

- Good afternoon. I wanna welcome our folks online and everybody who's here in person to the Unitarian Church of Evanston in Illinois, affectionately known as UCE. And we're pleased to be able to host this conversation between the Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson and the Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt. And I wanna give a special thank you to the sponsors of this event, the UUA Board and the UUA Election Campaign Practices Committee. And I'd like to give a shout out to the volunteers and staff at UCE, especially our AV tech, Adam Gogh. And our sexton, Liz Kennedy. So please join me now in feeling that connection among all of us, those online and those here in person as we light the chalice with words of the poem, love Beyond God by Adam Lawrence Dyer. What if every time you woke your sigh was felt by every being on Earth? What if every time you spoke your words were heard by every ear on Earth? What if when you told a joke, you tickled the senses of every smile on Earth? What if with each tender stroke, you shared your touch with every hand on Earth? What if when your heart broke, you tasted the tears running down every cheek on Earth, no bond or brand or gilded yoke. Surely this is love that reaches beyond, that holds one to another and every other to one, no matter the color or where from. This is now. This is we. This is love. This is God. This is love beyond God.

- Thank you, Susan, for welcoming us to this space. I'm Matthew Johnson. I'm the senior minister of our congregation in Rockford, Illinois, just up the road from here and a member of the Election Campaign Practice Committee, of the UUA, the ECPC. And this year we're hosting four forums around the country and each follow a similar format, which I'll explain to you in a moment, to give folks a chance, both in person in these places and online. Hello all of our folks to learn more about Rev. Dr. Sofía to be engaged in a conversation together. The mission of the Election Campaign Practices Committee is to enforce the rules of the UUA with respect to elections, but more importantly, to facilitate a conversation about who we are and where we're going. And a presidential election in the UUA is one of the times when we do that together. And so it's really important that we are here and that we're participating. So I thank you for being here and taking the time on this beautiful Midwestern spring afternoon to be present with us. It's good for the flowers, right? April showers the whole thing. So the format is at each of these forums is for the first 30 minutes or so, I've got a set of questions that I'll ask on a particular topic. And each of the forums will address a particular topic that's a matter of expertise and interest for the member of the ECPC. So last month in DC my colleague Rev. KC Slack, asked about faith in action organizing, social justice, prophetic ministry. Today we're gonna talk about two of my favorite topics, theology and religious professionals. Next forum in Santa Barbara, another member of our committee, Olivia Calvi will talk about lay leadership development and youth in young adult ministry. And then Bill Young, who's the UUA secretary and a member of our committee by ex-officio in Dallas. We'll have a conversation about the UUA board and UUA

governance and those important things that take up a lot of the president's time and energy. The second 30 minutes of our time together will be time for you to ask questions. So if you're in the room, the microphone will be brought to you, or you can come and ask your question, those online we'll be able to put it in the chat and I will ask the questions that come up in the chat on the Zoom meeting. And in the last 30 minutes of our time together, Rev. Sofía will have a chance to ask you questions to find out what's on your heart and what are you interested in, what do you think about what's going on? So it really is about a conversation that we're having together. I would ask everybody online and in person to ask your questions with a generous spirit of kindness and curiosity as we are engaged in a covenantal religious activity of discernment, not a competition to see who can be the meanest or the smartest even. I know that's more heresy for Unitarians, right? So thanks for being here and thank you for your time and your travel to be with us here in the Midwest today. How is the sound? It sounds very echoy to me, but is it okay to all of you?

- [Audience Member] It's a little high.

- It's a little low?

- [Audience Member] High, high.

- It's a little high. So is this better? How about that? Is that you can still hear me? That's a lot less echoy for me. That's better, okay, great. Okay, so let's talk about theology. How about that? I love theology. One of the things I love about your work in ethics in particular is the focus in locality and relationship as central to understanding our ethical priorities and our narratives. And I would love it if you can share how those concerns, narrative, location, relationship, shape your theological method and ideas.

- Let me just quickly check this sound level. Is this okay? You can hear me? Great, ooh, see? I wonder if this mic could be turned down a touch. Is that possible, Amy or Adam? Thank you both so much for the support. Is that better? Excellent. Okay. So one of the things that I really think is important about the approach to ethics that you're talking about is that in the ways that I study ethics and the, I'm a trained ethicist, I know I get described as one of our theologians a lot. I don't think that ethics and theology can be separated, right? And this happens a lot in womanist thinking and a lot of liberation is thought. We talk about theo ethics, this idea that yes, your theology informs your ethics, but your ethics also serve as kind of a discernment check, if you will, for your theology. So if the way that you make meaning in the world does not help you at all in the face of a moral dilemma, that's a flag that there's more theological work to do. Not that you haven't necessarily applied your ethics correctly. Does that difference make some sense? Yeah. Okay. So, but what you're talking about this narrative focus, a local focus I would describe as

centering lived experience, which is again, very traditional liberationist thought. And I think it's culturally very UU. So I find, you know, to the point where we struggle to remember that working from lived experience in Unitarian Universalism is not solely our own personal story, right? That lived experience matters, but it is expressed communally, congregationally, but also in all the other ways that we form community. I'm always thinking about Paula Cole Jones talking about communities of communities and our work together. So, you know, it's interesting, there's been a lot of burbling, right? About, especially because I speak a lot about how we are a liberal and a liberating tradition. But what I find fun about that, if that's a fair word, is that the central difference that we give authority to a different way of understanding things being lived experience is so very UU. So part of my answer to your question is that to me theology and ethics role together. And so by not separating them, and I think for me, I take from liberation practice, right? This idea that centering lived experience, not individualism, again, community knowing allows us to make meaning in ways that help us not constantly center one story as if it is a universal story, right? I'm gonna try to not just go all the way into being a professor about them, but if you think about how philosophy and theology or trying to find in a way a universal, a universally applicable thing to chew on to help us not be biased, it's kind of like a scientific method, right? But for the humanities, the problem is there's not been enough attention historically to what is considered universal. Or sometimes it takes us so far out of the weeds of something that's meaningful that it almost becomes an exercise that just doesn't apply to anyone's actual life. So, but narratives also I wanted to lean into, right? We hold our stories collectively. I think we are a storytelling people we often right engage our history and our theology and our justice work through stories and meaning making. But so how we hold our values together, how we story, the experience of our congregations and our communities come back centrally to support how we know ourselves as a people and how we live our lives with Unitarian Universalist values at the center. And so for me, that is the way that this ethical method, this values identifying way of thinking shapes how we make meaning together. Because the thing that I really understand most from our inherited tradition, from our theological lineage is that we agree that it matters, right? That I make meaning with you. That there is something added when we make meaning together, rather than me trying to simply filter my own personal lived story through what I'm taught somehow to come up with all that calls me into life, it matters that we actually have these conversations together. I do wanna say that there is a difference to me in supporting the kind of theological work that resources us, right? To show up confidently and fully in the world and the kind of personal spiritual work that's about my own individual beliefs. So this is why I'm not talking about my personal theology. What really moves me as a professor, as a religious leader, as a religious educator, as a potential president is, are we resourcing ourselves well to have the kinds of conversations we want

to have both in our communities but also out in the world, especially in a time that is asking us to make meaning out of incredibly difficult things and incredibly difficult moments. So how are we resourcing each other to do that work and to show up for our values? Well, which is not the same thing as can we choose one language set and all believe the same thing so that it's easier. I think we choose over and over again not to make it easier, but to resource depth, meaning making, and agency for us as individual practitioners of this.

- Thank you so much. A quick follow up to that. As you were talking, I was thinking about the power of rich small group ministry to like embody that pluralistic, but like narrative sense of really hearing each other's story into being. And like our thriving congregations have lots of small groups, right? Yeah, so, cool. Thank you. I don't know if you have more you wanna say about that sort of piece of how you actually actualize what you were just talking about, or?

- I mean, I see us trying new things, which is very fun. I've loved that we've done theological work from the GA stage lately. Thank you to our board of trustees for doing some of that work. It's been an arc. You know, I've been a minister for good grief almost 20 years now, and the shift in how dare you speak to me about theology, which was often right where we were even in classrooms, which was amazing. It was like, but we have to learn these things or how do we support our own communities to, we can reclaim a rich, multilingual, meaningful pluralistic way of expressing theology. And I do think you're right, small group ministries allow us to do that in deeply relational ways. When congregations get to a certain size, it's very hard. Then it's like, well, I may be in dialogue with my religious educator or my minister or a few of my friends, but that doesn't necessarily expose me to the stories that might actually change my life and change my thinking. So I think that the way that we keep coming back to small group ministries, whether they're identity based or theologically based or whatever they are, is about trying to resource ourselves to do this work. I remember when we used to feel reluctance to get involved in public national conversations that had a theological kind of underpinning. And some of it was we just weren't sure where we were with language, with communication. And it could feel overwhelming to be in a very doctrinal kind of context and trying to explain a UU perspective that might be more yours than everyone's. And so what I've been really excited about is how many UU across all kinds of roles are reclaiming the work of theological narrative and inviting us right to take ownership of it without silencing one another.

- Yeah, wonderful. One of the things in the Article II proposal, speaking of language that a lot of folks have resonated with, is this idea around centering love, liberating love, the spiritual discipline of love, which is in the draft text. What does it mean to you to say that love is the center of our faith? And how might that help you find

common ground or us find common ground with our metaphorically diverse people?

- That's a great question. To me, this is a great example of the work that remains to be done with Article II. And I wanna just pause and actually just thank the Article II Study Commission. Again, this has been an immense amount of work and they're literally waiting for us to tell them whether we want them to do yet another immense amount of work. So I just wanna say thank you. I think it's a powerful theological claim and one that is interestingly, I'm not gonna say not controversial because wow, I'm not trying to open that debate, but it feels less controversial. The love language from a theological perspective is so frequent in Unitarian Universalists personal expression and our humanity and sermons and you know, stories, all the things. What I like about it is that it draws from our inherited theological tradition. So, you know, a love ethic is central to liberal Christianity. It simply is. We have expanded that, wrestled with it, kept parts of it. I mean this is the work of a living tradition, but it does hold true to who we have been, which I think is really important in ways that still apply to who we are today. To me that's part of what it means to be part of a tradition. So I love that it's part of our inherited teachings, but it's also broad enough to honor the kind of pluralism and I keep using this word. So let me say out loud, I actually do not believe that Unitarian Universalists can believe anything and that there is nothing at the center of our faith. That is not what I believe. I do think one of our primary values to the point that we put it in our bylaws, which is somewhat odd, what do we choose to put values wise and theologically in our rules, but our rules are clear, right? That room for pluralism must exist among us. That is a powerful, hard earned value. So I wanna distinguish between the two. But anyway, love leaves room for a pluralistic expression of what that asks, right? And that's what I'm excited about. I'm also excited, I'm hoping that our religious educators and our theologians and our youth and our leaders of all kinds are gonna spend next year digging into what it means. We've been given this language set by the Article II Study Commission, but it comes with no RE curricula. There hasn't been any theological writing. We haven't told stories or written hymns or this. We have 30 years with our principles of that work having been done. And talking to beloveds who were part of the work in the eighties were saying there was no theology, there were no stories, there was no rainbow. That was a beautiful poster on the wall. And like we are being invited into that work. I'm excited about a year long preliminary conversation. What does love mean? And as I think about that, right, what does that ask of us in our relationality with each other? There are so many definitions of love and I'm not interested in all the Greek, you know, versions. That's not fair. But I don't think that's the point for us. I think the point is that we are saying something holds us in the spirit of how we are with one another that has a certain kind of character. And it may not be the same character for everyone, but it should be recognizable, right? So

whether that for you is compassion or it's right relationship or it's respect or it's open listening or it's open-mindedness or whatever kindness, something, it should be recognizable as love to someone else in the community, right? Even though they don't have to mean the same things. And the other thing I like about this language of love is that I think it calls us to something larger than ourselves in how we make our way in the world. That also leaves room, right? Are you particularly called by that? Which is most impactful in human living by ancestral tradition, by what you have known in your personal congregation about Unitarian universals and by your understanding of God or whatever you hold holy, all of those things can be encapsulated by the idea of love calling us on that's in one of our hymns, right? And so the question of how then do we hold a greater concept that leaves room for us to be who we are as you UUs, but still holds us to something. I don't wanna say that this is true for everyone. My experience through the pandemic was did we do enough to give each other enough to hold onto when we had to be physically apart? Are we doing enough now that many of us still have to be physically apart? Have we done enough to respond to the backlash in the world coming out of collective trauma? And if we haven't, then we have no theological work to do.

- Thank you. You may not know this 'cause it's only a few days old, but I was very heartened and you may be heartened to know that the soul matters congregations will be using pieces of the Article II draft as the monthly themes all of next year.

- Oh great. It just came out a couple days ago. So like that theological work is gonna happen, at least in our congregation, a few hundred others, which is exciting.

- That is really exciting. This idea that, you know, more than 10,000 UUs have already participated in this process and that we have the potential to have a full year of doing deep values work together without having decided where the outcome will remain, I think is really important and powerful. I know it's overdue. I'm glad we're doing it. That's exciting to hear. I did not know that. Thanks.

- I'm gonna turn to the second topic we're gonna talk about together in a focused way is religious professionals. So we don't know exactly how rough it will be this year yet, but we know that there will not be enough interim ministers, contract ministers, part-time ministers and ministers are sort of smaller or more rural congregations. That's where the shortage is gonna show up. It's very clear that that shortage is real. It's longstanding now. And I'm wondering what you think that the association can do about that. And I'm curious both about like technical fixes to that part of the work and also adaptive work in that area around our shortage of credentialed, professional ordained leadership.

- Thank you. I mean I hope it's okay. I actually would love to broaden this a little bit because I know our congregations are not just struggling with ordained religious leadership. They're struggling across the range of religious professionals. And I think that religious professionals are also there for struggling across the range. I think we see it more immediately in ministry because we pay so much more attention to it. But this shortage is real. It's absolutely longstanding. I have a lot of questions. I wanna be really honest that showing up to listen to what is actively happening at the UUA right now is a high priority for me because I know a lot of things are, but you know, I don't think the UUA has had a recruitment officer for ministry, certainly not for religious professionals since the seventies is what I was told, that there was a moment where we decided, thank you, it's helpful to have staff nodding in the room, but there was a moment where we thought there were too many of us, right? We did not need to recruit. Now let me say, when I say recruitment, I don't mean convincing a few more people to go to seminary or can we widen the path and find other ways into fellowship to ministry. I mean, what are the practices that make ministries of all kinds actually sustainable in our communities? And that is about resourcing congregations and communities as much as it is about resourcing, credentialing, practices, schools, processes, all of these things. So a few things worth celebrating. The UUA is in the process right now and has already started releasing resources, particularly for lay led congregations that didn't expect to be lay led. And that's not just around ministry, it's around a range of, again, religious professional roles. And I think this is continuing. So we're gonna see more resources. I think that's really important. I also wanna say the hard thing out loud that I don't think this is just our small and rural congregations, right? We have congregations and communities of all kinds that are struggling to figure out how to sustain the leaders they have, how to be in right relationship. And also, you know, looking at what it means to maybe be more collaborative, to maybe share, to maybe think of new ways. So I think this is a moment for some deep relational collaborative imagination, right? Our religious professional groups, our, you know, the UUMA, our membership professionals, our religious educators, our administer, all of these folks are having conversations, active conversations. What does it mean for this work to be viable? Ouch. But I just say ouch, in that is hard, that we are at a place of asking how do we support our congregations enough? How do we reimagine even what religious community means and how do we support religious professionals who make all kinds of sacrifices, right? To serve in these roles. So some gratitude, I'm grateful for the hope for us team. This is our new right trauma informed helping us be in stronger and healthier relations with one another in our congregations and communities. I think we really need that work. I'm grateful for the hard questions coming from our religious professional groups and the lay led resourcing I'm talking about. Another thing I wanna say is I'm grateful for the common ethics panel, which might not be something a

lot of folks are talking about yet, but that we are finally across religious professional organizations talking about the way we hold our leaders accountable. And as an ordained minister, I need to say out loud that ministers are traditionally, historically, we have held ourselves the least accountable to our other colleague groups of any group. And so I am grateful to see important early meaningful work in the UUMA and there is a history of harm that we are still working to address. I think that's just important to say out loud, but we're working on all the pieces. So these questions of if we come from multiple layers and maybe talk about economic justice and holding risk together differently, right? So I think it's past time for us to be honest about how many people who experience a sense of call to a range of UU religious professional life simply don't believe that that is a call that can be answered in a viable, sustainable way, right? Can we do more to support the costs of educational training? I know the NFC, the UUA is working on widening the pathway to ministry, I'm a seminary professor, I believe in seminaries. But also, is that the only path into professional credentialed fellowship ministry? I don't think it is. How do we do that work sustainably and well together? How do we balance the risk of entering sometimes a six year journey to become a religious professional who is taking on that risk? Do we do that collaboratively differently? Because what we lose is heartbreaking, right? Based on who, so who can and cannot answer that call. So we have spiritual work to do around how we value and support our leaders. We do have some right relationship work to do, but actually I don't think that's the only issue. And then can we also lean, I mean this goes going back like to the 1600s and I'm hearing Randy Becker in my mind, who just reminded us online that there was something in the Cambridge Platform that was about actually silencing our more liberal kin. It's never a clean story, but we have this, you know, almost 400 year history of believing that our congregations and our leaders have a spiritual responsibility to each other, to figuring out the hard things together and to intervening when something has just gone really, really wrong. And I think that spirit can help us here. You know, can we be generous with each other in these coming? We're gonna have to be, yes.

- Thank you so much. The Liberal Religious Educators Association, LREDA, really took the lead in being a more accountable, anti-racist, anti-oppressive organization some years ago and expecting that of their members and the minister's association as well as the musicians and the administrators are now too, really joining that movement. And you were just talking about some of the ethics work, which I was involved with, and boy, like that turn to accountability and higher standards for one another is a big deal. And so this kind of work is causing growing pains. We might call them other things within these organizations. And then also between religious professionals and congregations who are experiencing a real shift, I think, in the way we expect one another to act. And so how might the UUA itself be on that journey with these organizations and with these congregations in



this kind of work?

- You know, I have notes on this question, but as I'm listening to you, I think some of it is about telling our history. Well, you know, so it's interesting. I think when we talk about LREDA and anti-racist work, anti-oppressive work, justice oriented work, a lot of us go back to the white supremacy teaching because it was so impactful. So many congregations got involved and it was a real shift for us that was really important. But you know, when I hear you, like I go back, I go back to the early nineties where LREDA fall conference was like the place to be if you wanted to do anti-racism training. So I wanna celebrate right, that leadership. And then I also wanna say, but LREDA has never been a monolith, like unlike some of our, nope, I'm gonna be real unlike our ministerial association, right? Anybody can be a member of LREDA. And so there, I am a long-standing member of LREDA and I consider myself a religious educator too. But this piece of, there was this open invitation to the work, this lack of apology for the work. And we've seen, so I think we are having yet another deepening. They all come with growing pains. What I really appreciate about this moment is that I feel like we are not silencing the fact that whether the growing pains are in the room or not, there is pain, right? And, but when we do this work accountably together, then yes, we have to actually engage with the pain that is real and with harm that has been caused. But we're not solely looking at our most vocal and our, right, it's not just, well, does Sofía think there's pain? I have a lot of voice at this point in Unitarian Universalism. We are trying to make conversations that acknowledge the pain of folks who can't be in the room anymore. You know, the consequences of loss from some of the choices we've made and resourcing ourselves. So I think that's really important. And I think that that the breath of LREDA has actually done as much to further this work as their commitment to the topic itself. So I appreciate that the UUA is in pretty close relationship with our organizations of religious professionals. And that the UUA also took some of that onus on, I think back to faith and action, I think back to journey toward wholeness, which people still don't want me to say those words out loud because they cause so much upheaval. But actually I think we need to talk about that history. We need to talk about '68. We need to, you know, so I think that the UUA has been central in a lot of this and that right now there's so much pushback in the public square around justice, it's seeping into our congregations. How can it not? It is everywhere. You know, it's in our PTA meetings, it's in the media, it's everywhere. And so we're also, I'm experiencing UU's in general repeating some of the ways that that anxiety played out in other times. So, you know, that question of whose rights do we fight for first or which priority is the most urgent? Which is a defeating question, right? I'm hearing those again. You know, and we used to do this, we used to do this and we didn't know what it would mean to do this work when we feared we might lose who we are. And I'm hearing some of those fears again, but I'm also hearing congregations that are absolutely clear that this is the work

of our faith, religious leaders that are absolute, you know, I've talked about this Paula again, Paula Cole Jones used to tell us that there was a tipping point. That there would be a moment where there was just such clarity that this is what is asked of us in our faith tradition. And I remember, you know, being 28 rather than 48 and saying, Paula, when is that coming? You know, we're past. I mean it's remarkable to sit with her and say, you were right. You know, so if I went off on a tangent and decided, you know, well this isn't important anymore. I don't think UUs would allow that, but it's hugely important and hugely different. And so I think it's part of this moment. This is the work of faith and I think we can hold each other in it. And that the growing pains, you're right, there's always growing pains. But that this new wave of growing pains has a different character to it. And so I think I'm hoping we will show up to resource those conversations differently and well and draw on what we've learned in 30 years of doing this work. It's longer than that, but the like modern iteration of it is significant. We have learned a lot. There are real resources and there are numbers of beloveds who have chosen to stay and do the work of faith together.

- Wonderful. I've got one more question and then we'll open up to folks in the room and online. So my last question around religious professionals is what would be your priorities for the association to offer regarding continuing education and credentialing with religious professionals? What would be your focus around that?

- Hmm. I have such a range of thoughts about this, usually depends which group I've been with most recently. But adaptive leadership for sure. You know, how do we get past the, I think we expect our leaders to just, it's like what is your vision for right now? What's the next five years look like? How do we resource that? And that still matters, but so much is changing day to day that it's like how do we do creative design around understanding what is most needful to gather collaborative in community and even can we let go of some of our need to be the expert in the room to allow that work to actually reflect the wisdom of you UUs in the space in general. So adaptive leadership of trauma informed care. This has happily, well not happily, importantly, this has been live for us for a while, but when we are talking about just a global crisis on this scale, I think we need further continued resourcing on trauma-informed care. And I'm gonna say honestly, business acumen. Most of us aren't called into religious leaders because we wanna run a small nonprofit and we learn along the way. And some are, I mean, bless our colleagues who do that. I think I might be looking at one, two. However we do learn from each other, but I think sometimes we don't just do some really basic, this is what fundraising looks like in 2023. This is what budget balance, this is what equitable staffing compensation analysis looks like. And how we can understand that in the context of faithful connection and relationship. That does actually cause some more of us into leadership. But the thing is, I'm also really excited about spaces

that bow out of the traditional ideas of continuing education. I want us to hold more spaces open for colleagues, for dedicated lay leaders to be doing the kind of creative design together that we don't always make room for. And I'm, you know, and I think that we've tried some of this in some of our gatherings. It's gone better in some moments than others. But I think that all of us across a range of leadership need more than an expert coming into the room and giving us a new tool set about something, we can get really excited that the new tool set will fix us. And I think actually what we really need right now is more creative ways to recognize need together, to reimagine how we are with one another in ways where we're not actually sitting in rows and listening to one person primarily. I thank you for listening and I want to hear from UUs together as we make some hard choices going forward.

- So we're gonna take questions from the room. Amy, I lost the Zoom by accident. I pressed the wrong button over here. Sorry, so either I need your iPad or I need to rejoin the meeting, but we'll start within the room. So Marcus will bring the mic to you. If you could say your name and congregation and ask your question.

- I don't think your mic is on.

- Yeah, do we have a green line.

- Check, thank you.

- It is on.

- Better.

- Thank you. Thanks for asking. Hey, good to see you again. We're from Naperville, DuPage Unitarian Universalist Church. My wife Pat is with me. We're also members of the Unitarian Service Committee Stewardship Circle. Dr. Rev. Sofía and I had some interesting chats a while back. Thank you for opening the doors, the phrase business acumen because otherwise I would've thought my question would actually be off topic. Last time I checked using a business phrase, our market share of adults in America for our religion is way below one in 1000 American adults.

- I think that's true.

- I have found this astonishingly unsatisfactory for 25 straight years. And wonder whether in your six years this will make it anywhere near a priority for you to attempt to tackle, which is admittedly a very, very difficult problem to solve. But without me kind of leading the way and things I'd like to see done, I'd rather just hear what you think about this. And is there ultimately behind this, a trade off between size in the sense that we may never really be big so we

shouldn't have to worry about it. And what does it mean to be excellent size apart?

- Can I ask you to repeat just the last phrase that you said with the mic a little further from you mouth?

- Yeah, we may never be able to be a large, so one possible perspective on this is to say it doesn't really matter. We will be excellent and never worry about being large. On the other hand, being large with donations, pledges coming into congregations I think can go a certain distance to solving a lot of local problems. But we don't, as far as I can tell, we do not have models from congregations who have grown that we can look at and say, can we apply them to us locally?

- Thank you. I appreciate the question. Wow, this is a question. I mean you say 25 years. I agree that we have been wrestling with for a while, you know, and I know that we talk about growth as being more than about size and I think right now particularly, I mean our congregations are struggling. I think that is just true. It is partly financial for sure. Ooh, thanks. No, it's fine. Test. Thank you, thanks Adam. It startled me all of a sudden I heard my voice in a different way. Okay, so, I have a range of thoughts, which is where my quiet is coming from. I think actually that my strongest answer is a theological one and not a business one, but they go together, which is, I actually believe that making room for people who need a progressive faith community that holds them is a theological mandate. Like our Universalism asks us to make room for those who would be in community with us. And I'm not sure we always lean into that fully because we also have a real reaction to anything that feels evangelistic. Especially because freedom of personal belief has been so historically important for us. This spectrum, you know, finding a balance point in that I think has been at the center of some of these questions for a long time. Again, for me this is also about innovation and willingness to lean into something that we might not today recognize as a frequent expression of Unitarian Universalism. Because this issue is not just you. Yes, there are other movements and denominations that are larger than we are, but in terms of is there regular appreciable growth, most of them, no, not in the United States. We are seeing a real decline in mainline religious traditions. So to me that asks different questions. What are the actual needs and what are we particularly suited to show up for in terms of meeting some of those needs? And some of them, yes, are about numerical growth. Some of them are not, some of them are around growth in justice issues, growth and promoting values. But I think we have some hard conversations to continue. They've been going on for 25 years around whether we feel more called to make Unitarian Universalism available to people who are drawn to its message and its values. Or we are more drawn to maintaining our comfort in the expression of Unitarian Universalism that we know best. And that's another spectrum.

It's not, I don't believe in binaries much in general, but there is a tension in that yes, the familiar matters. Our communities matter. They have a character, they have a right to have a character. Who are we excluding simply by virtue of habit and sometimes by a type of, I don't wanna say shyness because we don't tend to be shy people very much, but a reluctance to engage in the public square about not just who we are as UUs, but why it matters and why it might matter to someone else. So all of that is life for me and life particularly in how are we funding innovative ministries. That is work that's happening at the UUA right now. You know, how are we resourcing congregations to try new things? What are we messaging and to whom? I know NPR is a great reflection of who we are today. That maybe that's therefore not where we need to be putting our message. What, how are we finding folks who will resonate with our values, who have not felt welcome in our communities? And what is our work to do to change the welcome piece if the tradition that we care about is of value to other groups of people? These are messy questions that don't just come back to, you know, what is the advertising campaign we do or do not do. That said, I keep raising, you know, Rebecca Savage is probably, her ears are ringing 'cause I keep talking about her. But we sat down the other day and she said to me, "I wish we would just put out a call and invite folks who grew up in the faith or who were active in the faith and left to come home, even just to visit, even just to talk." What would it mean to say, you know, to folks who grew up Unitarian Universal and found something else as adults or maybe aren't parents yet when they might come back or folks who were UUs but didn't feel welcome and haven't felt safe to come into a community. There are so many former UUs in the world. What if we said come home, we will make room for you. Come home. This is not my idea but it is haunting me. So I don't know what it will look like in the next six years. It is on my spirit and it is troubling my peace. So yes it is something I will be thinking about. Thank you for that question.

- Great, if you're online because of a, I somehow closed it and you posted a question, before I said Amy, I need your iPad, I need you to repost that question in the chat because I can't see back before this iPad joined. But there is one question in here that I will go ahead and ask and now there's a couple more coming in which is great, but this question represents a view among some Unitarian so I think that people have heard and so I'm gonna ask it 'cause the person asked you to respond. I think that's really important. The question from a person named Tim is that the current leadership and his belief has betrayed a number of the core UU philosophies including a willingness to discuss as well as a right for us to hold a range of beliefs. Decision, and he writes by the UUA to remove at least one person, specifically Rev. Equa, for what was deemed bullying and abusive behavior in itself seems an act of bullying in this questionnaire's view, or contradiction to our beliefs which harms our values and theologies. So his question you is, as a candidate for UUA president, how would you address this concern that some Unitarian Universalists

have?

- I mean honestly directly, I know that this is a live conversation in our movement right now and in our community and especially among colleagues. Like can I acknowledge that this tension point is in a community of colleagues that are trying to hold the faith together and that makes it even harder. I do wanna say that there are, you used the language, I'm sorry, I had COVID four weeks ago, so sometimes I drop words. You used the language of the UUA abandoning our philosophies, is that right?

- I think he wrote betraying, yeah.

- Betraying our philosophies. Okay, so I'm gonna say really plainly, I do not believe it is a betrayal of Unitarian Universalism to remove from professional fellowship someone who is out of covenant with a professional code of conduct to which we hold ourselves. That does not address heartache, relationships, complexity and other pieces that feed into this work. So I think that there is a lot about Unitarian Universalist values that are things that we talk about that are things that we debate. And I think there are standards for our professionals code of conduct that the UUA has a fiduciary responsibility to attend to for the safety and wellbeing of our congregations. I am not interested in adjudicating the issue of Rev. ello's case, because it actually never went before our adjudicating body. So what is hard about this is I think it is right for an institution charged with the credentialing, safety, vetting, training of its leaders to actually hold accountability to folks who are not willing to be in the process as it is. I decide every day whether I'm still willing to be in the professional agreements that I hold with my colleagues and with the institution of our faith around what it means to therefore make me more, There's a word that's leaving me. But for me to be accountable in how I am with Unitarian Universalists right? That that is part of our institutional responsibility that for me is very different than our philosophy as Unitarian Universalists. Yes. I think our philosophy says there is always a pathway back into community that is Universalist practice that is holding love at the center. I believe that a willingness to be back in our professional code of conduct and to have the conversation that never happened would be an accurate philosophical expression of Universalism, right? And to say that an unwillingness to be a part of the standards we have put forth together as religious, it's actually not even the UA that creates that code of conduct, it is our ministry as a body. So the path back into right relationship can be complicated but it is grounded in love and it exists. It does not, Universalism does not mean that every behavior must be acceptable for us to love one another. Yeah, I still love my colleagues who are no longer in fellowship. I am heartsick about the unwillingness to be in conversation with colleagues about what has gone wrong.

- Thank you. We'll take a question in the room. Mark's got the mic.

- Thank you. I am Karen Goldner from Second Unitarian in Chicago.

- Hi.

- Hi. Indeed, we got the bus up here. My question is about when you were talking about theology and you made a number of references to theology resourcing us and I just would ask you to maybe talk more about that, 'cause I didn't understand what you meant.

- Thank you for saying so and for asking. Yeah, I think I said resourcing us theologically, but I also think that theology resources us, so now I'm torn and I'm gonna talk about both things. I'll try to be fast. What I was trying to say was, theology is complicated, right? I don't mean traditionally the study of the understanding of God. I mean what are the things that we believe about life, about the large categories of life and living and how we make meaning out of our day-to-day lives and connections to one another. That's what I mean when I'm talking about theology. And I think that there is more work for us to do as Unitarian Universalists theologically when we are an intentionally pluralistic communities where right, we hold a covenant around our values and we encourage one another to do personal spiritual work and hopefully to be impacted by the personal spiritual work of others in our communities. I think we can get lost sometimes being worrying that one person's particular expression of belief means that another expression of belief cannot be held as true in the same moment. There's beautiful writing about this in Latinx liberation theologies, especially feminist ones that talk about holding multiple, like the discipline of multiple truths. So I might believe that love at the center of our faith means that I have an accountability to my ancestors and to all that they sacrifice to maintain and to being for my existence to be possible. And you might believe that love at the center of our faith means that centering human rights around the globe is how we know ourselves to be right. Both of those things can be true at once. That is very easy to say and sometimes really hard to do in a community. So when I'm saying I want to resource UUs theologically, I wanna give us conversation prompts, programmatic spaces, small group ministry resources that help us have conversations with one another, stay open to being impacted by someone else's lived experience and story and feeling authorized to do the own deep processing that we do ourselves to make meaning out of our own lives. That's what I meant. I also wanna say, I think theology resources us, you know, when I think about the times where I've most wondered what could we have done, you know, I think about a 21 year old in the Central Valley whose mother was dying and I was in a hospital room with this individual and he just wanted her to be clean and comfortable and cared for and I tried to get him to take a break. I'm not gonna tell you all the details of what a break would've meant and he wasn't willing to leave his mother's side, which I impacted me powerfully to watch this experience

between a mother and her son. But when we were having conversations about what it means to lose a parent at 21, about the meaning of death, about how we continue in our lives, we didn't have good shared language to talk about death, to talk about addiction, to talk about the complexities of life, to talk about feeling responsible as an emerging adult for a parent. And I thought while there's theological work we could have done before this moment happened, I think sometimes when we are asked to wrestle with the meaning of life doesn't mean we necessarily have a clean, I think I hope most UUs have evolving answers throughout our lifetimes. But having done the wrestling before a crisis strengthens us. And so I think theology resources us as well. Does that help?

- [Karen] Yes, thank you.

- Great, so our next question will come from online. And from Laylani Davenberry at Westside UU Congregation in Seattle, they note on occupied coastal Salish people's land and the Duwamish people in particular who are still there. And they ask, how do you think we should, especially leaders in our faith be showing up for the crisis of hate and life-threatening harms against Trans youth and Trans people?

- Vocally with a willingness to take risk and without ceasing, period. That said, it's a great question. Thank you, let me take the opportunity to be really real about what risk sometimes means. You know, there is a lot that Unitarian Universalism is doing and some of it isn't being talked about and that's about the safety of our beloveds. So I realize I keep talking about risk this week, it must be on my mind. But, there is a change in impact when a community decides to risk together, right? So we have incredible Trans youth showing up in all kinds of dangerous moments to speak about their own rights. We have parents who are risking incarceration in some states, I am horrified to say at this point, who are showing up, who are ensuring that their children have voice, who are advocating, who are doing the work in the world. There is a beautiful, if you have not seen the video from the last UUA board meeting, Carrie and Susan gave us an actually quite powerful reminder of years of work around Trans rights and around what combating cis sexism looks like in the world. Some of it can't be talked about. My question is what does risk look like and when things are this bad, how are we preparing to share risk? So, and you know, and I, and again this is every individual person, this is about families, this is about life situations and realities. But I am just gonna say we have still allowed our Trans beloveds to carry more risk than is reasonable in this particular human rights battle. And I think many of us need to be asking ourselves, what are we willing to risk? How do we mitigate risk by using, what are we saving our resources for during the rise of fascism? Like really, what does shared risk look like? So my first sentence is my answer, but my practice also is about what it means to do this difficult work and to



understand that harm to our children, to our Trans beloved is harm to all of us, but it doesn't land on us the same way. And it's the same kind of choice. What does it mean to be able to choose whether to show up or not on a given day for particular justice issue? And sometimes what does it mean to choose to stay home on a given day for your own safety, for your wellbeing, for the needs of your family? All of these things are real, but if there were ever a time and if there was ever a faith to do this work in the world, it is us and it is now, please don't ask our Trans beloveds to educate each individual one of us on what is needed right now. Like please, there's just, there's no time for that kind of labor. We know a lot. There are ways to ask accountably our beloveds things once so they can attend to what they need. But loves this work will continue. I will ask you to believe and trust that a lot is happening that we're not talking about. And I would ask you to ask yourselves, what is your risk assessment right now? It is urgent.

- Thank you. We'll take a question in the room.

- Hi.

- Hi. I think we as a country, as a society are really still trying to process everything that happened with COVID.

- Absolutely.

- There's just so much healing that is needed. I've heard you speak about collective trauma, trauma informed care and that's the language of healthcare and psychology and social justice. What is the language of theology to address that? I don't know. And you said we have a spiritual responsibility to each other. Can you speak more about that?

- Yeah, would you quickly tell us your name and your congregation?

- Oh, I'm so sorry.

- You're fine.

- Mary Doak, I'm from this congregation.

- Perfect, thank you. This is such a theological issue and the urgency around justice is why it often comes out of my mouth in social justice language. Early in the pandemic. No, it can't have been because we were in the room. Wow. When I was still in the faculty at Starr King School for the ministry, I was going back through the papers of James Luther Adams and reading his writing in the early stages of the AIDS pandemic, AIDS and HIV, and he was talking about how we have a moral responsibility in the face of death and loss to ask profoundly spiritual questions about what it means to care for one another, what it means to talk about death and dying. I mean, in some ways when I

think theologically about COVID, how are we talking about a global crisis where we have lost an unspeakable number of people? We have not as a nation made space for grief, and as a world we have not made space for an equitable sharing of protective medicine. So theologically, what does it mean for us to talk about the profound bad faith? I have been vaccinated five times. The partners we sometimes work with at USC can't yet be vaccinated once, I live in a nation that has decided to prioritize our survival over the rest of the world. I as an individual have not made that choice. How are we talking as a community of faith about what it means to live in a nation but still is not doing enough to protect us horribly, but also has made a decision to protect us over other countries. Yes, you can also say what the United States has done more than, they're all the nuance. But theologically, what does it feel like knowing that in the world? How do we live with those choices? Who does that ask us to be? Does it change what we know about death and dying or about living in impossible times? These are not cheerful questions, I know. And you know, part of what Adams was talking about was that we cannot shy away from that, which is devastating and death dealing, particularly in a time of pandemic. And with AIDS and HIV, horribly, this was another time where we turned away from those who were most impacted. I think we know a lot about what it means to hold ourselves accountable for long standing evils. This is one, how are we with one another in that grief. The care side of it is, I think especially early in the pandemic, we saw beautiful expressions of communities caring for each other. We were reminded, there was almost a heartening of, wait a minute, we do know how to care for each other. We do know how to love each other. We do know how to center what it means to share resources and to do this differently. We are sliding back into some fantasy of the before times. There's a theologian who writes about environmental devastation. His name is Rob Nixon, and he talks about slow violence, which is a really important environmental term, but I think it's, well, I think COVID is also an environmental crisis and therefore slow violence applies. So if we have an experience of devastation whose impact will be felt longer than the media's writing about it, way longer than our story, you know, our storytelling, he basically asked how do we tell stories in environmental time so that we are in effect telling the story long enough to address the actual impact of the thing that happened. And he and I, let me be really real, we disagree 100% on this. He completely disagrees with me about this, especially because environmentally religion has been used for a long time to justify environmental devastation. But what I said to him in a classroom once was, the thing that I know religion does really well is tell the same story for hundreds of years. So like, what would it mean for us to take on seriously the narrative of COVID-19, telling a story as people who love each other and love members of our broader communities that aren't UUs, how do we tell the story long enough to hold our values around making different choices, understanding who we are differently. Holding one another as we face the unknown. These, to me, are theological questions and they're hard. They hurt to ask out

loud. But I think that having a community that holds you in love, that you have built trust with and relationships is one of the only places that we can have these hard conversations well. And let me say, beloveds, partly because it's our culture, but also it's what I believe. I do think there are ways out of the fear place we have gotten to around COVID that is making us make some really hard unaccountable decisions. And that sometimes it's just making us not talk about it. Like sometimes we just don't wanna tell the stories or we want to remind ourselves of joy or we wanna remind ourselves that we are in fact a people who gravitate toward hope. And I wanna say that, you know, I think hope is a spiritual discipline. I think that we can tell stories that are difficult and to actually take comfort in the fact that we tell the truth to one another. And that that truth hopefully empowers us in different ways to bear witness in the world, to demand justice, To not lose one another in these times. Thank you for asking.

- Thank you. I've got a few more questions online, but I've got time to ask one more. And then we'll turn to your chance to ask the folks here and online some questions. And I'll explain how that'll work in just a moment. But this question comes from Teresa Zinger who is in Minneapolis and a member of the board of the UU Animal Ministry. They reference the proposal in the Article II Commission's work around interdependence and covenanting to cherish Earth and all beings by creating relationships with care and respect. And ask you to speak about how Unitarian Universalists are called to relationships of care and respect with all beings. And how this call would be reflected in your presidency.

- Hmm, that's a great question, thank you. I've been messing with our first principle for a long time. I usually talk about the inherent worth and dignity of all people and all beings. So I was really excited to see that language. To me, this is a question of respect. And again, like with many of our beliefs and practices, I think that that what it means for each individual or each community or each family to live in a manner that is a respect driven relationship, right? With one another, with all beings is the kind of work we do together in community are the kind of questions we ask and chew on and wrestle with. But we have a history, a lived long standing human history of putting lived beings, bless you into a hierarchy, right? Usually with humans at the top. So the question of what is asked of us, if we say that we are holding respect for all people and all beings, how do our values start to address climate disruption? Resource management is about who and how we are in relationship with the rest of the world, right? Especially in a time when humans are having such a profound impact on the globe that we are our own geological era, right? And so, but I am an environmental ethicist by training. This is my scholarship. And so these questions are always live with me. You will often hear me giving an environmental example or analysis for a question. But for me, this is always an

interdisciplinary issue. So how do we take on the realities of climate justice in an intersectional way, which for me means that we include human injustices in our analysis and it means we include the full respect and agency of all beings in our analysis and that when they conflict, we wrestle with it together. You know, traditional theology, there's a, I promise I will not just go completely professor on us, but there is a standard article that you read in the field of environmental ethics and it's title is "Do Pelicans Go to Heaven?" Which is like a funny title. But, but there, you know, in Christian systematic theology, the question of who has a soul, which has caused so much human harm as well in human history, if you don't have a soul, you don't have the same rights, you don't have the same, COVID brain, I'm thinking to helot you don't have the same call into a life arc that goes beyond human living, right? And so your life is somehow worthless. I don't think most UUs believe this, but we don't wrestle all the time either with, okay, so then what does that mean in terms of your lived practices and how you are in relationship with Earth and all beings. So I think these questions are live now in presidency. You know, those become questions about investments, relationships, resourcing, they become very institutional, but they're also pretty core to my own theological perspectives and ethical values.

- Wonderful. Thank you, and thank you for your questions. And I will remind folks that there are two more forums like this and then there will also be a forum of general assembly where questions will be able to be submitted in advance. So lots more if we didn't get to today, but we wanted to turn to a time for Rev. Sofía to ask you some questions to find out things. So she'll ask a question. If you have an answer to that question, you can raise your hand and Marcus will bring you the mic. If you're online and you have an answer, you can type it into the chat and I will read it out as time permits. So that's our plan.

- That's great.

- Sound good?

- Sounds good.

- Turn over to you.

- Thank you. I also wanna let folks know if you've been looking at the information about forums coming out of the campaign rather than the UUA, you will notice a rogue additional date. So I just want you to know that on June 4th we're also having a conversation in Nashville. It's gonna bounce from Dallas to Nashville. This was just to spend some more time in the South because the campaign only added one additional kind of event. It just looks like an afterthought, but it truly, so it will not be moderated like this, right? It will have a different style and feel, but if you are in driving distance of

Nashville, I would love to see you on June four. So, okay, thank you for that. You know, when we talked about what it meant for me to still be campaigning in an uncontested election, for me that's about showing up and being in relationship and getting to be in conversation with folks. And while I am pretty comfortable in the hot seat, actually it really means a lot to me to hear from all of you. So thank you in advance. I only brought two questions because what do we have, 160 people online?

- Something like that, yeah.

- I'd actually love to hear from folks. So my first question, and this is really, you know, I am active in a variety of UU communities and congregational spaces, but by no means anywhere near even a small percentage of them. So I'm curious what questions about Unitarian Universalism. Like this is a time when we are, wow, emerging from the quarantine phase of the pandemic. We're talking about our values, eventually we're gonna be talking about our bylaws, we're changing administrant, like there's a lot of Transition right now for us. So I'm curious, what topics are most live in everyday conversations in your congregations and communities right now? Like what are UUs talking about? I don't necessarily mean what are your boards doing? There's like what are the conversations UUs are having about, and what would you say members of your communities are most invested in and what do you wanna share about that? Does that make sense or have I given you four questions at once? Thank you.

- My name is Melanie Kitchner and this is my home congregation. What we are doing a lot of is white supremacy, anti-oppression, anti-racism work there. When we started three years ago, there were like 50 members of our task force and we've kind of reduced now to about 12 active people. But we hired the YWCA Equity Institute and they helped us get through this and we've got, we have three aims we were trying to get to, and I think we did. And we're starting to share that with the whole congregation now, we're gonna start with newsletter article starting the May 12th. And that's something I'm involved in. I am obviously not BIPOC and I'm was raised in a white supremacist Republican part of Pennsylvania. And I think I have atonement that I needed to share and to use to make it easier for me to understand that albeit I probably am a racist because I have a feeling I was raised to be one and I'm fighting it. Talk about cognitive dissonance.

- Yep.

- But, and then, well that's enough for me. Somebody else can talk.

- I appreciate so much that you put that in theological terms. Thank you.

- You're welcome.

- We don't have, I'm gonna see them in the regular chat, right, Amy, any responses that come in? Great, so I haven't seen them yet, so if you're in the room and you have an answer to Rev. Sofía's question, please. Rev. Jason.

- So exciting to be here with you. I'm Rev. Jason Lydon. I serve our congregation at Second Unitarian in Chicago. And one of the big things that's coming up a lot for us is a sense of belonging and what it means to feel like church belongs to everybody in the church. And that the congregation shares responsibility for the life of the church. We have, we're a congregation of about 220-ish members and we are really wrestling with lay leadership engagement. We're having, we're struggling with getting people to step up into certain roles. We're struggling to sustain people and to really nurture them and make them feel as though this is a great use of their time and that it is feeding them as opposed to taking from them. And so I know you said that this is us answering questions, but I'm also curious just about the ways that you imagine a sustaining lay leadership in a way that is theologically relevant to them. Is spiritually meaningful, is grounded in the realities of what our churches really need in order to function and that also navigate what's happening. Talking with colleagues, we have a lot of burnt out ministers.

- Oh we do.

- And a lot of ministers struggling with mental illness and struggling with all sorts of things. And so we have congregations that are being 75% served by their minister, not because the minister doesn't love them and want to do everything in their power to be there.

- Absolutely. And there's a lack that exists and there's an even greater need for lay leadership in that dynamic. So I'm wondering if you have any reflections too as we are reflecting on this, how we nurture ourselves to survive.

- Thank you. You are so not alone as a congregation, I mean I'm hearing this across the UUA in our congregations and communities and you know, until very recently I served on the appointments committee of the UUA and so I was really actively involved in identifying leaders to do national work in the faith. And we are, I mean we are exhausted. We just are exhausted and yes, our religious professionals are exhausted mostly because of sacrifice. I mean if we can say out loud the number of colleagues of all types who didn't retire, didn't take sabbaticals, didn't take vacations, stayed to be because that's what community asks of us. But I'm also seeing like what does it mean when a whole bunch of our religious professionals are like, it's been three and a half years and I must take a rest and we all must take a risk at the same time. This isn't what happens usually for us, right? In community. So I wanna thank you for just like naming honestly that

this is a thing that is real. You know, I wanna say that I'm seeing some colleagues asking to take brief, shorter, faster than usual sabbaticals. And I'm starting to see some congregation saying, yes, take a one month sabbatical because last year was really hard. Take a three month sabbatical because you must, can we be flexible with our rules about renewal and restoration and care given that we are in a circumstance that our contracts didn't imagine? You know, can we support each other? I know colleagues are trying to show up and support each other so someone can take a break so somebody else can cover and we're doing some of that, but I think we can do that in our communities too. And I think there are ways that the UUA can work with some of our professional groups to also resource some of that. But a lot of it is theological. You know, I actually think ecclesiology this kind of the study of like what is the purpose and power of community? Why do we gather in community some of the best of what we do as UUs? I actually think ecclesiology is where we really show up, right? We do not wanna lose each other. We believe in our communities and our communities are not perfect and they don't work for everyone and we try to build new communities when that is the case, right? So I think we have a long history of really trying to make meaning and understand why we gather as UUs. And could we spend some time, lemme say that differently. I think we could stand to spend some time, more time talking about what it means to have church, have congregational life be easeful. And this is countercultural because the longing for what we know and remember and have missed is so strong. But what if we considered ourselves to be 40% back in congregational life rather than 100%? What if that acknowledged that our families are trying to figure out school and life and religious all at the same time and our religious professionals are trying to now meet the community needs of a parish that could be all around the world at this part. And you know, at this point, and what if it meant that we leaned on each other communally to do more collaborative things so that we could be 40% back now and maybe 50 or 60% next year. And you know, we used to talk about watering the grassroots to mean sharing our financial resources differently and not top down. I think we need to share our human resources differently while still being in right relationship with the people we employ to be leaders in our congregations. This is a hard balance. I don't have an easy answer, but this is the heart of the work right now. So I think what I wanna say is I am in awe of how we held each other in these last three and a half years. And you know, can we celebrate not just Susan Frederick Ray, but the national staff of the, I've never seen us rally like this. We held fast to each other and I think that the collective burnout is now also real. Can we hold the same spirit? Can we treat burnout as seriously as we treat COVID? And can we try to hold the same ethic of care for long enough to restore the ways that we can be with each other? This is communal care work, it's relational work. But some of it is. And I know we struggle. I struggle. Let me speak. Sofia struggles with perfectionism. I'm bad at doing things badly. Can I invite you to do things badly with me for a while?

- Yeah.

- Really. I think 75% is a miracle right now.

- I wanna sort of summarize briefly some of the things that came in and answer to your question online. Lots of variety. And I won't do the names in places just for time sake, but people mention things about their congregations working on right relations and healing listening sessions, working in with mountaintop and drum on these questions.

- Excellent.

- Folks working on the role of humanism in society, working with humanist organizations and nurturing leadership among young people of color.

- Nice.

- In addition to quotidian worries of finances and aging, dwindling membership, we're exploring ways of living into the principle commensurate with the diverse small urban area where we are surrounded by political redness, congregation risk, just what we were talking about, reestablishing community sort of in this kind of sort of post-COVID world. Not entirely, obviously. By feeling a lack of connection and full complexity and reparations for indigenous people and black and brown folks addressing harms that have been done and doing structural work to stop ongoing harm. A sense of loss about people who left in the pandemic. And also fear around income. These are some of the things, more is coming in, but those are some of the things that people mentioned that they're working on.

- Thank you. It's beautiful. Okay, my second question is really meant for congregational leaders, but if you understand yourself as a congregational leader, please, please, you are very welcome to, so I'm thinking of, you know, committee chairs, board members, elders, staff members, really anyone that takes the responsibility of a set of leadership in their congregational life. So we have a little bit of this already, but my quest, what unexpected need or needs most impacted your community's experience in the quarantine stage of the pandemic? And what resources are most helpful or would be most helpful as we continue to navigate what it means for many of us to emerge from that quarantine moment? So what was most needed? What is or could be most useful as we continue this wrestling?

- Hi, Rev. Denise Colley. I am the interim minister in Palatine, Illinois and my pronouns are she and her and our congregation was super grateful for all the ways that leadership at the UUA and regional staff helped with online worship and things like that. One



thing that continues to be helpful and even Rev. Matthew Johnson helped with it was all of the music licensing stuff and that continues to be really clunky, but we do it. But I think more help in that is great. The other thing though that I see really coming up is, for example, the congregation that I have the pleasure of serving, there are a lot of people heartbroken that more people will not do work around anti-racism or anti-oppression. We hear comments like, it's too hard, it's too intense. I don't, I think that's gonna take too long. You know, some other people have done that. We have an anti-racism class running today and we have more people who are visitors signed up for it than our own members. And at the same time, there's people who are all on board for all of those wonderful amazing causes. We have a congregation very dedicated to justice. We have a house called Chalice House that's an interfaith collaboration on our property where we house immigrants that come right from being detained and stuff. And so I also see them wanting to do even more justice work and I think they do an incredible amount of justice work. But the one thing I think we need help as with, as a denomination, as a faith, as leaders is fun. I really think that we have a hard time having fun together. I think there's some people that worry we can't have fun because then somehow we won't be politically correct or religious. And so I also kind of wanna plant a seed of challenge to have your presidency include fun and giving us permission as a religious people that we can have joy together. And it doesn't all have to be all of the things that I so desperately have dedicated my life to caring about, but that we need that joy in order to fuel all the hard work we need to do.

- Absolutely. Thank you.

- The Rev. Mandi Huizenga from DuPage GU Church in Naperville. So I, our congregation, like many are trying to figure out how to come back together after the pandemic, post-pandemic, whatever we're calling this moment in time. But I am really, and this is also speaking as a parent of two teenagers, the pandemic has completely altered life for our youth and young adults. They are not the same. Not only has it devastated our youth group, it's devastated many, many youth groups. But I'm having conversations with young adults who can't even name what they're missing. And when I have proposed community as the answer there's like this light bulb that goes on. Like what? I can't what. Of course that's what I've been missing. How how do we reengage them? I don't even know where to look. I don't feel like the UUA has given us any opportunities in recent years and not only for young adults but for youth. And I would love for us to really expand on ideas that are working but also coming up with new ways because I actually don't think the old ways will work. I actually think we have to be experimental here. And so that's actually a resource that I could use and I don't think I'm the only one.

- Oh you're not. The wonderful news though is that resourcing around ministry and spiritual formation for emerging adults is like live any

minute now, which has nothing to do with me, but we have phenomenal stuff. The UA who's been working on exactly this question. So there should be, and the language of emerging adults is where we're gonna see it. So I would encourage you to actually just keep an eye on what's coming outta the UA. 'Cause it's coming. I haven't seen it, I'm really excited about it. But I think this is really real and it also for me is about shared risk, right? How do we take risk and listen and innovate together again knowing that it's not like we're gonna get it wrong before we figure it out. And so how are we listening to young adults and youth and resourcing what they know and need? How are we taking risks together so we're not just serially imploding programs because that's not helpful either, anyway. But the good news is I actually believe there's real resourcing coming.

- I've got some of the online answers and I will say from my own perspective in Rockford that what do we need next, the youth and young emerging adult thing is the thing that we're most feeling. We're seeing that same thing. So very much not alone. And few folks on chat said, yeah, us too. So some of the other things people said online is that things that were useful discounts for Zoom accounts a necessity then and ongoing, what is needed now more training on how to create true community that is multi-platform. Instead of two communities under one kind of name, a few folks mentioned that what was needed was that technological help, but it was a steep learning curve. The what was needed was the online resources which led to a more connection with the larger UU world and most needed now grief and trauma support that doesn't require more time and energy from the paid leadership.

- Noted. Thank you.

- Yeah. Most useful then ministers delivering great sermons, RE materials was what was most useful. Amends what Mandy said. The physical internet divide is mentioned here again and the fluency divide, right? That some folks are much more comfortable with that online access than others.

- Yes.

- New ways of engaging families with children than young people who are tech tapped out. Those are some of the things online that people are thinking about why, what we heard here in the room too.

- That's great, thank you.

- Are there answers in the room to this question?

- We are almost at time. Is there like a last burning question that someone wants to ask? Yes.

- Yeah, great.

- I just went rogue. I'm sorry.

- I love it. We're having fun. We're being creative. We're trying new things. It's all good. Thanks, Matthew.

- Barbara Michael, also from Second Unitarian, and thinking about how Second Unitarian did so well with tech stuff and that really kept us going and in and still doing Zoom as well as seniors at the Admiral, which is a senior center and in the sanctuary.

- Great.

- But I also think of five years ago being up in Marquette, Michigan and how they are really drowning and having a really tough time. So yeah, it's a rollercoaster all over. Yeah, I want to emphasize since time was brought up that during, in this most current UU world, Tina Danner's poem about time and taking time and giving time to her kids and so forth, it's an absolutely very important read for all of us. So take a look at that full page by a Tina Danner.

- Thank you. And go to in spirit and get that book.

- If you're game for one more one. When I said we had two questions online, but I don't need to get time for one, that person said, hey, ask mine if you've got time. And it's a good closing question I think. Because this is Carrie who's in West Seattle and asks and says, your ethical approach in the delegates guide for general assembly balances, valid yet potentially competing issues and suggests multiple possible solutions and asks in what other kind of areas of Unitarian Universalism would you like to take that kind of approach with multiple possible solutions?

- Yeah, that's a great question. I think I just don't believe that we have to lose each other when we disagree. I mean really at the end of the day. So for me, wow, multiple, so you know, I don't mean this in a flippant way almost everywhere, you know, so where's the question about? So we're asking questions about how we prepare ministers. Well that's great. I think we should be asking questions about how we better resource our seminaries, how we help our ongoing newer religious leaders coming in. But I think we also need to be asking about widening the circle of concern and what that means for widening a pathway. To me there is almost always multiple approaches to addressing a need that the community has identified as a whole. I am delighted that you're reading the Delegate Guide. Let me be really honest about that. Well, it's been a minute since we have, I can't look at my laughing colleagues. It makes me laugh. There's been a minute. We used to have moments in our congregations where we would set aside time, we would look at the business agenda. Some of this I'm hearing 'cause I didn't live it myself. And delegates would go from a

community informed by all the conversations about all the content to show up at general assembly and represent wrestling and communication that had happened. I feel like that spirit is meant to be in our governance, is meant to be in the way we undertake a range of resourcing approaches, decisions that we make communally, how we hold authority between the staff and the board and our congregations and communities. So people who know me, you will hear this from me, that I think there are multiple ways to address our needs and hopefully what we're holding at the center is that same ethic of care that keeps us in the longer process to address the needs of more members of our communities at once. I don't have a ton of concrete, right? The delegate guide is very live and and very particular, but that tends to be how I think systemically, I believe in multiple truths and with multiple layers of approach that hopefully still holds us in community with accountability and love, right? The UUA at the end of the day is meant to be an institution that holds us in our common endeavor. It's actually not meant to tell us what we believe. It's meant to help us community by community share together what it means to further our values in the world. And all of that work, I think benefits from multiple approaches.

- Thank you so much. I want to thank the folks here at the Unitarian Church in Evanston for hosting us. There is a reception to follow. I see coffee and tea. It looks like perhaps some juice and snacks back there. So hope you'll stay and meet your fellow Unitarian Universalists if you're here in the room. Thank to all of you online who spent your time with us today. A pleasure to have you joining us. Thanks to the UUA staff, to Amy Kent in particular for all the administrative magic to make all of this happen. And my deep thanks to Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt for this time together. Thank you very much.

- Thank you.

- Thank you for coming. Can we thank Marcus for running all the way around the room? Also, Marcus for doing the mic everybody and I acknowledge that David Pyle, the regional lead for Mid America region is here with us as well. So thanks for being here and thanks for being online. And you see you in Santa Barbara.

- Yes, you will. I think that's May 20th.