

- Good afternoon, one and all. Good afternoon to those of you here in this physical sanctuary with us, and to those of you who are joining us across our nation, I'm the Rev. Julia Hamilton and I am the lead minister here at the Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara. And it is my honor and delight to welcome you to the Unitarian Universalist Association Presidential Forum here on site in our sanctuary, virtually with you, and on unceded Chumash land. Let us begin our gathering in gratitude. On this Saturday afternoon as we gather, I invite you to think of who it is, who has made it possible for you to be here today. Think of someone in your life, wherever you are that supports your presence here. Maybe someone taking care of childcare, someone who clears the space on a beautiful Saturday for you to turn your attention to these matters of our faith. And I would like to name some specific people and organizations who've made it possible for us to gather. This event is sponsored by the UUA Board and the UUA Election Campaign Practices Committee, and they've put so much work into this series of events across our country. This is three out of four, so blessings as you head to Dallas next. And I also want to thank the Alliance of the Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara for the beautiful reception and food that is waiting for us out in the courtyard. If you're here with us in person or close enough to zip on over, please join us afterward for some community and conversation. Wherever you are joining us from, we are gathered under the same sky. We are grounded on the same earth. Take a moment to lift your mind to the sky, to send your spirit down to the earth and recognize that fundamental interconnection. I'd like to invite Olivia Calvi, our moderator, to light our chalice for us as we begin. Let us light our chalices this afternoon to remind us that we are moving in the stream of this faith with the strength of our ancestors holding before us, the vision of the beloved community that we are building together in this moment and in service to the generations to come. Thank you.

- All right. Hello, everyone. Welcome, It's great to be here with you all this morning. I guess it's almost afternoon now. My name is Olivia Calvi. My pronouns are she/her/hers. I am a lifelong Unitarian Universalist, currently a member of Neighborhood Unitarian Universalist Church in Pasadena, California. And I am a member of the Election Campaign Practices Committee, which is what has brought me here with you all today. And I'm here to help facilitate a conversation between the Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt and you all. And this is a really exciting opportunity for us to be in conversation together in terms of the Election Campaign Practices Committee, or the ECPC as we call it, a couple of the things that we do are to help ensure that there are fair and equitable practices in terms of elections and campaigns for UUA leadership. And we're also here to help facilitate conversation and dialogue relating to where we are at in our movement and where we hope to be. So we have been doing a series of four forums, as Rev. Julia mentioned, this is the third. And each of those forums has had a different topic. Our topic for today is youth and young adult ministry and lay leadership. Two things which

I'm very excited about, I know they've been touched on in the prior forums. And as a young adult myself, I'm very excited to be kind of here having this conversation with you in terms of what that looks like for our faith. So we're gonna have three segments for today. The first is going to be prepared questions that I've brought to ask Sofía. The second is going to be an opportunity for you all to come forward with questions, whether you're here, present with us in person or if you're online, I have an iPad here and I'll be able to access those questions. And if you're in the room, we'll go over that again when we get there, but Jessica York will be walking around bringing a microphone to you all to ask your questions. And then the third part is for Sofía to have an opportunity to ask some questions for all of you. And I'll let you touch on too why you wanted to do that as well. But kind of to create space where it really does feel as though it's more of a conversation and dialogue throughout. Alright, so before we get started, I wanted to give you an opportunity. I know a lot of people know you already. There's been two forums, but also some people might be meeting you for the first time, so I'd like to invite you to share a little bit about yourself.

- Thank you. Can you hear me? Oh, good afternoon. I'm so delighted to see this many of you here in Santa Barbara. Thank you for coming out. I'm the Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt. I have been goodness in UUA ministry about 20 years now, and that has had such a range in terms of my ministry from parish ministry to, I just completed a year of service at our Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. I've served on the faculty of one of our seminaries in a range of our congregations and I've served on the national staff of the UUA as the director for Racial And Ethnic Concerns and then briefly in 2017 as one of three co-presidents as we were in that interim transitional time. That tells you that I'm a minister who bounces around a lot to a lot of different places... But does that mean that you can't hear me? Say that again?

- [Speaker] It's a little fast and blurry.

- It's a little fast and blurry. Okay, so the first thing I'm gonna do is move my mic. The second is I'll say that my first language was Spanish, and research shows that we speak faster than English speakers do. Can you hear me? Is that any better?

- [Speaker] Yeah.

- Okay. I'm gonna try to slow down and please wave at me again when I forget, 'cause I will. Okay, so I was talking about the range of ministries that I have done over time that looks like we sound better. I hope it's true for folks online too, but it doesn't tell you a lot about what drives me in ministry. I care a lot about beloved community. I care a lot about our inherited theology and how it empowers us to bring our values into conversation in the broader

world. I'm excited about equipping UUs to be proud of who we are in the public square in some really challenging times. And I just mean finding language that works for more of us. I mean, getting comfortable with who we are as a faith community, with who we are in congregations and affiliate groups and communities, and feeling proud of bringing our values forward, especially in a time when there's some risk to doing that. When some of our beloveds who are most impacted really need us to be present, to be vocal, to communicate a different vision of what it means to hold fast to each other in community. That's what drives me. So it drives me if I'm in parish life, it drives me if I'm working with seminarians on their formation, it drives me if I'm helping the internal structures of our phenomenal international human rights organization. This is what moves me in these times. And it matters to me to be in relationship with all of you as we do that work. I'm also a singer and a poet and a knitter, and I spin yarn and I'm a scholar and one of the blessings in my life is being mentored by Katie Cannon, who is no longer with us. But Dr. Cannon, who is a womanist ethicist insisted that we couldn't study the pain of the world if we weren't creating beauty at the same time. So you will see in most of my spiritual practices the creation of beauty because it keeps me present also to that which is difficult in the world. Thank you for being here.

- Wonderful, thank you. All right, let me pull up my questions here. I have so many devices. Alright, so the first question that I kind of wanted to start with here was we've experienced a lot of change in our leadership opportunities for youth. And I think it's fair to say there are a lot of people in our faith who don't know what opportunities exist for youth, but there's been a decline significantly over the last decade in the types of opportunities, especially with this transition we've had away from districts to more of an emphasis on regions. So I'm wondering if you could share a little bit about what the current landscape is of national and regional youth leadership opportunities and what your hopes are for how we continue to build our youth leaders up in our movement.

- That's a great question. Thank you. I've been involved in leadership identification structures of the UUA for 12 years now. And so I wanna confirm, having sat on our Nominating Committee and our Appointments Committee, that we do see a real difference. I'm not sure in opportunities to serve, but in opportunities to develop as leaders, which are different things. And one of the things that our districts really offered us was a middle step between congregational leadership and national leadership. And I know that with youth, sometimes we saw this in con culture, sometimes we saw this in district gatherings of various types. But we've been working hard for so long to identify leaders, not just from who the people in the room happen to know, right? But who is being funneled through the system from congregational life, from district life and now from regional life. So I wanna say for me, one of the really important things is that we

think about partnering in leadership development differently. I think there is a greater need for congregations to be doing... When I think of Church with a big C, and I don't mean that in a Christian way, when I think about the institution of religious life, I think back to the Black Church where historically congregational life was the only place that invested in our growth, right? That invested in our skills as leaders. And I think this can be true sometimes for youth and even for emerging adults and I think especially since for a while, our national youth culture was so strong that our congregations didn't feel they had to do as much. And I think that's just not true anymore. So what worries me is opportunities for leadership development, particularly around intentional recruitment into leadership and investment in the skills that our youth and young adults have. So at the same time, I do think there are opportunities that are shifting in the landscape. Could we have a second handheld mic? I'm happy to take the live off. I think partly my mic is not in the right place on my body too.

- Right. But when I look down, I don't see any of you. Can you turn off my live so I'm not making an explosion in the room. I'm so grateful to you all for help. Thank you. As long as I'm still miced with this mic, I'm gonna wait. I suppose I could... Oh, okay. Can you hear me. No? Give us a minute. Sound matters, thank you. Test. Test. Oh, there we go. Is this better? Okay. Thank you for bearing with us. Accessibility really matters. This is my sixth weeks post COVID brain as I try to remember where I was in my thinking. What I wanna say is I think there are some important innovations that are also happening and let me acknowledge that they're not without tension, right? They're not without tension. So I see leadership opportunities that are coming out of community itself, right? We have more what we might call entrepreneurial or innovative coming from youth and emerging adult communities themselves. But I'm also excited about things like Thrive, which is particularly for BIPOC youth and emerging adults, and bless the LFE staff who gave me some updates before this forum. So I'm excited that there are going to be Thrive Fall, weekend gathering, starting in the fall, intensive moments for leadership training intentionally, which I think is exciting. So Thrive Weekends, yeah. But also what I'm hearing from the national staff is that they're looking to provide better resources for congregations to be supporting youth and emerging... I know you asked me about youth, and emerging adult development, but also to help keep what I think was so powerful about our national structures, even as they're changing, which is opportunities for young leaders to be with one another across Unitarian Universalism. I don't want to speak to programs that I am not responsible for and do not know all the particular details of, but I wanna hear more about what's happening with the Young UU project, which I know is doing some of that. And I know there's also a National Young Adult Task Force in the works. Then there's also some specifics. So I think we're working on peer counseling, which has been happening for General Assembly, a few national events, but looking at peer counseling training as a national project. And so I'm seeing the

emergence of good work from the national staff but I'm hoping will do some of those pieces. I also had the opportunity to meet with our... Let me slow down. To meet with our organizing strategy team this week, and hearing about how they're doing leadership development particularly around justice work. But this intentional investment in leadership that I think is multi-generational, it's not youth specific. Please, Steph, correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm seeing the emergence of new leadership development structures which we've needed for over a decade now. So I'm hopeful. Mostly I'm hopeful that we hold this understanding of the power and purpose of beloved community closely. And we'll talk about this more as we go on, but also check in with our expectations about what leaders look like, who they are, where our best ideas come from, and whose innovation we're investing in and why. These are some of the things that are live for me.

- Yeah, thank you for sharing that. I know, I think what I've experienced from a lot of youth and young peoples is those structures existing and it taking someone in a congregation, a peer to say, "Hey, I did this thing and I think you could be really good at this thing too." And that having the biggest impact. So as much as we as adults can kind of support and foster that and say, "Hey, I wanna support you because I see the different ways that you are a leader already in our community, connecting them to that." So I appreciate you sharing some of that.

- Absolutely. And I wanna say that we do still have structures where youth and emerging adults are intentionally in our leadership structures denominationally and as we start to see it become harder and harder to recruit people into those roles, that makes me want to ask what is happening in our congregations? What is happening in our regions that people don't feel ready necessarily? I don't wanna put my opinion in anyone else's mouth, but having been part of those recruitment structures, it tells me that there is more immediate local community development that needs strengthening. And this is like anything else, there is a lag. I think we are starting to see, or we're starting to see more the impact of the structures we lost before we put new structures in place.

- Absolutely. This lends itself well to the next question, which has to do with the way in which congregations can support their youth. One thing that commonly I hear is experienced by youth and young adults is they're bridging soon, or perhaps they've bridged already, they're returning to their congregations as young adults and they don't necessarily feel supported in that space. So how can congregations help support those folks? And then similarly, but also separately, when folks are going off to college, they're in new spaces, in new cities and they're seeking communities that are different from a campus ministry, perhaps their college doesn't have a campus ministry. How can congregations that are in college towns or where they might have young adults who are coming to them, how can they kind of create

space to foster that community?

- That's a great question. Thank you. I mean, first and foremost, and I don't mean this as a way to dodge your question. I think that intentionality and attention has to be there. So, my home church is the First Unitarian Society of Ithaca, New York. It's right between two college towns. And we've had a lot of starts. This is, let me be real that I have not been home, home in a while, but when I was attending as a member, we had multiple starts at campus ministry, which is important, but as you say, it's not the whole of congregational life. But what I appreciated about my home church is that there was this constant checking in and a constant willingness to resource what community itself was saying. I think we are learning this lesson over and over and over again, right? So are we actually checking in with our emerging adults, especially as they're coming, whether it's for college or family life, or a new job or whatever it is coming back often about what is needed? And especially right now, I think this is true across a number of issues. We are coming out of the quarantine stage of pandemic. Everybody's needs have changed. I think there is a very honest and understandable longing for congregational life to feel like it did. The problem is that for most of us, congregational life feeling like it did does not necessarily address who we are today or what we need three years into COVID-19, and particularly for youth and for emerging adults, I think this is actually even more intense than for those of us who happen to be older right now. When we look at our data, our youth are our largest dropping off number of active participants in congregational life. And when I sit and talk to young people in my life, and I hear this from parents, the language of having no hope at all is so common. And if we think about UU culture, right? We often talk about ourselves as a community that brings hope in the face of despair. So where is our cultural message meeting our emerging youth and our emerging adults? And I mean, emerging from quarantine, not emerging from one age group into another. So, I will say, what we resource says everything about our values. So really this question, where are we putting our resources? It's true that our bridging youth are sometimes, but not always in geographic transition and I know congregations who support young people beautifully when they head off somewhere else, whether it's for school or not, making connections with area congregations, doing some... I mean really doing research so that a young person doesn't have to find every Unitarian Universalist possibility themselves. And especially right now with online opportunities. Are we telling our folks about sanctuary? Are we telling our folks about Thrive? Are we telling our folks about about other opportunities? So that is a practical, we can focus our resources, focus our attentions kind of answer. But there's also a cultural answer, which I think is harder for us and maybe more important. And this is about lessening the culture shock of moving from specifically youth programming and congregational life into what we think of as the broader congregational reality, right? Why are our youth driven worship

experiences not impacting congregational worship more than they are? You can participate most often at the national level, not at the local level. And what does that say about who we think we are as a community and what we're resourcing? So this culture shock, lessening it, I think actually benefits everyone. And there's so many ways to make space and so just like any other area of welcome or investment or inclusion this is about, putting our impacted voices, our experienced lived voices first. And the last thing I wanna say is I also really want us to, to encourage us to partner across communities and congregations. I know not every UU community is blessed to be near other UU communities. That's just not true for all of us, but it is for some of us. And sometimes I think numbers drive decisions in ways that don't always best express our values. This is a beautiful place to partner, not only with the UUA and its resources with the regions and their resources, but with other UUs near you, right? To make sure that there is space.

- Thank you. And I do have to say, I love that you mentioned Sanctuary. Sanctuary was one of the communities that got me through the pandemic as a young adult. And they're located in Boston, if you don't know, but they had a really thriving virtual small group ministry space where we had folks from all across the country coming online. And then this brings me to my next question, because in transitioning from that space, I think a lot of us, while the virtual world can be really helpful, it can also be really draining. And people need that in-person connection and community. So I started attending Neighborhood this year and I just wanna give them a shout out because we have a young adult group that is 30 people now, which has been built in the last year. Half of us are lifelong UUs who came back to the faith but about half of them are folks who are young adults who are seeking connection. They maybe haven't had a religious community before, perhaps they had a different religious community that was not a positive or was perhaps a traumatic experience for them. So my next question brings me to, after we've been living through this pandemic, we've been isolated for so long, there are a lot of young adults who are existing, who are seeking community, and Unitarian Universalism is a place that holds a lot of these same values. So what are your thoughts on the way as we as a faith have welcomed those of either other faith backgrounds or no faith background, and where do you see space for growth?

- That's a beautiful question. Thank you. I think some folks have heard me talk about this a lot. I think we are both inheritors of a rich theological tradition that is specific. We forget that sometimes, but it is specific. And I also think we're blessed to be a community that is defined by significant growth from beloveds who came from other traditions. The thing is, I think sometimes we get stuck in this idea that every UU who has come into the faith is carrying the same kind of story about the tradition or community that they left. So I think we actually do beautifully in providing healing support,

community, places for reintegration re-imagination when folks come with experiences of trauma or unwelcome or even just lack of fit, for lack of a better word from the traditions they're coming out of. I think we struggle more with helping people in our beloved community integrate what they want to hold onto from their prior faith commitments as they come into Unitarian Universalism, that side of the pluralism of our faith. We struggle with more, we struggle with more. And I think it's understandable, it's very human. It rubs up for some of us against the places of trauma that are still healing. This is not just like willfully wanting to exclude people, but, so I would love us to lean more into what does it mean to be a Unitarian Universalist who holds commitments in more than one space, or who has been formed or shaped by more than one tradition? And again, we are all figuring out, I think, what it means to be in beloved community following this quarantine phase of pandemic, including ensuring that we don't abandon those who are most highly impacted by the ongoing reality of COVID-19. But community and connection are top priorities. I'm hearing this all around the country. I'm hearing this as I ask our religious professionals what they're hearing from families from their local communities and congregations, community and connection. So for me, looking at multi-generational community is how are we offering multiple types of opportunities to reconnect and to live back into what it means to make meaning in groups. I think for a lot of us, we made meaning, yes, over Zoom, but in the everyday face-to-face, for some of us it was us alone, for some of us it was one or two people, for some of us maybe we had a larger pod. But how we are accountable to each other in meaning making in larger groups, I think we're learning that again. And the beauty of learning that again, is that we can innovate and think differently. And so for me, especially young adults with families, which I think we sometimes forget, that young adults are often parents too, our expectations need to be about welcome, about listening for what's needed and about celebrating connection in all of its forms without having kind of a preset memory or expectation of what that's supposed to look like. And we should learn from places like Sanctuary, we should learn from places, yes, with campus ministries, but also who just have youth and emerging adults embedded in every area of congregational life. We are seeing best practices. I wanna point you to things like the RE Collab for ideas and resources, there are congregations that are doing this beautifully and well. And I think that we are getting sucked a little bit into a story of despair that we are simply gonna lose our young UUs somehow and never ever be ready. And instead I would love us to learn from each other and lean into change that builds community for everyone.

- Thank you. So moving into our next question then, right? We have young adults raging from 18 to 35, a lot happening in life that's very different for some of these folks. That's kind of a big range we put on there. When we talk about lay leadership and mentioning the ways in which we could be prepared to have folks of all ages involved at every

level of congregational life, historically, I think, sometimes we haven't been ready because the life happenings of youth and young adults are varied. Their schedules are messy, right? Or perhaps we're unsure of how to draw on the strengths of our youth and young adult leaders. So can you speak to some of what you have seen of the strengths of youth emerging and young adults in our faith? And then how do we find that balance between celebrating their strengths to build our community without tokenizing them?

- This is the question over and over again. I was ordained at 28, so I have lived experience of coming into leadership in this faith tradition, not only as an emerging adult, but also as queer a Afro-Latinx emerging adult. And I think in all of those identity ranges and many others, this question of how do we ensure that we have room for voice but also not tokenized and what do we do when we get that wrong is something I have lived with and experienced. Building community without tokenizing our beloveds is vital, and we do better at this some days than others. But the strengths are of course, legion, right? A significant lived experience in the faith. I say this one first because I feel like we forget it a lot. That our younger UUs that were raised UU often have been Unitarian Universalists much longer than some of our adult members have been so significant lived experience in the faith and lived experience of faith formation that is very different, right? To be raised UU or to live into Unitarian Universalism at a younger age, rather than coming in seeking something from a different, or from not having a specific religious tradition at all. Energy, vision, creativity. And for me, really important is particular lenses on the social issues of the day, right? Not that we don't all have a perspective, but I think the path that you see ahead of you in terms of the rest of your life and living impacts significantly how you experience and respond to whatever the most urgent issues are in your day-to-day world. So I think again though that this is partly cultural, that it's important that we work on our understanding of community and the purpose of community. I am a theologian at heart. I'm sorry, but this is theological work. Like, why do we gather in Unitarian Universalist congregations or affiliate organizations more than somewhere else? I think you could probably replicate the folks in this sanctuary right now in other secular spaces based on interest, right? What is it that moves us to gather in communities like this instead? What is the purpose of that? And who do we think is at the root of it? I personally don't believe that you can make meaning with one generation. I don't. I don't think it gives us a view or a frame on what life really means, on what being a human accountably in the world really means on how we grow into who we most want to be in life. So for me, the power of religious community is about holding ourselves and our values in specific ways and understanding community differently, right? More broadly beyond our own family structures. So how do we understand community? I've gotten to work with so many leaders who are younger than me, which has been vital over the years, and I have also spent decades in rooms where I

was the only person my age, or one of very few people my age. I have seen some changes in... I think we moved through a time where it was like, we must have one youth or young adult on every committee because this will help us, right? And the thing is, this is a stage. This is a stage and we were committed to that stage. I think now we ask better questions, right? Is this committee prepared to work well with a young person? Are even young adults and emerging adults saying this is the kind of work they want to be involved in? Have we asked them what they want? We are maturing a bit in the kinds of questions we ask, but I think we actually have been investing in this cultural change. But if I could choose actually a primary thing, it would be for us to so value a range of voices and experiences and perspectives that the convenience of scheduling would never be a deciding factor. It just wouldn't. We would choose our leaders and get them together and do our best to find times and ways that worked for the community at large because even that work, which can seem very tasky teaches us a lot about our individual communities and what the needs are. Also, I want us to be the kind of people who see the power of leadership and community more than the ease of meeting at 1:00 PM on a Tuesday. Yeah.

- Thank you. All right, so we'll wrap out this section here with one last question, speaking to why do we all gather in the room together. Unitarian Universalism has placed a lot of focus on creating strong, multi-generational communities in terms of young children and older adults. I have really fond memories from religious education, but oftentimes we do have our high schoolers and young adults who are feeling as though there's not a place for them in the community and so sometimes they leave. Can you speak to a moment when you have seen a truly multi-generational community thrive? And what you believe plays into that being a rewarding and inclusive community for all age groups?

- I'm gonna repeat myself a little bit, but again, to me, this is cultural. I see multi-generational communities thrive in almost every black indigenous people of color group in Unitarian Universalism. Every single one. And it's because the assumption of community is multi-generational. So we come into those spaces assuming that everybody has to be together, that we are better when everybody is together. And we see, it's not just across age, it's also across role and a whole bunch of hierarchical assumptions we make often in UU spaces feel very different in by POC only spaces. I think there's something to be learned there. What does it mean when the cultural expectation is that people of all ages of the lifespan will simply be represented and active and in leadership of all kinds. When this is true in our families, it is expected in our communities. When it's not true in our families, then we have cultural values work to do. And I think that is true. So again, I think there are best practices across the faith that we can draw on, and I really... I keep doing this, but I wanna lift the work of our national regional staff who have been trying to resource us in these ways for a very long time. So another

thing I wanna make sure that I say is, again, this is about intention and investment. So are we doing as much to stay on top of the resources that are being offered nationally around inclusion for youth and young adults as we are for other things? when it feels urgent, we really, really research. When it feels like something that could be maybe somebody else's problem, we're not always as good at it. This is a hard thing to say, but I want us... This is part of community building, is are we bringing bringing the best practices for everyone? Because there sure are a lot of them that are out there and available and in development. Okay, so changing culture, it requires modeling. We actually have to try the thing and do it long enough to learn how it's working for us. It requires communication, it requires reconciliation. We have some harm to address across generations in our faith, we do. And again, that intention to hold on to change long enough that it begins to be the story that we tell each other, right? I think we need to story this work differently and story ourselves into new expressions of community. It's not just about best practices, it's about what we instinctively believe community looks like and represents. So again, we have to decide who we want to be as a people. Multi-generational community thrives when it is the baseline expectation, a beloved community. So this is about meaning making, it's about theology and values. It's about more than programming, it's about investment and who we show up to be.

- Thank you. All right, we're going to move now into our second part of today, which is an opportunity for you all to ask questions that you have of Sofía. So for this piece, I have the Zoom open with the Q&A online. So if you are online, you can put your question in the Q&A if you have not already, and we will work through getting through as many as we can in this time together. And then we're gonna alter between doing online and in-person as well. So if you're in-person and you have a question for Sofía, we're gonna ask that you raise your hand, indicate that you have a question. Jessica will bring the microphone over to you and then we will have you state your name and your congregation if you would like, and then proceed with your question, all right? Sound good? All right. So we're gonna start with an online question here. So we have Don Price, who is a board member of the UU Animal Ministry, who says the 2011 statement of conscience, ethical thinking, food and environmental justice, awakened many UUs to factory farming's abuse of workers and communities of color, environmental damage and inhumane treatment of animals. How are UUs called to respond to factory farming in both our individual and our communal lives?

- It's a great question. Thank you. I really appreciate that even how you asked the question, Don, is clearly intersectional. So many environmental justice consider animal rights work part of our environmental ethics, they land on us from multiple directions. So the question of what is happening in your area locally, what are the ordinances in your area? I mean, we often talk about personal

practice. What are your personal eating habits? What are your cultural habits? How do those interact? What are your values? But I think that this is another one of those places where organizing and cultural change really have to be about the communities we are in and the decisions that our communities make. This was really live for me when I served in Fresno, California that has a lot of refining plants and other really challenging industries that are unregulated in some ways and that can be an extremely devastating reality and that congregation has a deep environmental ethic and environmental ministry. So I think as UUs we are called always to do values work, to do that in community and to do that in complicated ways that are nuanced. So this question about not just for me, animal rights, but eating writ large, how are we feeding ourselves in a community? This is a question that needs to be asked about vegetarian diets, vegan diets, diets that include animals. I know that for some of us, it's an absolute no, which is a beautiful thing. And are we asking hard questions about what comes to our tables and what doesn't come to other tables and why? I think as UUs we're asked to constantly be active, aware of our local realities and asking questions about how our values ask us to make difficult decisions. They're almost never as clear cut as we wish them to be.

- All right, I think... Did someone have a hand raised back there? Perfect. Thank you.

- Hello, thank you for being here. My name is Matt, he/him/his from the Chalice Community over in the Kanaka Valley and this is my Reverend Nika Gwyn. I guess I can appreciate the idea of nuanced configurations, constructions of dialogue, but we live in a non-nuanced time at the moment. And my question is multi-pronged, what are we doing nationally and regionally to support the fellowships in areas of our nation that our contra-indicated to everything we stand for as far as LGBTQ, labor laws for children, the idea of free thinking, not banning things that are obviously should be available to all to read, to work with, to have all in every conceivable nook and cranny of the Unitarian Universalist dialogue across the board. It pains me. I mean, we live... Obviously California is not a perfect country state. Well, a boy can wish, right? But we have obviously Florida. I know we can't be political in theory, but we can stand up and speak loudly if not scream at some level, in some way. And I'm wondering where you stand with all these things that are obviously even contrary to who you are as a human being, I can tell that.

- This is a great question. I mean, I think the beautiful news is that there are UUs acting up and acting out all across the nation. And I think we can be political. Legally, the only thing we cannot do is endorse candidates for political office. But values, I can't think of a time in recent memory where we've needed progressive values in the public square as much. So I'm incredibly proud of the organizing staff team of the UUA and side with love and the work that they're doing. And I don't just mean that there is a national staff group that is

speaking our values. There's a national staff group that is training UUs to speak their own values, right? To communicate their own values, to show up. I want you to look up Aaron Walters in Texas. I want you to see what congregations in Florida are doing, congregations in Wisconsin are doing. I mean, there are UUs that are in their state capitals every day. We're seeing UUs mobilizing in Oklahoma, we're seeing UUs all over the map, and I live in the DC area and we are seeing UUs at the capital over and over again. And so what I'm seeing is actually a beautiful, what's that word? Like diffusion. So there are resources that we gain, even if it's just connection and strength from congregational life that feeds us to go into the sometimes impossible feeling conversations, with local policies, state policies. Our values are under attack right now. That is not an exaggeration. I could not feel more strongly or proudly, honestly, about how UUs are in the public square. I remember when we had presidents campaigning on the really risky belief that UUs should have a public voice. This was like when John Buren was.. This was a long time ago. But we have... Staffers are laughing, but we have become a new people around what it means to bring a progressive religious voice into the world. And so what I would love us to do is to tell more stories and also when you're feeling despair, go online and see what UUs are doing because it's awe inspiring. So to be really clear, I have spent my ministry in counter-oppressive work. I have spent my ministry in nonprofit organizations. I spent my ministry working for justice. You will see me do that in the presidency. But the beautiful thing is that I get to go out into the world and amplify what UUs are doing. It's powerful and it could not be more urgent. And what I hope is that we will continue to feed each other because it's also draining, right? I mean, we have fierce, amazing UUs showing up every day, and it's really demoralizing to do that constant witness with so much of the controlling violence getting through. And it is, and we cannot go home right now, right? We cannot. So this is the work. This will be the work for the next six years. I cannot tell you exactly where or why, but there is no question that that constancy and figuring out how to support one another so we don't lose people along the way. Thank you.

- All right. We're going to go to a virtual question from Gina Whitaker who's from the UU congregation in San Luis, Obispo. And Gina says that they're concerned with the level of lower interest in their congregation with the Article II revision. There are core folks who have been following issues around this work, but can you suggest ways that they may not have thought of to interest folks and notes that it seems the importance of this work is not moving too many folks in their experience.

- This is a good question. Unfortunately, I don't know your congregation well, which means I don't know your culture and I don't know how conversations kind of take flight in your community. That said, I think that even the words Article II, right? It's bylaws work. I think that's not always why people join religious communities to get

excited about bylaws. And so when I talk about Article II, I do things like say, we have made a bold claim that love is the center of our faith. And I don't get to tell you what love means for you, but I would love for you to tell me. I think there are ways to talk about the content of Article II, even to talk about them, can we claim a UU miracle that more than 10,000 Unitarian Universalists weighed in on one document relating to our values and that there's momentum. Can we lift the good work of the Article II Study Commission. They did such incredible work over these years. So I think it's important to talk about the content of Article II. Why does justice matter to you? Why does interdependence matter? What does it mean for your congregation specifically? How does love bother you during the day when you are trying to figure out how to be your best self in the world? I think these are the kinds of questions that move us, whereas, well, okay, Article II, section 1.3B, that is not normally what moves most of us, but I think that UUs care deeply about the things we express together, and that there will be a full... Hopefully, if we vote yes, at General Assembly, there will be a whole year for us to dig into what some of these values mean for us, for us to imagine, just like we had rainbows with the seven principles to imagine beautiful articulations of our values and new ways to lean into what this framework that we've been given invites us into theologically, ethically, communally together. I have said this before that I used to, when I was writing sermons, have the seven and then the eight principles next to me. It was not that I was repeating the words, but there is an ethos of who we are in the language that we hold together. And when the first draft of Article II came out, I swapped it out and I started use... I just would write sermons with Article II draft next to me. And I have to tell you, it beautifully feels like Unitarian Universalism. I think a powerful thing to do with Article II is to translate it into something else. Write a poem with those words, find them in our hymns, write a sermon, something that's not writing, but work them into conversation. But it's about who we are and what we value most in the world. And I think when we can get it out of governance language, it takes on a different life and then we put it back into governance language so that the institution holds it for us, which is the purpose of our bylaws. All right, we have a question over here, up in the front. Thank you, Jessica.

- Hello? Yeah, there we go. First I wanna say thank you for your work. Thank you. And I have a difficult question, so luckily that preceded it. I'm Dana Zozolo from here. This is my beloved community. The number one cause of death amongst youth is gun violence in our society. And I have a two-pronged question. The first being, what do you say about that? And what do we do? And have we considered joining in with... I mean, I think there's a large movement starting in America amongst youth, amongst students. And my question is pretty direct. Can we join that? And is that something that we might consider putting energy into?

- What we say to this is that this is a moral tragedy. It is evil. I just wanna leave a breath after that. This is a moral tragedy and it is evil. I know that our national staff, yes, is in connection points with various partners that are working against gun violence. And I think this is another thing for us to ask, what is happening locally? Can congregations connect with each other to show... There needs, desperately, to be a faith voice in this issue. Let me say that differently. There needs to be more of a faith... Because there is one. We have... I'm thinking about, all the congregation that Josh Pollick serves in Connecticut. Is it East Hartford? No, it's something, something. I'm so sorry, beloveds. This is my post COVID brain. We have congregations that have been working against gun violence actually for decades, that have done beautiful coalition work, that have immense resources whose leaders have been authorized right by the community to show... We have people who can help us get more connected on this issue if it is newer in our local or regional spaces. There are resources from the national staff. But further, I think this could not be more urgent. It could not be more urgent. I wanna say that the survival of our young people of every kind across the board could not be more urgent right now. And this is the point of gathering as people of faith, right? This is the point of raising our values in the world. And I think it's a difficult reality, but I don't think it's a difficult question. I think it's urgent. Thanks, Dana.

- We're gonna move to an online question. Camille Hatton from Cape Town Unitarians, Cape Town, South Africa. Asks us, how can the UUA actively engage with international youth and congregations who are doing really amazing work?

- Camille is one of our phenomenal music professionals who used to be in California. This is a great question. I'm excited about the ways that we are connecting and reconnecting with international Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists around the world in general. I think some of those structures have also changed and we are leaning into reconnection and rebuilding relationship. And again, reemergence from the quarantine phase of pandemic. I'm gonna be honest that I don't know a lot about what is happening in our youth and young adult communities in congregations internationally that are outside of the two or three areas that are embedded in the UUA itself, but I'm excited to hear more. That that is the kind of... I keep saying that relationship development and relationship building are early priorities for me in year one. That is definitely part of it. So I'm excited about general assembly. We're gonna have a lot of international guests and I'm hopeful to have some of those conversations. But I think, again, this is what are our intentions and priorities. I think it would be so exciting to share resources and stories across nations. The kinds of values related work and faithful living that is urgent right now is urgent everywhere, is urgent everywhere.

- All right, I'm looking to see, does anyone else who's present in the room have a question, if not... Yes. Okay, perfect.

- Don't turn it off when you're done.

- Hi, I'm Chris Shorem, he/him, this is my congregation, and thank you for being here today. And I don't know if you volunteered or you were told to serve, but I'm so happy that you have stepped forward.

- [Sofía] Can I say both?

- Okay, great. In about 2,000 days, you're gonna be stepping down as president of the UUA, and I would love for you to paint a picture for us, how will our denomination have changed as a whole? You can also focus on the theme of youth, but I would love for you to draw that future for us.

- Oh, I so understand this instinct. And you're not gonna love my answer. No, and I say that only because... I think that more than is often the case, that we really don't know what's coming in the next six years. I keep saying... So when people ask me, the top priorities of my campaign are collaborative leadership, communal care, facing the future together. These are not specific initiatives or campaigns that will change an aspect of Unitarian Universalism. I want us to lean into resourcing the ways that we support one another as an association. I want us to lean into what does communal care... We learned some things about communal care because of COVID-19, and I feel like we drew down our wells, if that makes sense. Like we drew on the connections we had, we drew on the resources that we've collected over time. Some of those just need to be rebuilt or re-imagined, but I think they can be rebuilt and re-imagined in ways that draw from what we've learned in the last three years. I got asked a question very much like this at Finding Our Way Home. Finding Our Way Home as an annual retreat for BIPOC religious leaders of all kinds across Unitarian Universalism. I got asked a little bit differently. It was at the end of six years, what do you hope will have happened? And Bill Sinkford, our former president, was in the room. And I said, I remembered when Bill told us that we were an adolescent faith that bringing together Unitarians and Universalists in the early 60s. That's actually not a lot of time when you compare that to other traditions. And he said, it's okay to be an adolescent faith. It's okay that we're still living into who we are called to be and what that means. And what I said to my beloved colleagues was, I would like us to grow up a little bit over six years. I don't even mean that in a... It sounds funny, but I don't even mean that in a funny way. I think that we are living into who we are called to be collectively in the world differently than we used to. I think we are re-imagining shared values, shared communal endeavors, shared beliefs, shared a whole bunch... I don't mean exclusionary beliefs, but finding ways to communicate who we are collectively so that we can show up against

what we really know we do not believe in collectively. That takes investment, it takes language, it takes relationship building, it takes resourcing. Those are the kinds of things that I'm excited about in these next six years. I want us to resource UUs to be boldly, proudly Unitarian universalist in the world, and to understand ourselves to be a reflection of our tradition in modern times. I want us to look less like Cambridge in the 1800s than we do today. And we can. We actually can because this is the world that we live in. I mean, do I have specific things that are... Sure, I'm interested in reestablishing stronger international ties. I'm interested in climate justice. I'm an environmental ethicist. I'm interested in religious professional standards of conduct and being really clear and transparent about them. I'm interested in resourcing leaders outside of traditional structures. I'm interested in a whole bunch of things, but the truth is I want us to be better resourced to live our values into the world. And I mean that in terms of faith formation, governance, public witness, leadership, I mean really across the board.

- All right. I'm going in order here and I'm gonna do a two for one because one is just a logistics question, but somebody... Well, John Aitch from the first Unitarian Church of Orlando asked if there were transcripts available. There are transcripts available. There also are the video recordings available of... There will be all the forums, but specifically the first and second. This one will come up shortly after if you do a quick Google search of 2023 UUA Presidential Election Forums. So those are all online. You can share those with your congregations. And I wanna give a huge thank you to Amy and the UUA staff who are making this happen so that it can be so accessible for folks. That's really wonderful. And to all of our folks who are on Zoom right now, managing everything, thank you. Okay, so the question then is from Carrie L. from WSUU in Seattle, Washington, and she asks, can you speak to how lay leaders might best help address marginalization issues, including sometimes intersectional ones of disability, income and class?

- I'm thinking, because I'm trying to think about whether I believe there is a marked difference here for lay leaders versus religious professionals. I'm not sure that there is. I think that beautifully for us as Unitarian Universalists, that the priorities and commitments of our communities and congregations are held by their members. And so that insisting on practices, policies, ways of being together in community that are about access and welcome is a responsibility that's simply held by everyone in a community or congregation. I think that our religious professionals might get better access to training sometimes or to resources sometimes. But I think that these are values and commitments we hold as a collective. Again, I want us to... I think that there is still a lot of unprocessed grief about COVID-19, which sometimes means that we don't talk about what we gained in those years. I don't mean this in some kind of redemptive suffering kind of

way. It's not, oh, here's the silver lining of a... Absolutely not. But we learned some things about how we care for one another about what access means. I have been very heartened to see how many of our congregations really noticed accessibility changes as... And so there are apologies to be made for the interventions we did not make until no one could be in church, right? For a while it was easier to not always notice. I think we need to say that out loud, but I have been heartened with how many practices we've kept in place as we come back out of quarantine. As some of us come back out of quarantine. So I'm hoping that we will hold onto lessons, I'm hoping again, that we are also gonna authorize the voices of our most impacted beloveds and leaders as we make some of those decisions. But I think that as lay leaders in community, that this is also about how do you feel about the way your congregation and community is expressing your lived values. Is it reflected in community in the way that makes you feel good and proud to be a Unitarian Universalist? Our values are worth our pride. They are. And that sense of investment in the world we think we are living into, then also calls us to bring practices, to make commitments, to resource different choices based on those things. I'm bringing us back to culture again. I'm sorry, but when we talk about income, when we talk about socioeconomic class, this is a place where UUs I'm gonna say have not done as much around welcome. I just pulled another button off of my shirt, y'all, I will tell you this story someday. This one's on the bottom. Okay. Really quickly, I am wearing a shirt that I've never worn before. This is the third button on my shirt that has come off today. Wow. Seriously. Okay. I am a very transparent person and I'm very honest. But have you ever in your life... I feel like someone is pranking me today. Seen someone lose three buttons on their clothing in one day.

- [Speaker] Have one more safety pin.

- Oh, we don't need safety pins. Via took me to get a sewing kit. Anyway, we're off topic. But this is life. This is life. Very seriously with socioeconomic class, Robert Bella is a sociologist who talks sometimes about us as Unitarian Universalist as the most Protestant of Protestants by which I think he means we reform... The radical reformation is our history. He also says that there is a very particular reason why we don't deal with class as an issue very well. And he says, you cannot ask a queer person... Nope. It's the other way. You cannot ask a straight person to become queer. You cannot ask a man to become a woman. On and on and on. And he said, you can't ask people to give away their financial resources. And so the stakes are completely different. And so he says, we have deep work to do around how we address economic injustice in our communities. Because it is not simply about recognizing the rights of someone who is different from you. There are reparations to be made, there is reconciliation to do, there is resource redistribution that is possible. And that is a different level of ask and it makes us extremely uncomfortable and it makes it harder to talk about. So that is both a cultural thing. Who

do we expect to be in our congregations? And it is also a very big values thing that I am really excited to see some places in Unitarian Universalism starting to talk about this differently. I'm thinking of our UU service committee that not only brought in Anjali who does phenomenal work around, what are the resources you're holding? Where did they come from? What are your responsibilities therefore on how those resources are attended to and addressed, et cetera. And the service committee not only did this work with their board of trustees, but brought him to speak to all of their highest donors, which I think is really powerful, right? So what does it mean for us to invest in the kind of faith formation that lets us address class issues differently? This is ongoing work.

- Yes. We are switching soon. I'm just looking to the room to see if there's any final questions.

- I'm gathering up my button.

- Okay. Let's do-

- Seriously three. One final virtual question. There are a number of questions we are not going to get to today. There will be a number of different opportunities to connect with Sofia and ask these questions and we'll kind of sum those up at the end. And so I apologize if we don't get to your question today, but I wanna end on this question, which is the Rev. Dr. Michelle Walsh, who is the lead minister for the First Parish Church in Taunton, Massachusetts on unceded Wampanoag land asks, I'm curious how we overall, can support best practices for congregations in welcoming adults and children with neurodiversity diversity and notes that the UUMA did a fabulous workshop series in this area recently and learned a lot there from the very talented religious educator in Taunton, April Rosario.

- Beautiful. Hi, Michelle. Thank you for your question. I remember back when the Rev. Dr. Devora Greenstein was the sole staff member in our Office Of Accessibilities concerned and we were kind of just starting to lean into questions about neurodiversity and welcome. This was, oh goodness, almost 20 years ago now. And working with some of the very few resources that were out there. The beauty right now is that there are actually a range of UU resources. And I think that... I'm starting to sound like a broken record, but this is again about intent. This is again about where we expect our congregations to be and who we expect our leaders to be. I think for me, one of the biggest things around accessibility is not just how do we welcome people into our pews, but how do we welcome people into all of congregational leadership and congregational life? So I know the UUMA recently did a training. I think Loreta also recently did a training. Am I making that up? I'm looking at Jessica specifically. Maybe. But there are resources on our websites. There are phenomenal books about this. I think we have done less that you can find in every single

congregation. We are at that approaching tipping point space. We are not past the tipping point as far as I'm concerned. But this truly... I mean this is the work of the moment. This is what our beloveds are asking us to work on. And we're seeing it not just in terms of congregational welcome, but we're also seeing it in terms of a lot of the structures around leadership identification, around credentialing of religious professionals, around access to different kinds of authority and power within the structures of the UUA. So I am both hopeful about this work and aware that we are behind on this topic.

- Alright, so we're going to move into the last section of today. And this is an opportunity for Sofía to ask some questions that she all has for you all in terms of logistics. We're going to do the same thing. So if you have a response to one of the questions that Sofía asks, we'll have you indicate. If you're in the room, Jessica will bring you the microphone. If you are online, you can put your comments in the Q&A and I will read through those as they come through as well.

- Thank you. Let me tell you just a few quick things before we do this. One is that my campaign has sponsored yet another conversation. It will feel different than these in Nashville on June 4th at 4:00 PM Central time. If you are in a congregation within four hours driving distance of Nashville, you probably already know this. That's who we have really made sure to reach out to. But there are ways to join that conversation virtually as well. So if you are interested in that live stream, you can find that information on the campaign website, which is just my full name.com, Sofíabetancourt.com. Also, I did ask for this format. We've had an hour and a half for each presidential forum, and that's the same amount of time we had when we had three presidential candidates last time. So one is just, I'm not sure you need to listen to me for seven and a half hours leading up to... I mean, that's a lot general assembly and also we do this so often, especially with clergy, it's like we just get to monologue at you. And in some ways I hope that that does help you get to know me a little bit better as a person. But it matters to me that I'm in relationship with all of you. So I requested to the ECPC that there be time for me to ask some questions of my own during the forum, just as I asked for questions to be live and not pre-selected. I want us, as UUs to not miss this, every sixth year opportunity to talk about the future of the faith even with just one candidate. And it's the same reason why we're voting at GA even with just one candidate. Your perspective on my leadership matters hugely to me. Okay, I'm gonna mess up your system a little bit. I'm sorry. We talk sometimes about a progressive stack, which means that we put people whose lived experiences have a particular view on a question at the front of the line. So what I really wanna ask about is innovation, talking to our religious educators, when I get to talk to our national staff, we are in this moment of re-imagining, there are actually a ton of resources and opportunities that are coming live that come out of the re-imagining from like five years ago. It takes time to develop new things, but

I've been talking a lot about shared risk. As we're re-imagining what best serves us in congregational life, I think we do that better together without one program or one religious professional or one community holding the kind of risk for trying new things. I think it's exciting when we actually build containers that let us innovate together. So I would love to hear from any youth who are logged in, or young adults who are logged in or anyone in the room about the kinds of longings that you have for your life in Unitarian Universalism that maybe aren't fully expressed in your congregation or your community or the national opportunities of the UUA right now. If you had access to a bigger container for trying new things, what would you try? So if you identify as a youth or a young adult and you are putting your question in the webinar, would you just put PS at the beginning, for Progressive Stack? And can I ask Olivia for you to prioritize those?

- Absolutely.

- And I realize that we don't have a lot of youth or young adults in the room. It's not that I'm trying to silence you. I promise my next question will be for everyone, but especially with this focus this time, I'd love to hear from our younger folks. I'm trying to... I feel like there was something else I was supposed to tell you.

- Nashville.

- Oh, NY. Nope, those were the two things.

- While we're waiting for this to come in as well, I'll just say there will be one other forum that Bill Young will be doing on UUA board and governance. And that will be on Saturday, June 3rd in Dallas, Texas. Also will be online and then there will be a forum that will be multi-platform at General Assembly details to come about that. But it will be in existence.

- I think it's on Thursday of GA.

- Perhaps.

- I think so. We'll see. We are gonna get a business agenda soon, which will help. So let me expand the progressive stack to include religious educators, youth leaders, youth advisors, folks who work with our young folk too. It's not that I don't wanna hear from everyone, but I wanna hear these voices first if possible. Let me also say that after every forum I get messages from folks who don't want their comments read in the room. You can actually email my campaign, just campaign@Sofíabetancourt.com. I truly would love to hear your thoughts on this question. What are you dreaming about? Because I don't think what I'm dreaming about should be the defining thing in my brain, in addition to the wisdom that our staff is kind enough to share with me. Okay. I'm gonna shift to our next question. If

something occurs to you on this one, please just respond with PS in the front. And I'm aware that I don't wanna end on this topic, but I actually wanna hear what you're worried about. We don't talk about this and I know these are anxious times, so I'm gonna actually ask that responses be on the shorter side for this because in our places of anxiety we can give long answers. You've probably seen me do some of that today. So no progressive stack. I would love to hear in terms of the future of Unitarian Universalism, what the possibilities are in the next six years. What are some of your concerns? What do you want me to hear? I would ask you also to remember that we are all in this conversation together. So if concerns can be about the faith and not attacks on particular people, I would really appreciate that.

- In the back. Yes.

- So I'm gonna take a quick stab at answering both questions. What I find myself most concerned about is biodiversity and leaving a planet that is worth living in and enjoying for my young child. And if I had dreams for what to do, like with kids, I would just say a lot more specific programs. I would love to see youth choir, youth... Just specific programs, things that kids can do during the day after school that bind them in and bring them into the faith. The more of that we do, the stronger our church is gonna be, we don't really call it a church, but the stronger our congregation is gonna be in the future. Interest the kids.

- [Sofía] Thank you. Would you tell us your name?

- My name is Robert Warner.

- Thank you, Robert.

- So we did have a couple folks as well asking for a repeat of the first question. I do have some PS responses in there as well, so if you wanna repeat it and I can read through those.

- Beautiful. I was asking particularly for youth and emerging adults to talk about what kinds of things they dream of, right? To bring into congregational life, to bring into communities, especially if those things could be held in a larger, more resourced container. What are you dreaming about really?

- So Ryan shares with us, UUs speaking to the life experiences of those in non-traditional intimate relationships. Our culture is often still very white, Christian and monogamy-centric. We have Janet who says, dreaming of all ages being together in space, voice and support of one another and is concerned of how we get there. Rachel and Bruce from the UU Fellowship of Poughkeepsie in New York, fear that we are witnessing the end of our faith as we know it. There are as well concerns about sustaining a continued focus on adopting the Eighth

Principle, particularly in geographic places in the US that are averse or hostile towards social justice and progressive change. And aspiring for more UU congregations to take a stance on going plant-based for many reasons, including climate justice. And then to have open and honest conversations on controversial issues that are rather demonizing certain points of view. And this person, Dick from Seattle asks, will we keep our seven principles in words but lose them in practice? That's some of what folks are sharing in here.

- Thank you. I appreciate all of those perspectives. I've been really public about being in a non-traditional family structure, but let me take this opportunity to do that again. I'm in a non-monogamous marriage. Our UUA bylaws are very clear that we don't discriminate based on family or relationship structure. And I think you're right that culturally that is not always the case. During the co-presidency, I brought two partners to a board meeting and introduced them to everyone. I say this because I think a lot of our religious professionals who are in non-traditional family structures feel extremely endangered in their jobs because of this reality. And I think it's really important for me as a high level leader to be open about it. So let me be even more open about it. Thank you for that statement. I also wanna remind us that Paula Cole Jones, who's on our Article II Study Commission, speaks really directly to the importance of continuing the Eighth Principle work right now, even as we are leaning into the work of Article II that contains so much language from the Eighth Principle, but her point I think is really well taken. The work is always live. The work is writ large. It is true that there is no guarantee that we will pass Article II, but even I'm gonna say when we do, even when we do, the language of our principles is in our living documentation. Even if it's not in our bylaws, who we have been for the last 30, 40 years is not going to disappear because we articulate our values differently in our bylaws spaces. So I just wanna emphasize that again, we've had such a powerful response to this important work that I think it really matters to emphasize that it is ongoing and that it makes meaning in our communities and our congregations even when it's separate from our governance work.

- Yeah.

- Thank you.

- There's a couple more things coming in the Q&A here. Scott shares awoken as a core resource to spiritually grounding just climate regenerative community and to be the bridge builder to just institutional leadership. We have C who is thanking you for having this forum and for the multi-directional questions and discussions that are coming through. So thank you to everyone. And then there's a comment in here as well about how we can reach and find families and young adults to bring them into our community, not something on people's minds from Gail.

- This is such a hard question. I think to me, we have lessons that we've learned around all kinds of diverse perspectives in our congregations and communities that so often being within our walls is not the place to build relationships where our values are the same, but some of our lived experiences are different. I think we saw this when we had lots of questions about how to bring more people of color into Unitarian Universalism, and it's like that's really... We're not collecting people, it's like, are we meeting... Is our mission, however we understand it, meeting the needs of our surrounding community? Do we know what our surrounding community looks like? Do we know what would benefit beloveds in our area? I think it's more, are we doing the kind of ministry in the world that more young families and emerging adults are looking for? Do we know what that is? And if we don't, how are we putting ourselves out into the broader community to ask those questions and to be in dialogue?

- Yeah. Absolutely. That's what's in here right now in terms of responses.

- Any last burning last question? We're almost out of time.

- Hi, Sofía. I'm Rev. Nika Eden Gwyn from Chalice UU Fellowship in the Kanaka Valley. I'm so excited about our faith and yet I live with, as we all do right now, the complete transformation of what is church post-COVID. And so, I think we have so much to offer the world, but how do we really get that across? Or how do we create a future for Unitarian Universalism that is attractional, that will bring people in when most churches around us are dying and the whole form of church is dying? So I'm really curious to see, you were saying we have to come up with new ideas. Well, what kinds of forums might we have so that we can listen to what actually would appeal to people, what people really need in this day and age?

- It's a great question. I do not have all the answers. I really don't. I'm excited to work with your youth to figure some of this out. I think that we do have a certain sense of what Unitarian Universalism looks. I mean, we are literally an association of congregations. And I realize as we continue our bylaws work, we're gonna have some good dialogue about what that means. Who is a member of the UUA specifically? But when I think of Unitarian Universalism, I think of a value set. I think of an inherited tradition. I think of a lot of work for justice over a lot of centuries, actually. And to me, this question of, okay, in 2023, in 2050, What does Unitarian Universalism as an expression of values and commitments in the world look like? I don't know if it will look like this. I think it will look like this and like other things. Right now, CLF can still really call itself the church without walls. And there are some other expressions of congregational life that aren't as kind of physically bound. But for the most part, we have a primary expression of Unitarian Universalism

with some entrepreneurial style offshoots. And I think that we are really being called to embrace a broader range of possibilities of what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist, of what lifting UU values in the world looks like. And I think that our congregations can be the foundational roots of those things. I don't mean that I don't believe in congregational life, I absolutely believe in congregational life. And I will tell you one of my primary religious communities is BLUU is Black Lives Of Unitarian Universalism, which is not bound geographically. And so what does it look like to say, how are we not just meeting the needs of people, but actually reflecting who we are in the world in new ways? And I think that we're gonna struggle with this for a little bit both how do we value and hold on to what our congregations have represented and the lives that they've saved and the ministries they're still doing. And how can that be a foundation for other things. And I think that... I often attend worship at All Souls in DC and even just their story of planting congregation every 15 miles in a radius was radical at the time. And a lot of those communities are still... What does it mean to have extensions of the expression of who we are in the world without undermining our communities, without compromising who we've been. I actually believe in multiple truths, and I think that multiple expressions of our faith are not just possible but needed. And I can't have all the answers of what that looks like because I believe actually in emergent strategy, right? That there is something about the people who have showed up in this time and place have a very specific wisdom that can be expressed in no other way, right? And that there is vision that comes from us as a collective whole. I think one last question.

- My name is Donna, and I think we could do some basic marketing that could be used for congregations all over the country, some basic things that could be on public radio that local congregations could pick up that would be easy to get the message across that we are different and it's something the UUA nationally could help with. That's what I think.

- And we've done quite a lot of this actually. We have done quite a lot of this. I'm thinking of the whole uncommon denomination push and other things.

- As we're talking here, I'm thinking about the fact that... I know our congregation and many congregations are getting older and I used to be a UUA fundraising and organizational development consultant. And when I would go out to churches who are in the throes of growing, which means changing, there was always this fear of, oh no, we have to change when new people come in. And I'm thinking about, what I used to tell them was the only person who likes change is a wet baby. But I see the tension between older people, I'm one of them, have a hard time letting go of what's always been because the ritual and the how we do churches is so ingrained in us to think about changing. It's hard for us to get out of that box. And this is one of my fears is

that there's wonderful, I'm sure brilliant ideas of how to reach out and do church in some different ways without letting go completely of what we have in our buildings and that's my fear, is that tension between what what we're comfortable with, and then we have to be uncomfortable to move out into the world.

- What's your name?

- I'm Jerry Molder from Live Oak Unitarian congregation in Goleta.

- Thanks, Jerry. This is a good place to land. I actually believe in dynamic tension. I think there are good things that come from this. I think that the... And it's not always resistance to change. Part of the power of religious community is the ability to tell the same story for a long time and to have our values actually held for us across time. This is a thing that sure, can result in some of what we don't believe in, but it can also powerfully hold our values for us. I think there is a dynamic tension between not losing the core of who we've been that has real value and also not getting so stuck in how we do who we've been, that we are no longer actually welcoming to anyone, but a very narrow set of the population. Somewhere in the middle, for me, lives beloved community. And I think that this is, again, why we need multi-generational community, otherwise we're not going to even know where the center lies, right? And then who do we become in the world and why? It starts to shift us away from our values. But I think some of the fear is this idea that new people are gonna come into Unitarian and everything will change. Communal life changes all of us. It changes us. So the new people who come in the door beautifully feed our living tradition with innovation and change. And the people who have been in the door for a long time shape the people who join us, who are looking for a place that holds and shapes them in their values. And again, in that coming together is where this power lies. We are here as voluntary members of the faith. There's nothing in our teachings that say you are damned in some way if you don't participate in Unitarian Universal, we are here by choice. That is incredibly powerful. And I think that there is this richness in how multiplicities of us come together and we have fear in every direction about it, except we keep coming back. And there is something in there that calls to us in terms of how to be progressive people in the world. And now more than ever, I mean literally in the face of the rise of fascism, I want to be in a community that holds me accountable to my values, that reminds me when I falter and that gives me the opportunity to remind someone else so that how I am in my life and my living matter. Thank you all for being here.

- Thank you.

- All right, well we've all been seated for a long time, but I wanna thank everyone for coming. Thank you to Sofia for sharing an open conversation with us. We from the ECPC encourage you all to continue

these conversations and these dialogues. We want you to share the transcripts, the videos. We wanna continue this conversation. This is a pivotal moment in our movement and so as much as we can keep that going, then we're headed in the right direction. So for those of us who are here in person, there is going to be a reception, just one room over, I believe, where we'll have some beverages and snacks. And thank you again to the UUA staff for helping make this possible. And to everyone who tuned in online and all of you present here, it's been great to be in community with you all.