has built to a crescendo.¹ This transformation in religious practices, assumptions, and institutions is being felt in every corner of the religious sphere and is concentrated in the generational shift away from traditional religious expressions—a shift that is being led by the Millennials.

Today we see a big transition, as people move away from post-war, traditional forms of organized religion and toward the unaffiliated, or those who identify as “spiritual but not religious.” Millennials attend church even less than their parents did at the same age, with fewer than 18 percent attending weekly services.² More and more members of the Millennial generation describe themselves as disconnected from religion, or identify as one of the religious “nones.”

While confusing if you say it out loud (nuns?), the term “nones” describes people who respond to survey questions by saying that they have no religious identity or affiliation (i.e., “none of the above”). The “nones” incorporate a broad and diverse group that now totals 33 million Americans.³ They vary in terms of age, geography, gender, ethnicity, class, and a number of other measures.^{4,5} They delve into the unique relationship with religion found in many racial and ethnic minority communities (Black Protestant churches, Latino Catholic parishes, etc.), the different responses to religiously liberal versus conservative groups, religion’s impact on politics, and more.

It is also important to note that when discussions around trends in American religion address the changing nature of religious involvement from that of previous generations, what we consider “normal,” or our starting point for such a claim, is actually a historical anomaly. In the decades following World War II, the United States saw a huge upswing in religiosity and denominational involvement. Led by returning GIs and their wives who had yet to enter the workforce, middle class Americans were founding congregations left and right in the new suburbia. Weekly church attendance surged from 31 to 51 percent between 1950 and 1957.⁶

Young People Less Religiously Affiliated
Percent unaffiliated with a religion, by generation



Source: General Social Surveys.

Question Wording: What is your religious preference?
Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion or no religion?

● Millennial (born 1981 or later)
● Gen X (born 1965-80)
● Boomer (born 1946-64)
● Silent (born 1928-45)
● Greatest (born before 1928)
○ Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Religion in the Millennial Generation, February 2010

In other words, our expectations of individual congregations regarding their organization, priorities, and available resources, and indeed the construction of many of our UU church buildings themselves (outside of New England), are a product of a particular moment in history that represented a high-water mark of institutional commitment and devotion. (I recall one of the elders in my home church in Columbus, Ohio, telling me about when the congregation, founded in the 1940s, built its first building in the 1970s. The bank representative showed up one Sunday and required each family to sign a \$10,000 equity stake in the project!)

To illustrate this phase, consider the tenure of American Unitarian Association president Frederick May Eliot, who, under his leadership from 1937 to 1958 (prior to the 1961 merger with the Universalists), saw adult membership in the denomination grow by 75 percent.⁷ Yet, given the trends at the time, it would have been unusual *not* to see dramatic increases in membership and involvement during those years.

Eliot's leadership helped create the administrative structure and feel that continues to this day in the organization of the UUA and the relationships between congregations. However, we now know that these relationships and expectations reflect a specific past era more than a fixed notion sustained throughout history of how a denomination behaves.

Keeping this recent history in mind, for our discussion of today's trends, there are two critical points to highlight:

- Despite the diversity among the religious “nones,” they can be divided into two big and roughly equal groups. Lim, MacGregor, and Putnam (2010) describe the two groups as “liminal nones” and “secular nones,”⁸ and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (another great resource for data on American religious practice) breaks up respondents who are unaffiliated into “atheist/agnostic” and “nothing in particular.”⁹
 - The liminal “nones” are so-named because their religious identity is in flux; for example, they might be married to a spouse with a stronger religious affiliation, so the intensity of their own religious identity may change from year to year. This group includes many members of Generation X and the Baby Boom, whose religious participation has declined in recent years. Liminal “nones” tend to be a bit older and to have more socio-economic and racial diversity.
 - Secular “nones” are more fixed in their lack of religious connection, and they generally report lower measures of religiosity, such as belief in God or daily prayer. This group comprises more members of the Millennial generation, among whom a staggering 33 percent identify as having no religious affiliation.¹⁰ Secular “nones” tend to be younger and more educated.¹¹

- This brings us to the second point, which is how robust this trend is. Every major poll, including the ones conducted by Putnam and Campbell, the highly respected Pew Research Center,¹² the General Social Survey,¹³ and the American Religious Identification Survey,¹⁴ confirms this shift away from religious identity, and its development has been documented for at least the past decade.¹⁵ The trend has only been increasing as Millennials age toward becoming the dominant adult generation. This is the new religious landscape in America, and we need to respond to it.

However, the fact that the “nones” are here to stay does not mean that we are headed toward a European-style secularism. In fact, Millennials’ theological beliefs regarding the existence of God, the inerrancy of scripture, or the afterlife are largely consistent with Americans of other ages and generations.¹⁶ Millennials are not hostile to religious activity, per se; in fact, 76 percent agree that Christianity generally espouses good principles and values.¹⁷ Instead, the root of the drift away from organized religion is a dissatisfaction with religious institutions themselves.¹⁸ Large numbers of Millennials do not believe that Christianity or religion in general shares *their* core values and beliefs, and this is particularly true for members of the Millennial generation who are most sympathetic to the liberal values and principles of Unitarian Universalism. Among Millennials, 84 percent describe Christianity as judgmental and hypocritical, 79 percent say that Christianity is anti-gay, and 73 percent claim that Christianity is too involved in politics. This dynamic will come as no surprise to those of us who grew up not with the proclamation of the social gospel, anti-Communism, or the Civil Rights struggles, but rather with the moralistic and overtly political Religious Right. Putnam and Campbell ascribe this to a “second backlash,” a response to the ascendancy of conservative evangelical Christianity in the 1970s and ’80s.¹⁹ Coupled with the numerous clergy misconduct scandals over the past few decades, it is clear that trust in the value of religious institutions is quickly ebbing.

Millennials also display an overall lack of confidence in traditional institutions, from government to major corporations,²⁰ which likely amplifies this distaste for denominational organizations. The UUA and its member congregations are institutions in the same mold, with a proliferation of bylaws, committees, and officers. Ironically, rather than support the institution’s long-term health as they were designed to do, these structures can often weigh down our faith organizations with processes that were designed for another era and thus have little impact today. An institutional feel can make it difficult for local churches to develop a distinct and organic identity, which is a critical component for every congregation working to align its mission, vision, and operations in a manner that clearly communicates its values to the broader community.²¹

Being clear about our values is critical for a religious organization because, as Putnam and Campbell point out, Americans are attracted to congregations that share their values and beliefs.²² “Church shopping” is a familiar phrase, however, as anyone who

has tried it can tell you, what keeps you coming back is the people you meet. Putnam and Campbell confirm that feeling like you belong—that you have social connections and feel comfortable with the dominant culture—is the key factor in determining whether new worshippers return to a congregation they visit.²³ This research demonstrates that cultural and social ties are the glue that holds American congregations together, even as churches' outward reason for being is primarily theological.²⁴ The difficulty of navigating these two realities makes religious affiliation unstable, because congregations have to succeed in being attractive culturally and theologically to thrive.

Today, fewer than two-thirds of Americans choose to follow their parents' religion,²⁵ including 60 percent of Mainline Protestants and 85 percent of those who adhere to non-Christian faiths and who have either switched or lapsed their religious affiliation. This increasing frequency of religious switching has accelerated the trend of Americans sorting themselves into polarized religious practices and communities that match their values: conservatives moving toward active religious participation in conservative faiths, and liberals moving away from religion altogether.²⁶

When I look at religion in America today, I see a fluid religious marketplace driven by the preferences of Millennials, a more liberal and diverse generation than their parents, who are disenchanted with traditional forms of religion but still open to new experiences that meet their spiritual needs. The next section examines the trend of religious switching in the context of Unitarian Universalism.

How UUs Fit into the Picture

I began this discussion by describing how the Millennial generation is leading a major shift away from traditional churches in America. UUs occupy an interesting place in this shift. We are not a Christian faith, even though we are culturally similar to Mainline Protestant denominations, such as the United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ—for example, in the format of our Sunday services, the way we ordain ministers, and our governance structures. Indeed, I am always surprised when I talk with my colleagues from other denominations to hear that they face the same challenges we face as UUs. Several themes noted in the 1999 UUA Fulfilling the Promise survey could apply to many American religions today: Respondents reported that their congregation matches their values, that they would most miss the community in their church if it went away, and that in their perception, their faith (in this case, Unitarian Universalism) does not reflect any specific racial or cultural identity.²⁷

However, there are also critical differences between UUs and Mainline Protestants. Though our membership is only a fraction of the size of our larger, more frequently-studied ecclesiastical siblings, we still have access to a wealth of data about UUs and our faith. (It turns out, we love to talk about ourselves.)²⁸ One historically enduring distinction is that we are a “religion of choice.” A survey conducted in the early 1970s found that 85–90 percent of members of UU congregations were converts,²⁹ and a 2004 member survey by *UU World* magazine reported that the average UU had only been a church member for 10 years.³⁰ A plurality of our converts have come from Protestant denominations, and most UUs I know can easily recall a story (perhaps our own) of how someone finally found the UU church and thought, *Where has this been all my life?*

For decades, UUs have found a niche in the religious marketplace that offers a home for those searching for a non-dogmatic liberal religious community, seen in our “Uncommon Denomination” and “Is God keeping you from church?” campaigns.³¹ However, when we look toward the future, we see that the theological liberals or anti-authoritarians who found us comfortably at the end of the Mainline Protestant spectrum in the 1970s are today going further and leaving religion altogether.³² This strategy is less likely to serve us well in the future, especially given the progress that most Mainline denominations have made in becoming more welcoming of the spectrum of gender and sexuality and more accommodating of theological questions. Seen in this light, our frustration that so many UU congregations continue to be racially, politically, and socio-economically homogenous, despite our efforts to diversify over the past decade, makes even more sense.

One aspect that I want to address carefully is how our identity as a religion of converts relates to the youth who grow up in our churches. I have heard UUs criticize our churches countless times for losing 9 out of 10 youth who are raised UU, an inversion of the 90 percent conversion statistic noted above. However, this is a misleading conclusion for a number of reasons. First, these two estimates are not mathematically

equivalent and do not take into account the normal membership churn of our churches, which seem to have a fair number of people both coming in and exiting our faith each year. Second, as I highlighted earlier, a majority of Americans today are leaving the church of their childhood, so the fact that UUs have a retention issue (which is clearly a serious problem) may be a broader feature of religious institutions in this country rather than one specific to Unitarian Universalism.

Most importantly, while official “membership” numbers have been relatively flat over the past decade, the number of Americans who claim to be UU has risen 27 percent since 1990.³³ This would be consistent with adding a few thousand young adult UUs each year, a reasonable estimate of the number of graduates generated from our religious education annual enrollment estimates of 50,000–60,000. As UUs, we count our official members in a uniquely limited way that systematically excludes those who are often at the periphery of our congregations, including our youth and young adults. While other faiths refer to average weekly attendance, or the number of families in the parish, UUs insist on using reported congregational members as our primary definition of the size of our faith. Since these figures are also used to determine congregational dues to the UUA, there is a clear incentive to keep these numbers low. My guess is that overall our footprint in American culture is increasing, even if that translates into uneven growth in the vitality of our religious communities, where some are shrinking and others blossoming.³⁴

The difference between those who identify themselves as UUs and our official membership counts, which inspired President Morales’s *Congregations and Beyond* initiative,³⁵ says to me that while we are actually pretty good at instilling a faithful identity, we may be less successful at putting our lofty ideals into practice, and thus we fail to retain the youth who were steeped in those values.³⁶

Research conducted through the ongoing National Study on Youth and Religion shows that high school students who retain their faith into adulthood tend to have strong intergenerational relationships with adults, the expectation of faithful practice at home, and memorable personal experiences.³⁷ I think it is fair to say that Unitarian Universalism has offered memorable experiences for our youth through groups, camps, and conferences, and we have gotten better at intergenerational relationships in the past few years as our faith has embraced multigenerational ministry. Our leaders have worked diligently over the past few years to better integrate our youth into the heart of our faith communities by enacting the multigenerational, multicultural recommendations of such publications as *Full Circle: Fifteen Ways to Grow Lifelong UUs*.³⁸

However, my impression is that we have a long way to go in terms of faith practice at home. As a religion of converts, many of our parents have arrived in our congregations with a general suspicion of religion and have been reluctant to establish diligent spiritual practices with their children.³⁹ Parent devotion is still a huge determinant of a child’s

religious retention,⁴⁰ even though inherited religious affiliation may soon be surpassed by individual choice in terms of its impact on religious participation.⁴¹

Though it is inherently difficult to gain concrete information on why people leave our churches, we know that part of the problem has been the segregation of youth programs in the past few decades, a dynamic identified in the UUA's 2007 Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth.⁴² Left to their own devices under the aegis of "youth empowerment," generations of active UU youth developed their own subculture. The free-form organization of youth groups, the intimate and informal worship style, and the kinetic, creative expression of faith can make a deep impression on and foster profound spiritual connections among our youth. However, because they are siloed off from the rest of congregational life (youth groups often meet during the Sunday morning worship and have little contact with congregational leaders), there is no pathway between this experience and the reality of weekly life as an adult in a typical UU church.

In fact, youth have stated that adult life in congregations is so different from their previous experience (the "downstairs" youth group groove vs. the "upstairs" corporate worship of the congregation, with services that can seem stuffy, boring, bureaucratic, and spiritually unfulfilling), they have little interest in participating. In addition, adult members, the vast majority of whom did not grow up as UUs, often bring spiritual wounds with them to our congregations that can stifle more creative religious expression. And while the cognitive and hormonal context of adolescent development is a key contributor to the intensity of the youth group experience, nonetheless, these critiques levied by our youth have a ring of truth.

On its face, this pattern for UUs is different from the young Christians in the United States who leave their churches. The criticisms they most commonly cite are an anti-science bias, a judgmental approach (especially toward sexuality), theological rigidity, and closed-mindedness.⁴³ These all seem to be pitfalls that UU congregations, who embrace each individual's free and responsible search for truth, teach *Our Whole Lives* sexuality education and offer Coming of Age programs that include authoring one's own statement of belief, would seem to avoid. Yet regardless of the specifics, both Christian and UU youth seem to be rejecting the institutional feel of a faith that does not value their priorities or embrace their leadership when it might lead away from business as usual.

I suspect that the answers to two key questions—(1) How can we keep our raised UUs within the faith family? and (2) how might we effectively connect with the Millennial "nones"?—will lead us to the same place: a frank appraisal of the value of our current religious communities. These two groups—raised UUs and Millennial "nones"—are clearly demographically similar: young, predominantly white (though this is less true every year), liberal, educated, and middle or professional class.⁴⁴ For our parents' generation, the move away from church was temporary; Baby Boomers found

themselves returning to church when they had kids, a development that is clearly reflected in the rise of our official membership and religious education enrollment figures in the 1990s.

Today we have to ask whether my generation will be another group of boomerang church-goers, and I do not see much evidence that this will be the case. Declining congregations are the ones most likely to have *no* young adults (25 percent, compared to 17 percent for stagnant or growing congregations).⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the traditional markers of adulthood that precipitated this return, such as getting married, having kids, and buying a house, are fading, as today's youth will stretch out these decisions for longer than did previous generations.⁴⁶

So, what if the Millennial generation does not have as many children or get married as often, rendering useless the rites that have traditionally brought us closer to religious institutions—and on top of that is not much interested in belonging to a church in the first place? What if, among those who would have found our congregations 20 or 30 years ago, there is little desire for permanent religious affiliation? Are there opportunities to offer the same affirmation provided through traditional sacraments via new rituals that speak to the challenges of our generation? What is the new niche that Unitarian Universalism would fill?

These are important questions, particularly if UUs want to live up to our self-declared potential of being “a religion for our time.”⁴⁷

The Underlying Dynamics: Challenges and Opportunities

Can Unitarian Universalism become a “religion for our time,” as described by UUA President Rev. Peter Morales? What are the opportunities for UUs, and what challenges do we face?

It seems that Americans on the periphery of organized religion, such as those who describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious,” are interested in spiritual connection if they can find a faithful community that matches their values and openness.⁴⁸ One piece of good news for us is that the burgeoning religiously unaffiliated “nones” tend to share our values, particularly on two of the most salient issues for determining religious affiliation: abortion (72 percent of religious “nones” compared to 49 percent of religiously affiliated Americans) and gay marriage (73 percent versus 41 percent, respectively).⁴⁹ Are there ways we can more prominently assert our UU values in the world, and will this be enough to overcome the bad “brand” that church has become?

Focusing our leadership practices to respond to this challenge requires us to understand that our expectations about the form of religious organizations are not inevitable but rather date from a specific period in time, as discussed earlier—which allows us to ask what a 21st century religious organization *should* look like. For example, the many checks and balances included in the UUA’s governance structure (e.g., Financial Advisor, Commission on Appraisal) were developed to respond to past problems that required the restraining and redirecting of the central administration or denominational leadership. The generations of leaders who designed these structures decades ago built them to control powerful central bureaucracies. Yet today’s Millennials and younger generations live in a world in which so many institutions seem devoid of the very power that would allow them to fully address the problems at hand, as evidenced by our lack of trust in government. Our society has grown too multifaceted and complex for the singular, centralized solutions that our institutions were built to implement. Figuring out what roles institutions can play in a more pluralistic environment will be key to understanding how we as a faith movement can respond to these societal shifts.

We need to consider new organizational structures. For example, one of the most respected and emulated congregations, the 5,000-member Ginghamburg United Methodist Church of Tipp City, Ohio, which hosts the Change the World conference,⁵⁰ promotes a minimalist structure of only three standing committees and a small leadership board.⁵¹

We also need to reconsider what it means to “get our message out,” moving beyond traditional print publications and investing in interpersonal connections, existing venues and networks, and key influencers among prominent figures who share our values.⁵² In a world that distrusts conventional institutions, it makes little sense to use parallel conventional modes of communication. Instead, we should seek to insert ourselves into

the currents of information already moving through well-known blogs, TED talks, and major conferences. Prominent UUs, such as Zach Wahls and Melissa Harris-Perry, could be encouraged to be more vocal about their UU identity. Our most successful ministers and theologians could be invited to find new ways to speak to audiences broader than just their own congregations.

My generation is inherently skeptical of advertising and formal communication channels, which are geared toward getting us to *do* or *buy* something. Effective communication in today's media environment will not be focused on attracting people to Unitarian Universalism; instead, through networks of trusted individuals who proclaim *who we are* and *why we are committed to our values*, we will naturally attract those who sympathize with us.

Effectively projecting our identity and values will require use of online and social media, the “highways and byways” of our time,⁵³ and experiments in virtual worshipful spaces, such as the weekly online service hosted by the Church of the Larger Fellowship.⁵⁴ We must also become more comfortable in regularly connecting with our wider community, both as individual UUs and as congregations, through user-friendly websites and platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. Rev. Carol Howard Merritt, in her popular book *Tribal Church*,⁵⁵ points out that online engagement has become the water we swim in. If we want to connect with the Millennial generation, we need to use their communication style: 98 percent of adults under 40 are online⁵⁶ and 83 percent use social networking.⁵⁷

Such approaches may pay off for those other than Millennials. For example, a committee with a new young adult member may move its long-standing meeting time or try convening virtually to accommodate the young adult's work schedule—but meeting in more flexible ways may well make membership on the committee easier for people of all ages.

In the 2013 Minns Lecture series on the “Age of Collaboration,” Rev. Naomi King described a church's website as its new front door and social media as its lobby.⁵⁸ Her co-presenter Peter Bowden noted that most of our Sunday visitors have already “pre-qualified” themselves by scoping out our churches online before ever showing up in person. Together, they emphasized that speaking the language of social media is a powerful signal to the networked Millennial generation that yes, our religious communities have something relevant to offer them. How, they ask, could we selfishly withhold our message from those who do not already know about us by ignoring these critical avenues of communication, if we truly believe that the message is profoundly important for personal well-being and spiritual salvation?

Earlier, I discussed how Americans are initially attracted to congregations based on those churches' public image and values, but then choose to stay because of the relationships they build and the level of comfort they feel. Through initiatives such as

Welcoming Congregations, UUs have certainly gotten better at being clear that we want the entire human rainbow to feel like they have a place in our congregations—but we still have further to go. The experience of entering our congregations for the first time can be quite different from the values we espouse, which is often a product of the cultural homogeneity that is as common in our churches as it is in other faiths. When my office created a tongue-in-cheek poster of things not to say to young adults during coffee hour and posted it on our blog and shared it on Facebook, it received thousands of views in only a few days, from UUs as well as Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Congregationalists.⁵⁹ Commenters confirmed that these awkward interactions are indeed a regular nuisance across a wide range of religious communities.

Getting better at welcoming is a first step, but learning how to pay attention to the customs of music, conversational references, humor, dress, decoration, language, and other cultural elements that send subtle signals about who “belongs” here will be key to opening up our faithful communities to a broader diversity of members and friends. In the past decade, UUs have noticed and tried to act on the lack of certain types of diversity in our congregations, especially racial, ethnic, gender (and gender identity), sexual orientation, and class diversity.

Beyond affirming the intrinsic social justice value of challenging the inequity of segregation in our neighborhoods and social circles, I want to make two additional points about the importance of diversity in all respects in our congregations:

- First, the Millennial generation is itself more diverse than previous generations and highly values acceptance of difference.⁶⁰ This diversity includes faith practice; the rise of such groups as the Interfaith Youth Core⁶¹ emphasizes the importance that Millennials place on creating space for different modes of spiritual expression. It is not enough to simply share these values—we must be able to communicate them if we want to appeal to this cohort. I dream of a time where church is where we go to learn intercultural skills and awareness. Congregations may not be the hubs of diversity we dream of, but they can surely be training grounds for navigating the veils of identity and otherness that separate us.
- Second, and perhaps more importantly, the presence of diversity is what allows the fullness of humanity to emerge. I believe the theological diversity that is already present in our congregations is what makes us really feel able to pursue our own *free and responsible search for truth*. If we cannot find expressions of our faith that make sense to those outside our own limited cultural context, we will miss out on the opportunity to build new and meaningful relationships and to fulfill our own individual potential.

Does our time need a religion at all, or does it call for something different? The opportunities and challenges described in this section, including pursuing networked

communication and paying attention to the lived experience in our congregations, point away from growth as a way of maintaining existing institutions and toward a model of engagement that is more like a movement, or a political or advocacy campaign. Such a model is clear about its aspirations and priorities while constantly adapting its strategies in the face of shifting realities, always making room for more allies to join. It may also be part of our answer to the question posed about the form our leadership may take to be most effective; community or political organizing is always about mobilizing groups of people to effect change in diverse and complex environments.

The campaign analogy is also instructive because it offers a different way to conceptualize membership and participation. Anyone who has had contact with a well-organized campaign knows that organizers are ready to welcome you no matter your background, and they find a way to get you involved that fits your time and energy. Among campaign leaders, the mission, issue, or candidate is so important that they do not waste time asking potential volunteers “Are you one of us?” Instead, the only question is, “How can we get you more connected to this cause that we share?” And there is always a way you can do more—a new role or task you can assume if you want to take the next step and deepen your commitment.

This continuity is no accident. A campaign closely monitors its volunteers, and a good field organizer not only knows what the next potential level of commitment could be for each person but also tries to guide them toward that next level. For major races, these levels of volunteer leadership are built into the campaign plan from the beginning, with targets set for how many people need to be in which types of roles, by when, in order to succeed. Campaigns design pathways for volunteer involvement that are grounded in models of marketing and social influence, such as the “purchase funnel.”⁶² These models of the “consumer decision journey” describe how individuals affiliate and come to make personal and financial commitments.

For example:

- A campaign may expect to get 10,000 volunteer sign ups from its website, canvassing, and campaign events.
- Of those, half may eventually show up for a volunteer shift making phone calls or door-knocking.
- A quarter of these active volunteers may become core volunteers, who can be counted on for regular participation; this group will get invited to special events with the candidate or campaign leadership and will recruit their friends to volunteer.
- Five percent of these folks may rise to be volunteer leaders, coordinating other volunteers at campaign offices.

Campaigns measure everything they do, from the phone calls made and doors knocked on to the number of people who hear their radio ads. In particular, campaigns focus on contacts with marginal voters, because research has shown that *peer interactions are*

the most powerful way to change opinions and behaviors. However, campaigns also model the clear sense of purpose necessary to keep these numbers in perspective. The goal is to win an election, and voter contacts are closely watched and measured because experience has shown that this is a necessary step toward achieving the goal.

When we as religious leaders talk about the importance of growth, it is often from the perspective of trying to shore up our declining institutions. But growth for growth's sake ignores the underlying mission of our faith that the institutions are meant to serve, which is individual and collective transformation toward greater love, understanding, truth, and justice.

Could we conceive of religious involvement in this way—as a welcoming continuum of ways to live our values rather than the dichotomy of member/non-member that we currently use? Many of our successful congregations already conceive of membership in this way, as a path of faith development rather than a singular act pivoting on completing a pledge form or signing a book.⁶³ It is an approach that appeals to Millennials because we have multiple overlapping commitments and identities in our lives. The labor market leads more of us to move more often and switch jobs every few years. Our open and fluid spiritual opportunities are a far cry from the post-war notion of religious membership, in which the church was your primary social community and you joined a church for life.

This notion of religious participation may seem a long way off, but some of our most moving personal experiences currently operate this way. UU camps and conferences, including gatherings such as the Southeast and Southwest Unitarian Universalist Summer Institutes with thousands of UU families, as well as smaller gatherings at our meditative retreat centers, such as The Mountain and Star Island, are perfect examples. Our district and regional youth conferences, or “cons,” are not based on a defined membership status, but instead are a community of peers who meet a few times per year to create an intentional space of acceptance and affirmation. Youth leaders think of their role as being responsible for tending the spiritual and emotional climate of the gathering rather than maintaining specific programs or structures.

Participation in Unitarian Universalism, since it does not require a singular profession of faith, has often been considered contingent on formal membership in a UUA congregation. This reflects our congregational polity, our belief that denominational authority flows from an individual's freely made commitment. Our polity is literally rooted in governmental structure from the historic Standing Order of Massachusetts, in which towns were based on religious parishes. Today, we retain a flavor of these political roots with the modern version of congregational polity that forms the UUA's bylaws and governance structure. In his study of congregational polity, Conrad Wright notes, “Congregationalism has proved to be more durable and adaptable to changing times than any of the doctrinal formulations.”⁶⁴ What shape could congregational polity take in the future that would make more room for different types of individual

commitments, freely made? Could we conceive of an interpretation of congregational polity that affirms new ways of getting involved?

We know that the nature of membership in organizations is changing. The UUA's Commission on Appraisal identified these tectonic shifts years ago in its 2001 report on "Belonging":

*A key concept underlying this report is our understanding of membership as a process. . . . Transformation is the fundamental purpose of and reason for a religion of seriousness and depth. What we have called the process of membership is such a process, leading from superficial levels of identity and affiliation to deeper levels of commitment, to true membership.*⁶⁵

While these shifts are well-known to the youth and young adults in our faith, we have struggled to figure out what they mean in practice.

Ultimately, I would boil down the notion of this change to a shift away from exclusive "who" questions (Who counts as a UU? Who do our leaders serve? Who should have access to church resources? Who were the Unitarians in the White House?) toward more inclusive "how" questions (How can we live our values? How can we find meaningful spiritual community? How can we make a difference in our world?) and powerful "why" questions (Why do we embrace the principles of our faith?). Asking how a person would experience our community when he or she first looks at our website, walks through our front door, or responds to a check-in after a year of congregational membership is critical for us to keep in mind every day as religious leaders. Making time to remember the fundamental reason for our existence as a faith movement, and tying it back to every decision we make, is indispensable in living out that mission.

The emphasis on practice over person is seen in the resurgence in discussion of our covenant as UUs. A "covenant," the term we use to describe the faithful promises we make to one another, is a tool for looking at the "how" of our religious organizations and communities. Discussions of our covenant are cropping up across our religious venues,⁶⁶ from the 2013 Minns Lecture series mentioned earlier, to the 2012 Berry Street lecture by Fred Muir on the transition from iChurch to the Beloved Community,⁶⁷ to the priorities of the UUA Board of Trustees,⁶⁸ to the 2013 General Assembly theme of "From Promise to Commitment."⁶⁹ The conversation on covenant has been an abiding but oft-overlooked aspect of the heart of our faith, as Rev. Alice Blair Wesley described in 2000.⁷⁰ To UUs who grew up in a UU congregation or youth group, the act of making a covenant as an opening of any new gathering is a familiar one, holding up the aspirations for our time together and the commitments we each undertake to help make those aspirations real.

Keeping our covenant vibrant by avoiding group-think will require us to seek out new relationships with people who are different from ourselves. This type of outreach can highlight the cultural barriers we have erected between our easy way of doing things and the beloved community we seek, and is also key to our recognition of the value of diversity in our faith communities.

Connecting with those from other faith and cultural traditions may also require adapting the language of “covenant,” which holds such specific meaning for UUs, to a broader context. Indeed, our internal conversation around covenant can all too easily slide into solipsism. Instead of focusing on the end product of the community created by a covenant, which by definition excludes some people no matter how inclusive we may claim to be, reorienting our discussion toward the skills and habits that are required to sustain such a community may be a more fruitful application. This is the gift of our churches: that we may learn and practice the skills necessary to pursue the beloved community, not that our churches themselves represent the highest realization of this aspiration.

In this way, the language of covenantal habits is useful because it gives us a familiar framework for examining the “lived experience” of our religious communities, the critical element for Millennials who are evaluating churches. For example:

- Does coffee hour display our welcoming imperative?
- Can worship services evoke a visceral connection with the divine mystery?
- Will chalice circle discussion groups offer meaningful opportunities for interpersonal connection?
- Do meetings of the Parish Committee or Board of Trustees display the highest calling of our leaders?

If our churches do not embody our principles and offer concrete expressions of our spirituality, they will never have a clear enough identity to stand out in contemporary American culture and will simply be known as shells of inherited institutions.

One of my favorite descriptions of this dynamic comes from Frank Mercadente, a Catholic youth ministry consultant, who refers to “Immanuelization,” or making incarnate the word of God:

[The] church must communicate the gospel experientially. In other words, we must operate as the embodied and experiential presence of Jesus. We can't just talk about God's love, we've got to be God's love.⁷¹

A translation for non-Christian UUs might be that we have to feel the spirit, the power, and the mystery when we are present in religious community. It is, indeed, why people seek us out in the first place.

We can also extend this approach to our denominational structures and organization. The bylaws, committees, and officers of our Association interpret and reinforce the priorities of our faith, and inspiration for local congregational leaders emanates from large gatherings of UUs, such as General Assembly, that are hosted by the UUA and its districts and regions. Shifting the practices in congregations is most possible when the UUA itself models a new way of doing business. And in fact, there are innumerable ways in which the UUA is making this shift right now. Though it may not be apparent on the outside, internally our staff and leadership have embraced a culture of breaking down silos and learning and experimenting with new tools and approaches.

To be clear, the electric divine connection that we seek through faith is not dependent on our very human structures achieving daily perfection. Indeed, making room for brokenness, failing, suffering, and struggle is essential for opening ourselves up to greater revelation, or even salvation, and our most successful faith communities ensure that this message present in everything they do.⁷² Rather, it should be obvious that when confronted with challenges and disappointments, UUs individually and collectively search for deep meaning to guide their actions and follow through on that spiritual impulse.

Show me a church or faith that is growing, and I will show you a church with a vibrant covenant, visible in the communication and practices of everyday congregational life. Focusing on the quality of relationships within our faith communities as the foundation for spiritual growth, especially when struggle and pain are present, is not just important for our own vitality; having personal ties, through friendship and family, to regular discussion of religious values is the *single strongest predictor* of non-religious volunteering, civic participation, and philanthropy.⁷³ Or, to put it another way: Living our covenant may be the key to changing our entire world.

A Path Forward

A few decades ago, religious organizations had to successfully answer the question “Which church?” if they wanted to grow and prosper. Today, we theological liberals must answer the question “Why church at all?” if we want to be sustained. The religious “nones” of the Millennial generation may be spiritual seekers, but unlike their Baby Boomer parents or World War II-generation grandparents, they do not always see church as an institution that can help them on their journey. Since Millennials do articulate the importance of spirituality and a desire to connect, how can religious communities meet that need?

What are Millennials looking for? Two in-depth reports, based on interviews with spiritually inclined Millennials in liberal religious communities, illustrate the importance of spiritual communities that clearly embody their deepest principles, are committed to values of justice and inclusion, and provide profound worshipful experiences:

- The *Report on Young Adult Ministry*, commissioned by the UUA’s Massachusetts Bay District in 2010, is based on surveys and interviews with young adult UUs. It describes young adults with strong individual beliefs but an openness to new ideas, who highly value spiritual and worshipful engagement, and who are “hungry for lived spiritual communities.”⁷⁴ Young adults are looking for religious venues that offer them the chance of “being in a community of spiritual seekers, transforming the world and oneself, [and] music and rituals . . .”⁷⁵
- *Doing Church and Doing Justice*, a report on the young adults who attend Middle Collegiate Church (a diverse, liberal Christian church on Manhattan’s Lower East Side), highlights Millennials’ desire for a church that is at the forefront of social justice, is fully committed to racial, ethnic, gender, and sexuality inclusion, and promotes an atmosphere of openness and acceptance. The report also emphasizes the importance of having a fluid approach to membership (with no pressure to participate in a certain way), maintaining a consistently worshipful space, and offering an inspiring and thought-provoking message that avoids political vitriol.⁷⁶

What would a religious community that achieves these aspirations look like? Could it be more responsive to the shifts seen in American families and individual lifestyles? The Changing Spirituality of Emerging Adults (Changing SEA) project,⁷⁷ a study of successful Christian ministry with young adults, offers congregational models for us to consider, including emergent, accessible, and contemporary/missional churches. We are already seeing examples within our faith of the types of churches profiled by the Changing SEA project.

Emergent churches comprise a loosely connected movement across Protestant denominations that emphasize inclusive theology, anti-institutional and anti-hierarchical

organization, and a focus on participatory and ritual-based worship that channels the feeling of the early Christian church.⁷⁸ The Changing SEA project profiled one example of such a church, The Crossing, an Episcopal emergent community in Boston.⁷⁹ Another new emergent-style worship group led by UU young adults called The Sanctuary has begun meeting in Boston and Cambridge.⁸⁰

Accessible congregations are more traditional in form but have succeeded in making themselves attractive and welcoming to young adults. Key to this transition has been gaining a critical mass of young adults involved in church life, which both helps new young adult worshippers feel welcome and encourages existing younger members to reach out to their friends.⁸¹ Two UU congregations that exemplify this approach are the First Unitarian Congregational Society of Brooklyn, New York,⁸² and the First Unitarian Church of Providence, Rhode Island.⁸³ Both are traditional-feeling congregations who, through active outreach to local colleges and cultivating substantial numbers of young adults who regularly attend services, have integrated young adults into the life and leadership of the church.⁸⁴

Contemporary or missional congregations are exploring new models of church altogether. The category of “missional congregations” can include any religious community that is experimenting with new ways to spread its values and its message beyond the historical norm.⁸⁵ For example, the Changing SEA project describes the sweeping programs of New Life Fellowship in Queens, New York, which include youth leadership development, a food and clothing pantry, a health center, and family ministry; in addition, many of its programs are organized under a community development corporation framework.⁸⁶ Another new missional UU community is The Sanctuaries in Washington, D.C., a kindred spirit to the Boston group. Describing itself as “a new multicultural movement of spiritually creative people,”⁸⁷ groups (“sanctuaries”) across the city worship, eat, and engage in creative expression together.⁸⁸

The Changing SEA project also investigates religious spaces and intentional living communities that are not congregations at all but may have similar goals to a missional congregation. These groups include college campus centers, young adult events, and gatherings sponsored by multiple local churches or religious organizations. One example from our own UU faith family is the Lucy Stone Cooperative, a housing cooperative in Roxbury, Massachusetts, which offers a savvy and sustainable model of housing grounded in UU principles.⁸⁹

In addition to models for congregational growth and new modes of congregational organization, Unitarian Universalism has already invested in several other approaches to religious community that could be key to leveraging our faith’s attractiveness to skeptical Millennials. For example:

- **Standing on the Side of Love (SSL):**⁹⁰ Encompassing our unified messaging around social justice issues and activism, the UUA’s SSL campaign has been

successful in raising the profile of UUs around such high-profile issues as immigration reform and marriage equality. The fact that the campaign does not lead with its denominational affiliation (though it is clearly articulated on the website) has made it accessible to thousands of people across the country who agree with the core message but would never have become official church members. With a renewed emphasis on volunteer organizing, the SSL campaign could demonstrate the type of membership continuum presented earlier.

- **Our Whole Lives (OWL):**⁹¹ This lifespan series of sexuality curricula, co-authored by the UUA and the United Church of Christ, is known as the gold standard among sexuality educators. OWL's non-judgmental and values-based approaches to relationships, sexual health, and human development are outstanding examples of how we as UUs have put our faith in practice, and its flagship program for grades 7–9 has become a rite of passage among UU youth. The young adult program is perfect for groups on college campuses.⁹²
- **Quest for Meaning:**⁹³ As the public face of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, Quest for Meaning has created a meaningful digital worshipful space for thousands of spiritual seekers and formal church members. This experimental approach, which includes an engaging website, weekly online worship, and social media small-group ministry, is already yielding valuable insights into the possibilities of virtual spiritual community.
- **Beloved Café:**⁹⁴ The brainchild of UUs in the San Francisco area, the Beloved Café project (projected to open in the next year or so) makes delicious, ethically sourced food available in an atmosphere that promotes community organizing and social justice activism.
- **Unitarian Universalist College of Social Justice (UUCSJ):**⁹⁵ UUCSJ is a collaborative program between the UUA and the UU Service Committee (not an actual college) that aspires to “help Unitarian Universalists deepen and sustain the work of justice in their congregations and communities.”⁹⁶ High-quality service-learning experiences are structured around a common spiritual framework. One of UUCSJ's priorities is to make such projects accessible to young adults and seminary students.
- **Camps and conference centers:**⁹⁷ Independently run and deeply rooted in our faith, UU camps and conference centers offer a wide array of family-oriented leadership development and spiritual deepening opportunities. For those UUs who attend the same camp each summer, camps may be their central spiritual experience.

Each of these approaches embody our core principles of respecting the inherent worth and dignity of every person; pursuing a free and responsible search for truth; affirming

justice, equity, and compassion; and embracing the interdependent web of existence; yet, not one of them is predicated on a Sunday morning church service or an up-to-date financial pledge. Most, in fact, maintain an identity of purpose that is independent of their denominational affiliation and speaks to *what they are doing*, not merely *with whom they are associated*. It is particularly easy to imagine the program offerings of UUCSJ, OWL and our camps and conference centers appealing to a broader audience and perhaps serving as an entry point into Unitarian Universalism. One example of this approach is Create Meaning, started to congregations in the Denver area to offer adult faith formation classes and opportunities to the community at large.⁹⁸ Imagine what our faith would look like if each approach had hundreds of thousands of participants within and outside our congregations.

The excitement about these new expressions of our religious values should not overwhelm the fact that there are also vibrant, flourishing traditional UU congregations in which Millennials are well-represented. It is no accident that the list of the UUA's Breakthrough Congregations, a distinction based on numerical growth, is a who's-who of some of our most engaging and spiritually integrated churches, each with their unique and compelling interpretation of our shared faith.⁹⁹ As Rev. James Ford points out, plenty of young adults are uninterested in exploratory spiritual community and instead embrace the historic authenticity of religious ritual, demanding that we "put robes on the choir."¹⁰⁰ Again, as I've mentioned, young adults are themselves a diverse group.

The critical point, however, is that successful churches are those who are doing great ministry and offering valuable worship services and involvement with congregational life (just watch the Breakthrough Congregation videos and prepare to be impressed). This may seem obvious, but two generations ago Americans went to church without needing to be convinced—church-going was a normal and expected part of life for most of us. Sermons did not have to be exceptional, and church reflected the middle-class, middle-brow aspirations of the time. Today, churches are not competing with one another; rather, they are competing with catching up on sleep, going out to brunch, attending a child's soccer game, watching Netflix, or taking a walk in the woods on Sunday morning.

In the next 10–20 years, I see continued growth at either end of the spectrum of religious communities, with exceptional churches that continue to capture the attention of their members and visitors on one end, and new modes of religious expression on the other. But even as these groups thrive and prosper as exemplars of the lived faith, offering the experience of putting our values into practice, the middle of the religious landscape will find it harder and harder to sustain itself. Much of this is purely generational; many congregations that flourished with a core of Silent Generation or Baby Boom members, who are dependent on the deep personal and financial commitment of a small group of individuals who are aging past their time of peak earnings and activity into fixed incomes and declining health, will quickly find themselves without a viable leadership succession plan.¹⁰¹

It is also true that a subset of churches have kept their doors open even as they have utterly failed at creating spiritual community, a trend that seems unlikely to be sustainable for much longer. Here, it is helpful to think of young adults of the Millennial generation as an “indicator species,” a biological term for a species that is only present in healthy ecosystems.¹⁰² Similarly, Millennials will only stick around in congregations that promote healthy interaction. Those who indulge in petty church politics, caustic theological debates, or the complacent attitudes of a social club will turn off many people outside of their walls even as they may seem to serve those who are present—and young adults may simply be the most noticeable absence.¹⁰³

I should again reiterate that this realization does not imply that church must be perfect, as no design made by human hand can be. Rather, it is the response to our inevitable stumbles and conflicts that demonstrates the power of the spirit in our midst, the same spirit that calls to us and beyond our walls to the greater community.

Ultimately, as previously discussed, religious organizations and communities who successfully connect with Millennials will be the ones that have managed to put their aspirational values into practice by re-imagining the limits of what “church” can be. If we want to embody our principles, we have to ask ourselves, “What do people experience when they come through our doors?” and “What do people sense about the mission of this place through the ripples we make in the waters around us?”, and then work to ensure the answers are aligned with our stated ideals. Projecting our identity in this way will not only help us break through the media clutter, it will also create lasting value for our members and friends, both at the local level and through the larger, public narrative of our faith offered by the UUA.

What We Already Do for Millennials

When considering how to reorient our faith in light of rising generational trends, it is helpful to better understand the two areas of Unitarian Universalism that have most deeply engaged with Millennials, namely, youth ministry and young adult ministry—two ministries that will always be on the vanguard of generational shifts.

The UUA defines the term “youth” to mean high school students (or the equivalent for home-schooled youth; typically, this is roughly ages 14–18, but the developmental definition is more important than the age distinction), and the term “young adult” to mean those ages 18–35 (which includes college students). Though youth (and largely young adult) programs have been synonymous with weekend conferences in decades past, our understanding of what it means as a faith community to support high school students and younger adults has expanded.

Youth ministry in Unitarian Universalism has shifted in the past few years to embrace a vision that is dynamic, multigenerational, multicultural, and congregationally based. In its 2009 recommendations, the UUA’s Youth Ministry Working Group emphasized that “youth ministry is the responsibility of every Unitarian Universalist,”¹⁰⁴ and since then we have seen more lay and professional leaders explore how they can support youth ministry. We have moved toward better practices,¹⁰⁵ as they are understood across a range of issues around adolescent development,¹⁰⁶ youth safety,¹⁰⁷ and leadership training.¹⁰⁸ Most congregations offer religious education programs for youth, typically including OWL (sexuality education) and the Coming of Age intensive introduction to adult faith in grades 7–9. High school participants most commonly engage in youth groups that range in size and function.

The UUA and its districts and regions support a range of youth events that have also evolved to reflect this updated vision and best practices, including weekend conferences, summer leadership schools, and social justice trips.¹⁰⁹ In the 2011–2012 church year, 2,500 UU youth attended district conferences, 400 attended district training events or participated in district boards and committees, and 200 attended summer leadership schools or had intensive leadership experiences with the UUA (e.g., served as General Assembly Youth Caucus Staff).

The area of youth ministry with the most urgent need for improvement is “bridging,” or the transition from youth ministry into adulthood. While we have achieved great success in keeping our UU youth connected through high school, our churches rarely offer a clear pathway to spiritual development and faithful leadership in the early adult years, when religious habits tend to form. We need to do more to make this pathway explicit and to translate the investment we make in our youth leaders into their capacity as adult leaders for our faith.

Though it encompasses a wide swath of people, young adult ministry at its essence is how we create faithful communities for those going through the transitions of the first third of life. Young adult ministry itself is a large umbrella, capturing both life-stage (developmental) needs and generational distinctions that leave our current cohort of young adults spread across half a dozen different areas of the denomination. These young adults include some who have been raised UU, many who find us in college or in their twenties, young families, young professionals, students, working people, unemployed people, under-employed people, searchers, seekers, and even religious professionals. Groups of young adults cluster at our most vibrant churches, the aforementioned “indicator species” phenomenon, and perhaps a quarter of UU congregations include a handful of young adult members. Common programs for young adults in congregations include meals together, volunteering, and small-group ministry. At the UUA, we consider it part of our ministry to reflect this diversity and to uphold the full range of young adult experience.

Outside of congregations, other young adults find their faith communities in concentrated experiences such as UU camps, conference centers, and summer institutes, which they attend every year despite having little or no connection with UU congregations. Service and social justice are also a major element of many young adults’ lives; opportunities for young adults to go on service trips are available through the UUCSJ, and countless UU young adults pursue justice work as their vocation. UUs who are young military service members are supported by a growing cadre of UU military chaplains. Ministry with college students is another distinct area of young adult ministry; congregations supporting on-campus student groups need specific guidance to navigate university administrations.

The Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries helps to create UU faith homes for emerging generations by connecting and empowering local leaders, equipping congregations, and advocating for youth and young adults. We are ideally positioned to think about generational issues, as we see them manifest in adolescence and then play out during emerging adulthood. Right now we are at a sweet spot in which both high school students and young adults fall under the same generation: the Millennials. This gives us an opportunity to fine-tune our programs and approaches over the next few years, while this is still the case, to see what resonates with Millennials and to then pass on that wisdom to other areas of ministry in the years to come.

We also know how important generational adjustments can be. One way to view the conflicts that arose in the early 1980s over the transition from the independent Liberal Religious Youth organization (LRY) to the UUA’s Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (YRUU), and the restructuring of youth ministry from 2005-09, is that these were the inevitable result of generational differences. LRY was a quintessential Baby Boomer institution, with its artistic and eccentric quality and fierce commitment to principle, and thus had to give way at some point to a more process-oriented, pragmatic, and grounded Generation X approach that characterized YRUU. Perhaps just as inevitably,

when the goal-oriented Millennials gained the helm of YRUU in the late 1990s and wanted the organization to have an impact it was never designed to carry out, it became an untenable situation.

Today, I think about how we can more proactively anticipate the coming shifts that the next generations will bring and work to avoid future conflicts, rather than allow those shifts to catch us off guard—or wait to react until they have already started to happen.

Support for youth and young adult ministry will continue to be a specialized role for the UUA to play, and one that evolves as generational cohorts age. In addition to the direct services we offer our constituents, lately youth and young adult ministry leaders have been invited to participate in conversations about the future of our faith. Beyond having an obvious investment in the outcome, Millennials may also have the most insight into what choices Unitarian Universalism should make to stay relevant in the face of these historic trends.

What Else We Can Do

How can we as faith leaders respond to the trends and opportunities presented by a shifting religious landscape? Specifically, what is the UUA's job in pointing the way forward, given our unique placement and resources within the denomination? I see four areas where we could have the most impact: accelerating innovation, encouraging congregations as centers of innovation, helping existing faithful communities evolve, and telling our story.

Accelerate innovation by empowering innovators

As the pace of change in our world quickens, so too must our ability to adapt. Gone are the days when a multi-year commission or task force was our best way to tackle complex questions in our faith.¹¹⁰ Instead, we must become comfortable with experimentation at every level of our Association. As Peter Simms and John Roberto (respectively) urge us, we should embrace “little bets”¹¹¹ that “fail quickly and cheaply,”¹¹² increasing our odds of finding new breakthrough strategies by experimenting with a range of new methods and seeing what works. We do not know what approaches will be the most successful, so we need to try as many fresh ideas as we can think of and closely track their results and impact. Following the energy of our lay and professional leaders, and helping them experiment with new approaches, can be as fulfilling for them as it is useful for the wider faith. And indeed, we as UUs have the theological basis for this type of innovation, recognizing that there are always multiple paths to wisdom and that the divine reveals itself in countless different ways.

The UUA clearly has a role to play, one that starts with us modeling the mission-driven, open-minded, and creative faith communities we promote. Our upcoming move to 24 Farnsworth Street, away from the historic buildings we have occupied on Beacon Hill for the last century, is one big step in this direction. Beyond our internal organization, it may be that rather than directing the emphasis experimentation for the entire faith from Boston, the most effective strategy for us is empowering individual creative ministers and lay leaders who have the inspiration and capacity to explore new modes of religious expression. This offers us the flexibility to support and sustain the places where innovation is already happening, rather than put all our eggs in one basket with a top-down or one-size-fits-all approach.

It is exciting to watch these new experiments start to crop up across our faith. For example:

- In collaboration with the UU Ministers Association, the UUA is already working on a program of “callpreneurship,” at the intersection between one’s call to ministry and religious entrepreneurship.¹¹³
- The Fahs Collaborative for creative and innovative educational encounters at Meadville Lombard Theological School¹¹⁴ and the UUFund crowd-source funding

site developed by the Clara Barton and Massachusetts Bay Districts¹¹⁵ both hold transformative potential for our faith.

- The UU Funding Panel has been a key supporter of the partnership-for-innovation approach, sponsoring a number of innovative projects in the past year, including Beloved Café and Original Blessing.¹¹⁶
- Ongoing collegial support for innovative leaders is offered by learning circles hosted by the UUA's Office of Growth Strategies¹¹⁷ and by a series of Facebook groups called "labs" (e.g., Growth Lab, Stewardship Lab, Worship Lab, Social Media Lab, Young Adult Growth Lab).¹¹⁸

In the UUA's Youth and Young Adult Ministries Office, we have tried to model this way of operating by partnering with groups and individuals in our faith communities to try new approaches for reaching the Millennial generation. Some have been successful (e.g., consulting with The Sanctuary Boston in the group's planning stage), while others have not come to fruition (e.g., a proposal we investigated, but ultimately abandoned as too ambitious, to produce a mobile application to link conversations around social justice that occur through existing sites, such as Facebook and Twitter). We look forward to doubling down on these strategies in the coming years and encouraging even bolder propositions for creating spiritual spaces for youth and young adults.

Groups of young adults across our faith are already engaging in varied approaches to faithful UU communities. Our office highlights common approaches that have proven to be spiritually fulfilling in our own communities as well as other churches, including spiritual retreats, opportunities to engage with social justice actions and issues, contemporary-style worship services, and avenues for professional discernment for emerging young adults.

One especially fertile area for us to explore is the way we blend virtual and in-person interaction to optimize the spiritual experience for young UUs with busy lives. Though online and brick-and-mortar options are often presented as substitutes for each other, engendering defensiveness about the inevitability of technological progress or the fear of forsaking our worshipful spaces for "online church," in fact the two can act as complements that amplify each other's impact. If I meet someone at a conference and then am able to collaborate with that person through video conferencing and shared platforms (e.g., Google docs), both of those activities are enhanced by the presence of the other. Had we not met in person, our online collaboration would have been less rich, and had we only been able to meet in person, we never would have had the chance to follow up on that contact or relationship.

The motivation for new and innovative ideas is already present in our congregations and faith communities. It seems like every week I hear about an exciting new venture being undertaken by a UU somewhere in the country. However, we need to develop better systems of support for translating inspiration into real, scalable projects. The business savvy required to deal with the legal, financial, accounting, and logistical challenges that

every start-up project faces can be difficult for our creative visionaries to acquire. But this expertise, too, is present in our congregations and personal networks; connecting innovators with one another in mutual support, and with others who possess the professional skills to help make their dreams a reality, will be an essential step in harnessing the brilliant experimentation that Unitarian Universalism inspires. Making innovation a normal and expected part of our UU faith will help us find new ways to reach the Millennials. Just as importantly, it will help us develop new and adaptable spaces to serve the older liminal “nones” who are already connected to our congregations but still lack convenient and consistent ways to participate—something that will only become more pronounced as the Baby Boom generation ages into a new stage of life, and mobility and accessibility challenges arise.

Encourage congregations as hubs of innovation

Though congregations have sometimes been characterized as being in a zero-sum game with innovative faith communities, successful faithful experiments tend to be strongly assisted by and connected to existing UU congregations. Most of the pioneering groups that I know of, such as Awake Ministries in Annapolis, Maryland,¹¹⁹ operate with support (e.g., financial, facilities, staff, participation) from the congregations that enthusiastically promoted their inception. It can be the most dedicated, accomplished, and consistent church members who find joy and meaning through these inventive approaches to their faith.

This makes complete sense, given that no congregation can be everything to everyone and that UU congregations themselves exhibit such a range of liturgy and weekly practice. Innovative “spin-offs” allow a church to reach out to different potential audiences and could be a natural extension of the membership continuum idea, with traditional congregational membership and leadership at the center. The talent and expertise that already sits in our pews can be critical for helping struggling start-ups get off the ground and reach people at the beginning of the membership continuum. Congregations also have access to the mundane but often confounding logistical infrastructure that any fresh initiative requires, such as bank accounts, legal counsel, health insurance, and federal tax reporting practices, which they can extend to their creative leaders to free them up to do the work of their faith. The stability of the congregation, with predictable revenue streams and established leadership, offers excellent ballast for inspiring but often-unpredictable new projects.

This lesson was learned decades ago by leaders of campus ministry programs. Though most campus groups meet on campus and are registered with their college or university, our office strongly urges those groups to form relationships with neighboring congregations (or the Church of the Larger Fellowship, if no congregation is nearby). These congregations are essential for sustaining campus groups through the natural ebb and flow of student leadership by checking in with the group regularly, offering them access to pastoral care, helping with leadership transitions (typically every year or two),

providing small but critical operating funds, and connecting on-campus leaders with the resources of the faith.

Innovation is not limited to external efforts—congregations can also take on investigate new projects within their own walls. For example:

- Why limit worship to Sunday mornings? Could a simple vespers service on a weekday evening serve a different set of people?
- What opportunities are present for UUs to take their expertise in guiding individuals through their distinct spiritual journeys and offer it to those who are not members as an entry point to our faith, rather than as a secondary benefit of becoming a member?
- Could we provide more avenues for participating in the performing and visual arts we have cultivated to craft our worship services, leveraging this capacity to give non-members the chance to engage in creative expression with their spirituality? Such programs could even be financially self-sustaining through charging a small fee to participate.

These seemingly small experiments can feel enormous to congregations that attempt them, recognizing how many unspoken norms are woven through our congregational practices. Yet they are also critical for developing our congregations' ability to respond to changing realities with new ideas and approaches. We need new norms for our congregations for healthy ways of dealing with change itself. The rate of transformation in our world is only accelerating, and learning to surf the upheaval rather than have it swallow you is the only pathway to serenity and satisfaction in the midst of tumult and turmoil.

Congregations may discover that they love being centers of innovation. They already possess a wealth of resources that could be directed toward the community at large. This mindset is 180 degrees away from a myopic internal focus on serving the needs of existing members, but congregations are perfectly positioned to make innovation the epicenter of their faith, should they choose to do so. The UUA should help record and share such practices to promote these opportunities for our faith leaders, both lay and professional.

Help committed faithful communities evolve

For UU congregations and faithful communities to adapt to the changing world around them, and to align the lived experience of our congregations with our spiritual heritage and principles, our leaders will first have to make this evolution a priority. Here, I intentionally broaden the terms to include “faithful communities” beyond just member congregations of the Association to include our camps and conferences, small groups, and other gatherings that are part of the array of UU religious experience. Across our Association, I am happy to report that awareness of the urgency these challenges is growing.¹²⁰

I recently attended the first-ever regional assembly in the Pacific Western Region. From the theme of the conference to the workshops included to the featured speaker and Sunday sermon, every aspect looked toward the future.¹²¹ Rev. Christine Robinson, the opening speaker at the Regional Assembly, is the senior minister of the First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque, New Mexico, which broadcasts each week's worship service to satellite locations around the state. Rev. Robinson's congregation is an example of a congregation trying something new and succeeding at it. The clergy and lay leaders present seemed to be in broad agreement that our UU parishes, societies, and fellowships will need to adapt to survive the profound shifts in American religious practice—but more than that, they grasped the fundamental truth that if we believe our faith has a saving message to offer the world, we cannot keep it locked away in congregations that have become social clubs, only focused on those within their own walls.

With this future-oriented outlook, we must remain open to congregations serving new and creative purposes. For example, two urban congregations that have become centers of their communities, by hosting groups such as nonprofit organizations and offering their space as music venues, are the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia¹²² and the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles.¹²³ These churches have leveraged their outstanding, centrally located facilities to serve UU principles and values in a myriad of interesting ways.

These purposes will inevitably look different in different parts of the country, since by definition they are responding to their unique local needs. In much of the southern Bible Belts of the United States, UU churches may offer the only respite for liberal values in conservative small towns. Far from the institutional, centuries-old “church on the green” of our congregations in New England, Southern UU congregations often play host to a range of liberal groups and causes in the area and are a safe space for people of different genders, sexualities, orientations, and persuasions.¹²⁴ Helping these congregations expand their reach and capacity will bring their prophetic voice to more people in their communities. Indeed, the most profound ministry is always most intimately connected to the unique context in which it is found.

Yet another approach for congregations to consider is the one illustrated by the 21st Century Faith Formation trainings¹²⁵ that UU lay and professional leaders have begun to attend in the past few years. Based on the Faith Formation 2020 (FF2020) study¹²⁶ and developed by experienced religious practitioners looking at demographic trends, the ecumenical FF2020 approach urges congregations to move from assuming they are part of “embedded communities” where churches overlay onto their members' primary social groups and cultural identity, toward serving “networked individuals” who are more diverse and mobile. In this model, the church's primary role is to act as a trusted filter for the seemingly infinite resources and messages found in our communication streams, and assembling or “curating”¹²⁷ those resources into demographically tailored networks. Such networks would include diverse modes of participation that are

accessible regardless of the user's lifestyle (e.g., video clips, service trips, podcasts, self-guided study, and daily prayers).¹²⁸

The UUA can mirror the FF2020 approach by putting concrete tools into the hands of local leaders, culling the best of the resources and wisdom both within and outside the faith. With leaders who are committed to helping their UU communities evolve, the UUA can be a partner and guide in evolving in response to the changes brought by a new generation.

For example, only 15 percent of UUs report that their weekly worship services have "high spiritual vitality,"¹²⁹ thereby lacking a key ingredient in congregational growth. To respond to this challenge, rather than train a limited number of congregational leaders in specific styles of worship, the UUA could convene conversations between ministers about their best practices, or use its interfaith connections to help bring the top thinking in worship planning to our faith communities. This is one example of a new role for institutions that reflects a diverse and pluralistic society.

In a separate but related area, helping congregations become multigenerational and multicultural has been a focus of the UUA in the past 10 years, and indeed we have made strides in this direction. A wealth of resources are already available online, though many of them sit unused. One approach that the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries is pioneering is the use of self-assessments to help individual UUs find what will be most useful to them. We plan to roll out an online self-assessment tool for young adult ministry in congregations, based on five common stages of development that we have observed as congregations try to welcome young adults into their fold; the tool will also direct participants to resources tailored to the needs of their congregation.

Another area ripe for better curation by our churches is an online presence and use of social media, a need that is exacerbated by the rapid pace of change in social media platforms, terms, and settings. Congregations can barely keep up! And while dozens of webpages are currently available on the UUA's website, including online communications guidelines,¹³⁰ the online experience of countless congregations and lay leaders is one of being frustrated and overwhelmed. (Our office frequently receives requests for advice from constituents on social media practices.) Establishing relationships with those who engage with social media in congregations, and getting better at modeling this interaction as UUA staff members ourselves, will help to create a network of UU faith leaders who are learning together how to navigate the fluctuating waters of ever-changing online currents.

Though this may appear to be a separate issue for each local church, it is also true that our low profile as UUs means that one interaction with a single congregational website or Sunday morning service and coffee hour reflects on the entire faith. Members of the general public, even savvy Millennials, rarely have the time or sophisticated understanding to distinguish between individual congregations, the UUA as a whole,

and the characterizations of us that show up in the mainstream media. Building the capacity of our congregations to cope with constantly evolving social media platforms would be a welcome role for the UUA to play, and a particularly important one for reaching youth and young adults who tend to have high expectations for sophisticated design and presentation of all types of media.

There are too many areas for which congregations are seeking to improve their capacity to delve into each in greater detail, but that list certainly includes professional art and music, room for members to express and cultivate their own creativity, and consistently stunning visual communications.

Though we often castigate ourselves for our small membership figures relative to our ecclesiastical brethren, these types of shifts may actually be more feasible for us because we are a smaller faith and thus better able to coherently manage transitions across a range of congregations. In general, our task as denominational leaders has now become sharing success stories of amazing developments going on across the country, and curating the wealth of resources within the UUA and elsewhere to get the right information into the hands that need it—and this task is one that seems imminently possible.

Finally, though this report primarily focuses on the role of the UUA, we as staff members cannot do it all. The 1,000 congregations of our Association and hundreds of thousands of self-identified UUs are where the true inspiration, talent, and capacity resides to test new ways to serve our deeply held values in contemporary American society. Our job at the UUA becomes less one of direct service and more of connecting, distribution, holding up, and reaching out, sharing success stories and knitting together our disparate efforts into a tapestry of shared vision.

One congregation or faith community cannot be everything to everyone, and our “shared” vision may seem to vary in different regions of the country, where churches play a distinctive societal role. But focusing on the strengths of each covenanted UU community will lead us toward a more diverse portfolio of religious expression, and it is through that experimentation and differentiation that we may offer more paths of faithful engagement to a wider range of our friends and neighbors.

Tell our story

Do we believe that our deepest values are essential to make the world a better place and for us to live more purposeful, faithful lives? If so, then how can we justify keeping those values hidden inside our church walls, waiting for “them” to find “us”? Some of the saddest but most inspirational stories of UUs discovering our churches are the ones that begin with the tearful line, “Where were you 10 years ago when I was searching for a place like this?”

As I discussed earlier, Unitarian Universalism defies most of the negative stereotypes that Millennials hold about Christians: that churches can be judgmental, homophobic, and reactionary. However, because our structure is so similar to Mainline Protestant faiths, we “feel” like a church and thus get tagged with that same criticism. Perhaps this also points to the ways in which the criticisms of rigidity and exclusion are not just about social views, but are embedded in the form of Mainline Protestant congregational life and worship itself.

However, when I speak with my peer leaders at our denominational cousins (e.g., United Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America), I start to realize that we UUs actually have some competitive advantages of which we may not be aware. Contrary to Millennial stereotypes about Christians, we have been at the vanguard of religious support for marriage equality and reproductive justice. Our embrace of each individual’s spiritual path is what some Protestant leaders are currently advocating for in their own congregations.¹³¹

We do not have a conservative minority of churches contesting the liberal values of our leadership, we are not constrained by theological restrictions, and our governance structure is much simpler (trust me!). Though we are configured like a Protestant denomination, there is nothing holding us back from pursuing an entirely different, and uniquely UU, way of organizing and leading ourselves. Making difficult but profound internal changes that symbolize the principles our faith can speak volumes more than any communications strategy, and can communicate the sincerity, legitimacy, and consistency necessary to cut through the clogged media environment.

Ironically, our tradition as a religion that has at times embraced stark individualism may also be a strength for us in striking a chord with contemporary American culture. Our rich theology and history of dealing with this duality of individuality and belonging, holding on to the contradiction embedded in an organization of anti-authoritarian iconoclasts, makes us valuable and unique. If we are able to resolve the inherent tension between the prophethood of all believers and the profound human need for deep community, then surely we must have something to offer our society. If we can formulate our internal conversation about “covenant” for an external audience, I believe it would have great resonance.

Making that connection requires us to proclaim our faith and values. We should be known as true advocates for the Seven Principles in our society, exemplifying what it looks like to stand up for our values. Unlike our advertising campaigns of the past, which have focused on differentiating us from other churches, we need to demonstrate an argument for the importance of religious community itself. When we organize around marriage equality and say, “I’m committed to this cause because, as a Unitarian Universalist, I believe in the inherent worth and dignity of each person,” we attract attention and followers without ever saying a word about church. We want to make

people think, “Wow, I need to hang out with those folks. They have their priorities in order.”

Rather than tell people we want them to become one of us, we can adopt the tack of countless successful campaigns and simply tell the story of our values, of who we are. If we can get clearer on that story and why it matters, then the task of getting our message out there can be far more easily determined. Taking advantage of our existing contacts of friends and family, engaging with key influencers in our networks who share our values, and crafting better online resources on behalf of the faith are key components of any outreach or communication effort.

This would also satisfy a hunger among our members to be known in the world as UUs. One of the main findings of the multi-year, Association-wide Gathered Here Initiative of appreciative inquiry was that we are seeking “growth and increased visibility for the faith.”¹³² It is the dream of many UUs, including this one, to live in a world in which the typical UU elevator speech, often delivered in response to confused looks about what our faith actually means, is unnecessary because we are so widely recognized. Indeed, telling the story of our faith has already been recognized as a priority for UUA leadership. Included in President Morales’s strategic vision is a call for the UUA to “communicate a new vision” for our faith.¹³³ It is a priority that will entail re-examining the countless signals we send out through our tone, actions, style, and priorities, and aligning those signals with the message we want to send.

Getting on the same page about our story and our vision is essential; however, we should not confuse this with the periodic attempts that have been made to nail down modern Universalists and Unitarians to a specific credo.¹³⁴ Trying to find a single statement that captures the widely varying beliefs held by UUs,¹³⁵ not to mention the decision about who would have the privilege of authoring such a statement, has been a fruitless exercise in recent history.

If we are looking for the lowest common denominator among UUs, one could say that it is already eloquently articulated in our Principles and Sources.¹³⁶ However, I would hope we could also find a *highest* common aspiration, a clear mission for our gathered community and faith movement. Why are we here together, and what are we trying to do? Such a mission would be the foundation for our ecclesiology, our practice, and our structure, an ambition for which we might marshal our energies and against which we could measure our progress.

Ironically, a clearly and succinctly described mission (note: not just a mission *statement*) might spiritually center our congregations by offering deeper inroads into theological questions, calling us to approach our shared ministry from the full diversity of our individual faith journeys and to find ways to put our calling into action. We proclaim values that are widely shared in this country and that have an authentic legacy of social and activist liberalism to back them up. If we are able to couple the evolution of our

faith communities discussed in the first three recommendations with a better way of communicating about them through “walking our talk,” there will be no stopping us.

Closing

UUA President Peter Morales describes the future we face as multicultural, wary of church, and full of spirit. These changes are being driven by shifts in the Millennial generation's relationship with religious institutions. Therefore, the key to finding our footing in this new phase of American religious life is to focus on the challenges presented to us by this age cohort. If we can experiment with new avenues of religious expression that provide the lived experience of our deeply held values, then our continued growth as a faith tradition is assured.

We have come through generational shifts before, from the GI Generation that completed the merger between the Universalist Church of America and the American Unitarian Association, to the Baby Boomer leaders who have professionalized our ministry, to the Generation X leaders found in so many of our most successful pulpits—and we will do it again. I am convinced that the changes that so many UUs yearn to see today are exactly the ones being called for by the Millennial generation.

Beyond the self-interest of preservation or growth of our faith, I believe that our theological commitments call us to make these changes. We have something profound to offer our communities, hard-won wisdom from wrestling with what it means to live our principles, a saving message about the habits of inclusion and affirmation necessary to create community in a fragmented world of individual journeys. The legacy of our Unitarian, Universalist, and liberal religious ancestors demands that we translate their vision into the needs and realities of our time. May we have the courage, humility, and imagination to make it so.

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- ⁴ Kosmin, B. A., & Keysar, A. (2008). *American Nones: A Profile of the No Religion Population*. (Based on the American Religious Identification Survey of 2008.) Hartford, CT: Trinity College. Retrieved from http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/NONES_08.pdf
- ⁵ For a deeper discussion of what is driving today’s decline in religiosity, I highly recommend Robert Putnam and David Campbell’s 2010 book *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*.
- ⁶ Putnam, R. D., & Campbell, D. E. (2010). *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (p. 84). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. Retrieved from <http://americangrace.org/>
- ⁷ Brooks, L. G. (1960). *Frederick May Eliot: Unitarian President*. Retrieved from http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/unitarians/eliot_f.html
- ⁸ Lim, C., MacGregor, C. A., & Putman, R. D. (2010). Secular and Liminal: Discovering Heterogeneity Among Religious Nones. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 49(4), 596–618.
- ⁹ Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project. (2012b, October 9). “Nones” on the Rise: Religion and the Unaffiliated. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise-religion/>
- ¹⁰ Putnam & Campbell, 2010 (p. 561).
- ¹¹ Compared to liminal “nones,” secular “nones” also tend to comprise more males and more Asian Americans and to reside on the East or West Coasts.
- ¹² Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, 2012a.
- ¹³ Hout, M., Fischer, C. S., & Chaves, M. A. (2013, March 7). *More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Key Finding from the 2012 General Social Survey*. Berkeley, CA: Institute for the Study of Societal Issues, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from http://issi.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/shared/docs/Hout%20et%20al_No%20Relig%20Pref%202012_Release%20Mar%202013.pdf
- ¹⁴ Kosmin, B. A., & Navarro-Rivera, J. (2012, May 31). *The Transformation of Generation X: Shifts in Religious and Political Self-Identification, 1990–2008. A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008*. Retrieved from <http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2012/05/ARISGENX2012.pdf>

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- ¹⁵ Hout, M., & Fischer, C. S. (2002, April). Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Politics and Generations. *American Sociological Review*, 67(2), 165–190. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3088891>
- ¹⁶ Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. (2010, February). *Religion Among the Millennials*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/Age/Religion-Among-the-Millennials.aspx>
- ¹⁷ Jones, R. P., Cox, D., & Banchoff, T. (2012). *A Generation in Transition: Religion, Values, and Politics Among College-Age Millennials*. Washington, DC: Public Religion Research Institute, Inc., and Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. Retrieved from <http://publicreligion.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Millennials-Survey-Report.pdf>
- ¹⁸ *Odyssey Networks* [Website]. (n.d.). Jefferson Bethke on Loving Jesus but Doubting Religion. Retrieved from <http://www.odysseynetworks.org/video/jefferson-bethke-on-loving-jesus-but-doubting-religion>
- ¹⁹ Putnam & Campbell, 2010 (p. 120).
- ²⁰ Brownstein, R. (2010, May 8). Young People Seek Shelter from the Storm. *National Journal*. Retrieved from http://www.nationaljournal.com/njmagazine/nj_20100505_2490.php
- ²¹ A Distinct Identity Helps Churches Remain Vibrant. (n.d.). *Insights into Religion*. Retrieved from <http://religioninsights.org/distinct-identity-helps-churches-remain-vibrant>
- ²² Putnam & Campbell, 2010 (p. 169).
- ²³ Ibid (p. 174).
- ²⁴ Putnam and Campbell also describe the exceptionally strong pull of religion among ethnic and racial minorities in the United States who are more likely to feel marginalized, including black Protestants and Latino Catholics.
- ²⁵ Putnam & Campbell, 2010 (p. 137).
- ²⁶ Ibid (p. 144).
- ²⁷ The results of the 1997 Unitarian Universalism Needs and Aspirations Survey are tabulated on the UUA's website (<http://www.uua.org/directory/data/demographics/130035.shtml>).
- ²⁸ For a good sampling, check out the UUA's page on demographic and statistical information (<http://www.uua.org/directory/data/demographics/>).
- ²⁹ Tabb, R. (1973). *Religion Among the Unitarian Universalists: Converts in the Stepfathers' House* (p. 12). New York, NY: Seminar Press.
- ³⁰ Lewis & Clark Research. (2005). *UU World 2004 Readership Study*. Pg. 11 Available on request from the Unitarian Universalist Association Publications Office.
- ³¹ The UUA posted a 2007 campaign video for "Is God Keeping You From Going to Church?" on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24X8YmNldk>).
- ³² Putnam & Campbell, 2010 (p. 146).

³³ Kosmin & Keysar, 2008.

³⁴ Smietana, B. (2012, October 4). On Faith: Unitarian Universalists see chance for growth in growth of secularism. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/unitarian-universalists-see-chance-for-growth-in-growth-of-secularism/2012/10/04/e2e4adae-0e4e-11e2-ba6c-07bd866eb71a_story.html

³⁵ The text of Rev. Morales’s “Vision for the Future of Unitarian Universalism” is available on the UUA website (<http://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/officers/president/morales/192145.shtml>).

³⁶ I preached a sermon on this dynamic called “The Pilgrims, the Road and the Path,” which is available for download (http://www.uucsr.org/sermon/129917594636092970_Pilgrims%20Road%20and%20Path%2009-9-12.zip) (see Track 8).

³⁷ Smith, C., Snell, P., & Longest, K. (2010, Summer). Religious Trajectories from the Teenage Years into the Emerging Adults Years. *Lifelong Faith: The Theory and Practice of Lifelong Faith Formation*, 4.2, 14–27. Retrieved from http://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/lifelong_faith_journal_4.2.pdf

³⁸ This 2004 book by Kate Tweedie Ersley is available through the UUA’s online bookstore (<http://www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=681>).

³⁹ It seems ironic when I hear my UU professional colleagues bemoan parents who object to our churches instilling our children and youth with a UU identity because they do not want their child to feel “pressured,” no doubt reflecting the dissonance of their own adolescent experience. However, not only is creating a lasting identity a valuable strength of ours as UUs, but contemporary American society has no problem driving home the freedom of religious choice even without our assistance.

⁴⁰ Smith et al., 2010.

⁴¹ Putnam & Campbell, 2010 (p. 158).

⁴² Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. (2007, August). *Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth: Summary Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.uua.org/re/youth/know/workinggroup/history/index.shtml>

⁴³ See, for example, the Barna Group’s *Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church* (September 2011, available at <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/teens-nextgen/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church#.UevrIT6bghl>) and *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* by David Kinnaman (Baker Books, 2011).

⁴⁴ Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, 2012a.

⁴⁵ Cowtan, C. (2006, June). *Faith Communities Today, 2005: Young Adults in UUA Congregations*. Retrieved from http://www.uua.org/documents/congservices/fact/05_ya_report.pdf

⁴⁶ From a March 4, 2011, interview with Dr. Richard Settersten, conducted by Tess Vigeland for Marketplace.org, titled *Twenty-somethings taking longer to reach adulthood*. Retrieved from <http://www.marketplace.org/topics/world/twenty-somethings-taking-longer-reach-adulthood>

⁴⁷ *A Religion for Our Time* is an 18-part video series created by the UUA. More information is available on the UUA website (<http://www.uua.org/publications/multimedia/religion/>).

⁴⁸ Mercadante, L. (2012, June 13). The Seeker Next Door: What Drives the “Spiritual But Not Religious”? *MTSO: Methodist Theological School in Ohio*. Reprinted with permission from *The Christian Century*. Retrieved from <http://www.mtso.edu/what-drives-the-spiritual-but-not-religious/>

⁴⁹ Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life. (2012c, October 9). “Nones” on the Rise: One in Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation. Retrieved from http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/Unaffiliated/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf

⁵⁰ For more information on this missional conference, see the Change the World homepage (<http://legacy.ginghamsburg.org/ctwhome/>).

⁵¹ VanBecelaere, J. (2012, November 26). Minimal Structure, Maximum Mission. *Growing Vital Leaders. UUA Blogs*. Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association. Retrieved from <http://vitalleaders.blogs.uua.org/leadership-skills/minimal-structure-maximum-mission/>

⁵² See, for example, “Social Media: the New Hybrid Element of the Promotion Mix,” by W. Glynn Mangold and David J. Faults, published by *Business Horizons*, July 15, 2009 (<http://hbr.org/product/social-media-the-new-hybrid-element-of-the-promotion-mix/an/BH338-PDF-ENG>).

⁵³ Rev. John Murray wrote “Go out into the highways and by-ways. . . .” (From Reading 704, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993.)

⁵⁴ The Church of the Larger Fellowship describes itself as a UU “congregation without walls.” Learn more on their website (<http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/worship>).

⁵⁵ *The Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation* by Carol Howard Merritt (2007) is available through the UUA’s online bookstore (<http://www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1057>).

⁵⁶ Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project. (2013). *Trend Data (Adults)*. Retrieved from [http://www.pewinternet.org/Trend-Data-\(Adults\)/Whos-Online.aspx](http://www.pewinternet.org/Trend-Data-(Adults)/Whos-Online.aspx)

⁵⁷ Duggan, M., & Brenner, J. (2013, February 14). *The Demographics of Social Media Users—2012*. Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/~media//Files/Reports/2013/PIP_SocialMediaUsers.pdf

⁵⁸ King, N. (2013). Ministry in the Age of Collaboration: Congregations in a Hyper-Connected Generous World. *The Minns Lectures*. Retrieved from <http://www.minnslectures.org/2013Series.php>

⁵⁹ You can see the poster (titled “Coffee Hour Caution”) on my November 16, 2012, blog post, *Don’t Get Burned @ Coffee Hour!* (<http://blueboat.blogs.uua.org/young-adults/dont-get-burned-coffee-hour/>).

⁶⁰ Pew Research Center. (2010, February). *Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf>

⁶¹ For more information on Chicago's Interfaith Youth Core, visit the group's website (www.ifyc.org).

⁶² For more on the "purchasing funnel," see The Consumer Decision Journey (David Court, Dave Elzinga, Susan Mulder, and Ole Jorgen Vetvik, *McKinsey Quarterly: Insights & Publications*, June 2009, http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/marketing_sales/the_consumer_decision_journey#).

⁶³ Tandi Rogers, the UUA's Growth Strategist, recently posted on this topic on the *Growth Strategies* blog (see Possible Implications of Pathways to Membership, July 17, 2013, <http://growinguu.blogs.uua.org/organizational-maturity/possible-implications-of-pathways-to-membership/>).

⁶⁴ Wright, C. (1997). *Congregational Polity: A Historical Survey of Unitarian and Universalist Practice* (p. 1). Boston, MA: Skinner House Books. Retrieved from <http://archive.uua.org/cde/congpolicy.pdf>

⁶⁵ Commission on Appraisal, Unitarian Universalist Association. (2001, June). *Belonging: The Meaning of Membership* (pp. 103–104). Retrieved from <http://www.uua.org/documents/coa/belonging.pdf>

⁶⁶ See, for example, "Covenanted Communities"—What Are We Talking About? by Ted Fetter (April 22, 2013), posted on the CERGING Forward website of the Central East Regional Group (<http://cerguua.org/cergingforward/?p=257>).

⁶⁷ Muir, F. J. (2012, June 20). *From iChurch to Beloved Community: Ecclesiology and Justice*. Berry Street Lecture presented at the Ministerial Conference, Phoenix, Arizona. Retrieved from <https://uuma.site-ym.com/page/BSE2012/>

⁶⁸ See "Covenants and 'Ends' Top Agenda at October Board Meeting" by Michelle Bates Deakin (October 29, 2012) on the *UU World* website (<http://www.uuworld.org/news/articles/279352.shtml>).

⁶⁹ For more on General Assembly (GA), see "General Assembly, A Meeting of Congregations" on the UUA's website (<http://www.uua.org/ga/>). To read about "From Promise to Commitment," the theme of GA 2013, see "General Assembly in Louisville, KY: June 19–23, 2013" on the UUA's website (<http://www.uua.org/ga/2013/index.shtml>).

⁷⁰ Wesley, A. B. (2000). The Lay and Liberal Doctrine of the Church: The Spirit and the Promise of Our Covenant. *The Minns Lectures*. Retrieved from <http://minnslectures.org/archive/wesley/wesley.htm>

⁷¹ Mercadante, F. (2012, Summer). Engaging a New Generation (p. 44). *Lifelong Faith: The Theory and Practice of Lifelong Faith Formation, 6.2*, 42–56. Retrieved from http://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/lifelong_faith_journal_6.2_summer_2012.pdf

⁷² One good example of this is the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, New York, whose Mission Statement is available on the church's website (<http://www.rochesterunitarian.org/missionstatement.html>).

⁷³ Putnam & Campbell, 2010 (p. 472).

⁷⁴ Dawson, E. D. (2010, May 18). *Report on Young Adult Ministry* (p. 1). Watertown, MA: Clara Barton and Massachusetts Bay Districts of Unitarian Universalist Congregations. Retrieved from <http://www.cbd-mbd-uaa.org/sites/default/files/documents/Report%20on%20Young%20Adult%20Ministry%20Eric%20D%20Dawson%202010-05-18.pdf>

⁷⁵ Dawson, 2010 (p. 2).

⁷⁶ Jones, R. P., & Cox, D. (2011, May). *Doing Church and Doing Justice: A Portrait of Millennials at Middle Church*. Washington, DC: Public Religion Research Institute, Inc. Retrieved from <http://publicreligion.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Millennials-at-Middle-Church-Report.pdf>

⁷⁷ For more information on the Changing SEA project, visit the team's website (www.changingsea.org).

⁷⁸ For more on this topic, see Gerardo Marti's essay "The Emerging Church Movement and Young Adults" on the Changing SEA website (<http://www.changingsea.org/marti2.php>).

⁷⁹ For more on The Crossing, see Hillary Kaell's essay "The Crossing: Worship, Community and Action in Emergent Episcopal Ministry" on the Changing SEA website (<http://www.changingsea.org/kaell.php>).

⁸⁰ To learn more about The Sanctuary Boston's music-filled worship services and inspired young leaders, visit the group's website (<http://thesanctuaryboston.org/>).

⁸¹ To hear about a church that steadily built a younger ministry in the back yard of the University of Notre Dame, read Justin Paul Farrell's profile of Clay United Methodist Church in South Bend, Indiana, posted on the Changing SEA website (<http://www.changingsea.org/farrell.php>).

⁸² Learn more about First Unitarian Brooklyn's outreach to young adults on the church's website (<http://www.fuub.org/home/community/tnts/>).

⁸³ Learn more about First Unitarian Providence's outreach to Brown University students under Lifespan and Faith Development on the church's website (<http://www.firstunitarianprov.org/lifespan/campus.shtml>).

⁸⁴ For more information on how to help your congregation make this transition, I recommend Rev. Laurene Beth Bowers' practical and visionary book *Designing Contemporary Congregations: Strategies to Attract Those Under 50* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), which is available through the UUA's online bookstore (<http://www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1091>).

⁸⁵ For more on "missional congregations," see "My Best Shot at Defining 'Missional'" by Dave Owen-O'Quill (May 25, 2012) on *The Underground*, the website of dare2seek.org (<http://www.dare2seek.org/2012/05/25/my-best-shot-at-defining-missional/>).

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- ⁸⁶ See Richard Cimino’s profile “Diversity and Spirituality Drive Young Adults at New Life Fellowship” on the Changing SEA’s website (<http://www.changingsea.org/cimino.php>).
- ⁸⁷ From The Sanctuaries Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/TheSanctuariesDC>).
- ⁸⁸ The Sanctuaries’ website (<http://www.thesanctuaries.org/>) aids the group’s outreach by offering engaging videos and pictures.
- ⁸⁹ Learn more about the Lucy Stone Cooperative on the co-op’s website (<https://sites.google.com/a/lucystonecoop.org/lsc/>).
- ⁹⁰ Learn more about SSL on the campaign’s website (<http://www.standingonthesideoflove.org/>).
- ⁹¹ Learn more about OWL on the UUA’s website (<http://www.uua.org/re/owl/index.shtml>).
- ⁹² See, for example, the 2012 *OWL on College Campuses Information Sheet* compiled by Kayla Parker, the UUA’s Campus Ministry Associate (http://www.uua.org/documents/congservices/yacm/owl_on_campus.pdf).
- ⁹³ Learn more about Quest for Meaning on the church’s website (<http://www.questformeaning.org/>).
- ⁹⁴ Learn more about the vision of Beloved Café on the project’s website (<http://belovedcafe.org/>).
- ⁹⁵ Learn more about the Unitarian Universalist College of Social Justice on the school’s website (<http://uucsj.org/>).
- ⁹⁶ Unitarian Universalist College of Social Justice. (n.d.). *About Us* (¶ 1). Retrieved from <http://uucsj.org/about/>
- ⁹⁷ Learn more on the Council of Unitarian Universalist Camps & Conferences website (<http://www.cu2c2.org/>).
- ⁹⁸ Learn more about the Create Meaning project on their website (<http://www.createmeaning.org>)
- ⁹⁹ The Breakthrough Congregations from 2005 to the present are listed on the UUA’s website (<http://www.uua.org/growth/breakthrough/index.shtml>).
- ¹⁰⁰ Ford, J. (2013, January 22). Neo-Traditional Liberal Religion? A Sidewise Glance at a Unitarian Universalist Congregation (¶ 7). *Patheos: Hosting the Conversation on Faith* [Website]. Retrieved from <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/monkeymind/2013/01/neo-traditional-liberal-religion-a-sidewise-glance-at-a-unitarian-universalist-congregation.html>
- ¹⁰¹ Indeed, this is already the case—look at declining participation and religiosity among Mainline Protestant churches described in the April 2013 Report to the UUA Board, Membership and RE Statistics 2013 (http://www.uua.org/documents/uua/130401_board_rpt_member.pdf). (See in particular the table of Membership Data from the National Council of Churches on page 2.)

¹⁰² This analogy was coined by Andrew Mertz, the Joseph Priestley District's Youth and Young Adult Ministry Director, in the June 2010 newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Jersey Shore (p. 6).

¹⁰³ Ain't nobody got time for that.

¹⁰⁴ McDonald, C. (2012, March). *Promoting Dynamic Youth Ministry* (p. 1). Retrieved from http://www.uua.org/documents/yaya/1103_yacm_pres_response_rpt.pdf

¹⁰⁵ In fact, the UUA's Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries was recently profiled by the Jim Joseph Foundation in its report *Effective Strategies for Educating and Engaging Jewish Teens* (<http://jimjosephfoundation.org/evaluations/effective-strategies-for-educating-and-engaging-jewish-teens/>).

¹⁰⁶ The UUA's Youth Ministry Renaissance Module makes use of the 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents identified by the Search Institute (<http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18>).

¹⁰⁷ Our *Safe Congregation Handbook* is available on the UUA website (<http://www.uua.org/safe/handbook/>).

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, the UUA's Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries' 2013 report *How Youth Lead: An Update on Unitarian Universalist Youth Leadership* (http://www.uua.org/documents/yaya/130207_brd_rpt_lead.pdf).

¹⁰⁹ A sampling of events and trainings for youth are listed on the UUA's website (<http://www.uua.org/re/youth/events/>).

¹¹⁰ If it ever was . . .

¹¹¹ Author Peter Sims spoke on "Inventing the Future with Little Bets: New Ways to Solve Social Problems" on Day Three of the Social Good Summit 2011. A video of his talk is available on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZW1Lh6DIV8Q>).

¹¹² Roberto, J. (2013). *A Guide to 21st Century Faith Formation* (p. 31). Naugatuck, CT: LifelongFaith Associates. Retrieved from http://www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/guide_to_21st_century_faith_formation.pdf

¹¹³ Read more about "calltrepreneurship," a term coined by the UUMA's executive director Don Southworth, on page 4 of a January 2013 memo from UUA president Rev. Peter Morales (*Subject: Significant recent developments in professional ministry*, retrieved from http://www.uua.org/documents/moralespeter/120109_board_rpt.pdf).

¹¹⁴ Learn more about the Fahs Collaborative on the group's website (<http://www.meadville.edu/the-fahs-collaborative.php>).

¹¹⁵ Learn more about the plans for the UUFund site on the Clara Barton and Mass. Bay Districts' website (<http://cbd-mbd-uua.org/drupal/content/uufund>).

¹¹⁶ A list of the grants made by the UU Funding Program in 2012 is available online (http://www.uua.org/documents/uufp/fuu_12_grants.pdf).

¹¹⁷ Learn more about Innovative Learning Circles on the UUA Office of Growth Strategies' website (<http://growinguu.blogs.uua.org/organizational-maturity/innovative-learning-circles/>).

¹¹⁸ A directory of UU labs on Facebook is available online (<http://uuplanet.org/labs/>).

¹¹⁹ Learn more about Awake Ministries on the group's website (http://www.awakeministries.us/awake_revcrestwell.php).

¹²⁰ It is certainly one of the goals of this paper!

¹²¹ Resources from this gathering, Big Faith, No Borders: Regional Assembly 2013, are available online (<http://pwruua.org/theme-track-resources/>).

¹²² Learn more about First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia on the church's website (<http://www.philauu.org/residents>).

¹²³ Learn more about First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles on the church's website (<http://uula.org/english/neighborhood-partner>).

¹²⁴ See, for example, the Mississippi Welcoming Congregations Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/MissWelcomingCongregations4LGBTQ>).

¹²⁵ Learn more about the 21st Century Faith Formation online resource center on the group's website (<http://www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com/>).

¹²⁶ The book *Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation* by John Roberto was published by LifelongFaith Associates and Vibrant Faith Ministries (2010). Read more at the Lifelong Faith website (<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/faith-formation-2020.html>).

¹²⁷ I prefer the term "DJ" to "curator."

¹²⁸ More information on how the FF2020 approach can be used by UU churches is in development at the UUA and will be available soon. Additionally, the family of FF2020 websites (see, for example, the Faith Formation Learning Exchange, <http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/>) offers a wealth of research, tools, and information for congregational leaders.

¹²⁹ Royle, M. H. (2012). FACTs on Worship: 2010 (p. 15). *Faith Communities Today*. Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religion Research. Retrieved from <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faithcommunitiestoday.org/files/FACTs-on-Worship.pdf>

¹³⁰ The UUA offers online guidelines for Communications and Social Media for Unitarian Universalist Congregations (<http://www.uua.org/communications/index.shtml>).

¹³¹ See, for example, "Shepherding SBNR Sheep: How to Create a Church for the Spiritual But Not Religious" (2011) by N. Graham Standish (http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=10196#.UW_2Q4Tzteg.facebook).

¹³² The UUA Gathered Here Initiative. (2012, October). *Gathered Here: An Overview and Summary of Results* (p. 19). Retrieved from https://www.uua.org/documents/gatheredhere/121010_board_rpt.pdf

¹³³ Unitarian Universalist Association. (2013, March). *Strategic Plan* (p. 6). Retrieved from http://www.uua.org/documents/moralespeter/2013_strategic_vision.pdf

¹³⁴ See, for example, "The Marketing of Liberal Education" (2009) by Rev. David E. Bumbaugh (<http://www.meadville.edu/uploads/files/144.pdf>).

¹³⁵ Indeed, the UUA website states "We Embrace *Diversity* of Religious Background and Belief" (<http://www.uua.org/beliefs/welcome/index.shtml>) (italics mine).

¹³⁶ Our UU Principles and Sources are listed and described in detail on the UUA website (<http://www.uua.org/beliefs/principles/>).