## Beyond the Partisan Divide

## Anonymous Voices of Unitarian Universalists

The six anonymous monologues presented here can be read aloud in a small group or shared as readings in worship. Discussion questions are provided after each monologue.

### Monologue One: An Anonymous Unitarian Universalist

I have been a Unitarian Universalist for 25 years... most of my life.

I’m passionate about our religion. It defines who I am. My children will be brought up in our faith.

I grew up in a family that represented a diversity of political views. Our particular church... our church really tries to be inclusive. It tries, but it doesn’t always succeed.

Even if I don’t have strong personal beliefs about being Republican, I don’t like the exclusion and the isolation that comes from an adherence to one particular party's beliefs. Isolation and exclusion is not what we are about.

It’s the more subtle things that people say... We grow very comfortable agreeing with one another... and assuming that agreement.

[Pause]

If you were going to come out to your UU congregation as gay, Christian, or Republican, it seems like Republican would have to be the hardest.

My father is a Republican. He holds firmly to the original republican ideals. When I tell this to my friends I always qualify it by sharing the fullness of his ideology. You might be surprised to learn that my Republican father and I stood out in the rain together, passing out flyers and working diligently for Gay Rights.

We are all more complex than our labels allow.

I was making a joke one day at church with a member and friend about my Dad’s politics, and this beloved friend noted that she actually shared my Dad's politics. I felt shame at having made my assumption. We lose a valuable balance when we assume. There is no strength or beauty in isolation.

**Discussion Questions**

* Have you ever made an assumption about a fellow congregant that was inappropriate or unfounded? How did that make you feel? How did you rectify the slight?
* Do you agree that if you were to come out to your congregation as gay, Christian or Republican, Republican would be the hardest?
* Were you surprised that a Republican stood out in the rain passing out flyers for gay rights? Does this challenge your assumptions about Republicans or perhaps challenge your understanding of the monolithic nature of any political ideology?

### Monologue Two: An Anonymous Unitarian Universalist

The three greatest justice ills of our time are class-ism, illiteracy and racial/ethnic discrimination. I grew up poor and understand first-hand that the rich and the poor are in two different worlds. I am Black and have been discriminated against because of my race.

Politically speaking I am a conservative-democrat... a liberal-republican. At my UU congregation I specifically avoid discussing my affiliation. While I am not ashamed of any of my political views, for some reason I think my congregation would think less of me.

I respect the Unitarian Universalist tradition because it honors all faith traditions and refuses to call one valid belief “right” and another “wholly wrong.” But this is where I struggle sometimes. There’s a difference between what’s posted on the UUA website as the official sources of Unitarian Universalism and what I actually see in practice. Sometimes in practice I see a lack of respect for other faith traditions, especially Christianity. This same lack of respect seems apparent across the political spectrum.

I am a UU because of the way we define and study faith, not because of the sides we choose on political issues.

There is nothing to lose in opening our doors to those across the political spectrum. We might gain more members, and more diversity. We would be living our values and respecting the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

**Discussion Questions**

* Is there anything you avoid discussing at your UU congregation? Why?
* Have you ever witnessed a lack of respect for other faith traditions or political perspectives in your congregation? How does this make you feel?
* What, if anything do you thing we might gain by opening our doors to those across the political spectrum?

### Monologue Three: An Anonymous Unitarian Universalist

I understand my political affiliation as independent, progressive and civil libertarian. I feel at home in my UU congregation when issues are discussed rationally, from facts and principles. I feel alienated when folks interpret how others feel.

I respect our faith because of our history of opposition to religious and racial/ethnic bigotry and our commitment to a free and independent search for truth.

While I disagree with them occasionally, I find much to admire in the consistently “pro-life,” advocates, by which I mean those who oppose war, the death penalty, and abortion equally. My viewpoint is considered misguided or even misogynistic by most UUs.

Why should Unitarian Universalist congregations make an effort to welcome individuals across the political spectrum? ... Well, the first reason is that they might be right!... Second, the truth might lie in the gulf between, and third, we will all benefit from a free discussion. Perhaps some of our ideas would change. At the very least we would deepen our understanding of the sources of our beliefs, and improve our ability to work together towards common goals.

**Discussion Questions**

* Have you ever felt alienated in your congregation?
* Can you see how a consistent “pro-life” position could be upheld by someone who honors the first and indeed, all the Pinciples of Unitarian Universalism?
* Is it possible that “the truth lies in the gulf between?” What if any wisdom do you hear in this idea?

**Monologue Four: An Anonymous Unitarian Universalist**

When asked by fellow Unitarian Universalists I always say that I'm a classical liberal like the great Unitarian thinkers Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. I personally identify as Libertarian. I will never use the word libertarian in my congregation. In Canada it’s a four-letter word and people think I'm either an American sympathizer or that I don't care about the poor. Both of which are stereotypes and wrong.

I looked for a long time thinking I had to give up things that I knew to be true in order to be religious. Unitarian Universalism lets me keep my spirituality, my faith, and my skepticism and doesn't ask me to believe in anything but the seven Principles, which I firmly hold true.

I'm not a supporter of the Conservative Party of Canada but many UUs in my congregation use derogatory language and insult members of that party. They claim that it's irrational to vote for any party but the leftist ones. I would hope that UUs would be more aware and reflective of this open prejudice. It's one of the reasons why I choose never to openly talk about politics in church.

The simple question that rises from this reality is... do our faith and our own individual congregation want to grow? If we could apply the same tolerance and understanding that we do to theology, to politics, then growth would happen, naturally.

**Discussion Questions**

* How does Unitarian Universalism give you the freedom to be you—fully you?
* Have you heard any derogatory insults directed at political parties or political persons in your congregation? How did you feel when you heard them?
* Is it possible for Unitarian Universalists to apply the same tolerance and understanding to politics as we do to theology? What would happen if we did?

### Monologue Five: An Anonymous Unitarian Universalist

When it comes to politics I am purely an issue-by-issue guy, but when I describe my political affiliation to others in my congregation I call myself “the token Republican.”

There are many more conservatives in our congregation than anyone realizes. We have a lot of current and former military, government and law enforcement. Many are NOT open about it. They even joke about being forced to stay in the closet. Because I am so overt about being a conservative they will talk to me in confidence. They say, “It’s easier to tell people you are gay than to tell them you’re a Republican around here.” Some even have what they call “mixed marriages” with a liberal spouse.

I do feel at home in my congregation. I am not easily offended by the bigotry I have endured… and yes I have come to truly believe it is bigotry. Merriam-Webster defines a bigot as: "a person who is obstinately or intolerantly devoted to his or her own opinions and prejudices; especially: one who regards or treats the members of a group with hatred and intolerance." Yes. That describes it pretty well.

I know people in our congregation that will not speak to me, invite me to their homes, or even acknowledge my existence. All because of who I voted for, or because I am a member of the NRA. People have even unfriended me on Facebook. So many people just assume that I am a "Liberal Democrat" that they are incredulous when they find out how much I liked Ronald Reagan.

As far as political conversations go, I prefer when we discuss the issues. When these conversations are done well, we discover that it is “us” all of us, against a problem and our only differences are our preferred solutions.

Unitarian Universalists need to do more to welcome those across the political spectrum. To do otherwise would be pure hypocrisy. Our foundation is the respect of each person’s search for truth and meaning.

**Discussion questions**

* Do your opinions of others change when you discover that they do not share the same political opinions as you? How?
* Unitarian Universalists work hard to upend bigotry. Do we have “blind spots?” Are we missing true bigotry in our midst?
* Have you ever had a good conversation that reached across the political spectrum to reveal common understanding or, at least, shared values? What contributed to the quality of this discussion?

### Monologue Six: An Anonymous Unitarian Universalist

One of my reasons for being a Unitarian Universalist is that I can be honest in this community regarding my searching, my beliefs, and my shifting perspectives, as I learn from others.

I am an independent who typically sides with conservative ideas on economic issues and progressive ideas on social issues.

I feel “at home” in my own congregation, but choose not to speak up about most political issues. It is rare to find a setting where a conversation will last long enough to explore not only our opinions, but the rationale behind them.

UU district and national events are uncomfortable settings. Too often, people make broad statements about creating a society that is far beyond our capacity. The vision may be great, but we are going to need to learn how to work together before we can manifest our vision.

Also, in large groups of UUs I sense an assumption that we all are expected to share a common political perspective on foreign wars, taxes, and other issues. That’s bunk, we don’t. Why go to an event where the choice is to acquiesce in silence if we don’t share the expected political perspective?

For me, Unitarian Universalism is a community of faith and ethical exploration where people can be serious about their beliefs, adopting them only after personal discovery and by choice. It’s a community where our common bonds should always be more important than our differences of opinion. It’s a community where people provide support, but also challenge each other to be honest and practice what we believe.

**Discussion Questions**

* Do you feel at home in your congregation? How or how not?
* Do we, in conversations, or in worship services broadcast our assumptions about shared opinions? How?
* How might you challenge yourself and others to be honest and practice what we believe?