

**Remarks of William Sinkford**  
**following his election as UUA President**  
**June 23, 2001**

Thank you, Kay. Thirty-three years ago, our predecessors - and some of us - left Cleveland filled with pain and racked by division. In the intervening years, we have experienced both progress and travail. But we will leave Cleveland in 2001 united as a movement in celebration of our principles and newly committed to our purposes. At this historic moment and in these echoing halls, it is a tremendous honor to have been chosen to be the next president of the Unitarian Universalist Association. I want to thank all of you. I know that it's been a long day, and an even longer week, so I will keep my remarks brief.

[Take off buttons]

First, I want to thank Diane Miller for her contribution to a campaign that was engaging and extensive. Even though Diane and I have disagreed at times, I was always confident that she had the interests of the Association at heart. I thank her for her dedication, and for her service to the Association. Thank you, Diane.

And I want to thank all the hardworking volunteers who devoted countless hours in support of all the candidates in this year's election. I know you need some rest after the campaign, but I warn you that I will call upon you in the weeks ahead to partner with me in advancing the cause of liberal religion.

As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the union of the Unitarians and Universalists to form the UUA, it is a time of growth in our congregations - growth in numbers and growth in spiritual depth. No other religious movement on this continent has had such a profound impact in shaping the civic institutions that we all hold dear. Name the institution and chances are that Unitarians or Universalists, or Unitarian Universalists, were there at the beginning. This is a time to honor our history and a time to look ahead. And it is a time of challenge.

We are challenged to claim the reality that Unitarian Universalism has good news - news which has been palpable in our own lives, and which will be a blessing to the world outside our sanctuary walls.

We are challenged to work together to strengthen our congregations and build new ones, so that persons everywhere may join with us on the path of truth-seeking and justice, which is the only path to spiritual depth.

We are challenged to pay close attention to the energy in our youth and young adult movement. These young persons are every bit as smart as we are and every bit as committed. We need to practice radical followership: if we will only listen to them, they will tell us what they need to remain Unitarian Universalists.

This is a momentous time, a time of challenge. We live in a world of hurt -- and we have a healing message. It is our job-and it will be my job as our new president -- to make this healing voice heard far and wide.

Our Unitarian Universalist values are an antidote to the shrill and divisive voices that claim to speak for religion in our land. People who hear and resonate with our principles will join us in understanding that what we need is a new concept of family values -- one which honors the transformative power of love, wherever it may be found. As people hear this message and join with us, the artificial barriers we have placed around gender, age and ability will give way to the reality that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

People who hear and resonate with our principles will join with us in understanding that racial gulfs can be bridged by committed people working to eradicate racism and other oppressions. The fact that I am standing here as your new president, the first African-American to lead a historically white denomination, is in itself witness that we can move toward reconciliation.

During my presidency, our Unitarian Universalist voice will support racial justice and gender justice and equal rights for our bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgender brothers and sisters. We will speak for responsible stewardship of our environment. And we will work to redress the economic injustices that plague our society.

In this era of increasing multiculturalism, and the social strains this brings into people's lives, our free faith is evidence to the world that pluralism can work. We know it can work because we live it every day. We are living proof that our difference need not divide us.

We stand on a faith which is rich and precious. It has been given to us; we did not create it. It is a gift which we have received. We need to take that faith seriously enough to mold it and grow it so that the faith that we leave will bless far more than we have been blessed. That is our calling.

[Silence]

In the spirit of those on whose shoulders we stand, let us move forward together.