Unitarian Universalist Identity
Renaissance Module

READER

By Michelle Richards and Hannah Roberts Villnave

This Reader is a collection of short writings. Read the material for all of the sessions before the module begins.

Session 1
Overview of Developmental Theories

Session 2
Learning Types and Their Needs
Themes in North American UU History

Session 3
A Free and Responsible Search: The Story
First and Last Principles
Six-Word Stories of Faith

Session 4
The Thomas Jefferson Ball: Reflections and Reconciliation

OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES

These developmental theories represent four major frameworks for understanding human development. Rather than presenting an exhaustive or presenting an in-depth study, these overviews present the main ideas of a small but important set of theories. They do not all agree with one another, and we are not suggesting that you should necessarily agree with all of the frameworks presented. However, in a conversation about religious identity development, some background in human development is important.

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson was a 20th century developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst. His best-known work is his theory of psychosocial development in human beings.

STAGE	APPROX. AGES	MAJOR EVENT(S)	MAJOR CONFLICT
Infancy	Birth-18 mo.	Feeding	Trust v. Mistrust
Pre-School	18 mo. -3 yrs.	Toilet Training	Autonomy v. Shame/Doubt
Early Childhood	3-6 yrs.	Independence/Exploration	Initiative v. Guilt
School Age	6-12 yrs.	School	Industry v. Inferiority
Adolescence	12-18 yrs.	Peer Relationships	Identity v. Role Confusion
Young Adulthood	19-40 yrs.	Love Relationships	Intimacy v. Isolation
Middle Adulthood	40-65 yrs.	Parenting	Generativity v. Stagnation
Maturity	65 yrs. - Death	Reflection	Ego v. Despair

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg was a psychologist who taught at both the University of Chicago and Harvard University in the mid-20th century. His best known work is his study of the stages of children's moral judgment and development.

- **Level 1 – Pre-Conventional Morality**

    - Stage 1 – Obedience and Punishment Orientation

        - "It's wrong to steal."

    - Stage 2 – Individualism and Exchange

        - "Whether it's wrong is relative to Heinz's self-interests"

- **Level 2 – Conventional Morality**

    - Stage 3 – Good Interpersonal Relationships

        - "The druggist is selfish, and Heinz is right to save his wife."

    - Stage 4 – Maintaining the Social Order

        - "It's wrong to steal. You can't just do whatever you want."

- **Level 3 – Post-Conventional Morality**

    - Stage 5 – Social Contract and Individual Rights

        - "Weighing what's moral with people's rights"

    - Stage 6 – Universal Principles

        - "Moving toward universally applicable principles of justice"

Fowler's Stages of Faith Development

James W. Fowler, a United Methodist minister, was Professor of Theology and Human Development at Emory University in the second half of the 20th century. He is primarily known for his book, *Stages of Faith*, published in 1981. This summary is adapted from Session 2 of the Tapestry of Faith program, A Place of Wholeness.

STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS
Undifferentiated Faith	Generally children from birth through about 2 years of age.
	Have the potential for faith but lack the ability to act on that potential.
	Through loving care from parents and other adults in their life young children start to build a lived experience of trust, courage, hope and love.
	At this stage, children experience faith as a connection between themselves and their caregiver.
Intuitive-Projective	Generally pre-school aged children.
	The cognitive development of children of this age is such that they are unable to think abstractly and are generally unable to see the world from anyone else's perspective. As Robert Keeley writes: "These children cannot think like a scientist, consider logical arguments, or think through complex ideas."
	Faith is not a thought-out set of ideas, but instead a set of impressions that are largely gained from their parents or other significant adults in their lives. In this way children become involved with the rituals of their religious community by experiencing them and learning from those around them.
Mythic-Literal	Generally ages 6 to 12.
	Children at this age are able to start to work out the difference between verified facts and things that might be more fantasy or speculation.
	At this age children's source of religious authority starts to expand past parents and trusted adults to others in their community like teachers and friends.
	Like the previous stage, faith is something to be

experienced. At this stage it is because children think in concrete and literal ways. Faith becomes the stories told and the rituals practiced.

Later in this stage children begin to have the capacity to understand that others might have different beliefs than them.

Synthetic-Conventional	Generally starts about the age of 13 and goes until around 18. However, some people stay at this stage for their entire life.

Unlike previous stages, people at this stage are able to think abstractly. What were once simple unrelated stories and rituals can now be seen as a more cohesive narrative about values and morals. With abstract thinking comes the ability to see layers of meaning in the stories, rituals and symbols of their faith.

At this stage people start to have the ability to see things from someone else's perspective. This means that they can also imagine what others think about them and their faith.

People at this stage claim their faith as their own instead of just being what their family does. However, the faith that is claimed is usually still the faith of their family.

Issues of religious authority are important to people at this stage. For younger adolescents, that authority still resides mostly with their parents and important adults. For older adolescents and adults in this stage, authority resides with friends and religious community. For all people in this stage, religious authority resides mostly outside of them personally. |
| Individuative-Reflective | This stage usually starts in late adolescence (18 to 22 years old). However Robert Keeley points out that "people of many generations experience the kind of dissonance that comes with the real questions of faith that one begins to address at this stage of development."

People in this stage start to question their own assumptions around the faith tradition.

Along with questioning their own assumptions about their faith, people at this stage start to question the authority structures of their faith.
This is often the time that someone will leave their religious community if the answers to the questions they are asking |

are not to their liking.

Greater maturity is gained by rejecting some parts of their faith while affirming other parts. In the end, the person starts to take greater ownership of their own faith journey.

Conjunctive   People do not usually get to this stage until their early thirties.

This stage is when the struggles and questioning of stage four give way to a more comfortable place. Some answers have been found and the person at this stage is comfortable knowing that all the answers might not be easily found.

In this stage, the strong need for individual self-reflection gives way to a sense of the importance of community in faith development.

People at this stage are also much more open to other people's faith perspectives. This is not because they are moving away from their faith but because they have a realization that other people's faiths might inform and deepen their own.

Universalizing   It is a rare person who reaches this stage of faith.

James Fowler describes people at this stage as having "a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us."

People at this stage can become important religious teachers because they have the ability to relate to anyone at any stage and from any faith. They are able to relate without condescension but at the same time are able to challenge the assumptions that those of other stages might have.

People at this stage cherish life but also do not hold on to life too tightly. They put their faith in action, challenging the status quo and working to create justice in the world.

Robert Keeley points to people like Gandhi and Mother Teresa as examples of people who have reached this stage.

Stages of Development by Dr. Tracey Hurd

Tracey Hurd is a Unitarian Universalist with a doctorate in Developmental Psychology from Boston University. She is the author of *Nurturing Children and Youth: A Developmental Guidebook*, a Tapestry of Faith Toolkit Book.

Pre-School-Aged Child's Development

Physical	Cognitive/ Intellectual	Social/Affective	Moral	Spiritual/ Religious
Acquiring motor skills	Object permanence	Social circle of family is reference point	Wrong and right rigidly categorized	Learns via experience
Learns by doing	Categorizes and classifies	Staring to understand "friend"	Needs help linking words to actions and moral issues	Open to spirituality
Needs sensory experiences	Appearance = reality	Empathetic, but centered on self		Not afraid of the "big questions"
	Needs a problem to solve			

Early School-Aged Child's Development

Physical	Cognitive/ Intellectual	Social/Affective	Moral	Spiritual/ Religious
Starts coordinating motor skills	Starting to understand idea of conversation	Learns through social interaction	Listens to authority	Does religion to know religion
Uses tools for drawing and writing	Likes being right	Starting of true friendships	Uses rules	Needs to have rigidly held ideas gently challenged
Needs play and learns by doing	Interested in numbers, letters, facts	Enjoys working with peers	Begins to understand motive	

School-Aged Child's Development

Physical	Cognitive/ Intellectual	Social/Affective	Moral	Spiritual/ Religious
Motor skills almost fully developed	Logical thinking	Peers/friends very important	Uses "Golden Rule"	Enjoys membership in faith community
May enter puberty	Hierarchical reasoning	Navigates self through relationships	Interested in fairness, justice, care	Does both religion and spirituality
Top consumers of media images of bodies/ ideals	Developing specific learning style	May segregate based on identity	Aware of moral issues, wants to help	

Early Adolescent's Development

Physical	Cognitive/ Intellectual	Social/Affective	Moral	Spiritual/ Religious
Transitions into adult body	Focuses on self and how others see self	Peer relationships very important	Interest in ethics of care and justice	Interest in religion that matches values
Eats and sleeps more	Engages an "imaginary audience"	Learning what if means to be "sexual"	Respects social order, but sometimes challenges it	Develops by engaging in a community that allows questioning
Seeks support for self-esteem, body image	Particular strengths show up	Criticism of self and others		

Middle Adolescent Development

Physical	Cognitive/ Intellectual	Social/Affective	Moral	Spiritual/ Religious
Develops sexually; gendered attraction central	Can think deductively, inductively, hypothetically, conceptually	Tries to claim identities	Thinks conceptually	Sees religion as outside authority that can be questioned
Navigates increased risks relating to alcohol, drugs, sex	Practices mindfulness of self	Needs belonging and self-worth	Enjoys moral reasoning	Questions faith
	More critical of world	Struggles with gender/sexual identity	Principled morality with principles more important than laws or rules	Deepens spiritual and religious identity

Late Adolescent Development

Physical	Cognitive/ Intellectual	Social/Affective	Moral	Spiritual/ Religious
Full physical develop-ment	Open to learning	Self-reliance	Wrestles with personal morality and life choices	Claims authority around issues of faith
More assurance about body image	Expresses ideas with more linguistic skill	Sense of identity and intimacy	Interest in moral and philosophical thinking	Engages in "faith" beyond organized religion
Sexual activity; more likely to be partnered	Sees many points of view	Sense of vocational and life choices		

LEARNING TYPES AND THEIR NEEDS
By Daniel Harper
from *Essex Conversations: Visions for Lifespan Religious Education*

When I started mulling over the questions for the Essex Conversations, an old problem came back to haunt me. Why was it that some of our UU youth seem (to me, at least) to be further along in their faith development than some of our UU adults? As I reflected on this odd little problem, I began to see that the model of UU religious education that I inherited may not be a sufficient model for meeting the needs of all the learners I encounter in my programs. The more I reflected on the insufficiency of my narrow model, the more I realized how I, as a religious educator, was inclined to limit my conversations on religious education to conversations with other religious educators. And gradually, I began to realize that, if I were to move beyond the confines of my limited model, I needed to engage in conversations with a broader range of people, including parish ministers, lay leaders, theologians, scholars, families, and others.

But let me begin at the beginning. Let's go back to the problems with the narrow model of religious education I inherited.

In the past twenty or so years, developmental psychology has been one of the only concepts used by UU religious educators to describe learners and, therefore, to determine what material to present to a given learner. One of the fundamental insights of our progressive philosophy of education is that as children grow older, they are capable of learning different things. In the context of the Sunday school, this represents a huge advance over the nineteenth-century system of Sunday school teaching where there was one lesson for all grades. Sophia Fahs, our greatest UU -religious educator, believed in developing closely graded curricula based on her understanding of developmental psychology. Fahs made extensive use of the developmental insights of Piaget, according to Robert L'H. Miller in "The Educational Philosophy of the New Beacon Series in Religious Education."

In my observations of individual learners, I find that developmental psychology does not give a fully adequate description of learners for the purposes of religious education. In *Religion in Childhood and Adolescence*, Kenneth Hyde writes, "there

are not sufficient grounds for rejecting the idea of stages as a basis for the study for religious development, providing it is used as a performance rather than a competence theory and used with some caution." Referring only to developmental psychology, I should observe a fairly clear progression of educational tasks based primarily on the chronological age and/or developmental stage of the learner. Yet my observations of the real world show this is not so. For example, adults who come into Unitarian Universalism from unchurched backgrounds face some of the same educational tasks as young children.

Recently, I have found it useful to consider not only the developmental trajectory of the individual, a trajectory that considers the individual in comparison to idealized normative developmental stages, but also the trajectory of the individual in relation to a given religious community. John Cleverly and D. C. Phillips, in their book *Visions of Childhood*, wrote about defects in Piaget's work, pointing out that

Piaget tended to regard the child as a solitary inquirer, as a young scientist engaged in single-handedly building his or her own cognitive structures so as to come into equilibrium with the environment. Other workers . . . have emphasized more the role of social forces in shaping the child's cognitive growth. For children do not develop alone; parents, teachers, older siblings, and peers indicate to the child what mental accommodations are likely to be fruitful, and they discourage the acceptance of other conceptualizations.

In *Growing Up Religious*, sociologist Robert Wuthnow says that "effective religious socialization comes about through embedded practices." An individual is embedded in a given religious community, and his/her faith development or moral development must be considered in light of the socialization of the individual within the religious community.

Let me give you an example. Let's say you grew up as a Unitarian Universalist, and you are now a middle-aged adult and have reached a fairly high stage on some standardized, objective faith development scale. But now you decide to become a Zen Buddhist monk. From the frame of reference of the religious community you are now joining, you might be considered a pretty special person (or not), but let's face it, you haven't memorized any sutras, you can't sit zazen for more than fifteen minutes, and koans give you headaches. I argue that similar things happen to people who

come as adults to our UU religious communities. The problem may be especially acute for unchurched people; they may have as much difficulty listening to an entire sermon as the average seven-year-old UU kid, because they simply don't have enough practice.

I began to believe that developmental stage of the individual and socialization of the individual in the religious community do not necessarily have a strong correlation. For a given individual, the developmental stage may or may not predict relationship to and embeddedness within a given religious community. Within the context of a living religious community, developmental stage alone is an insufficient descriptor of a learner.

What I needed was a typology of learners that would allow me to better understand the needs of different persons so that educational programs could be tailored to meet their needs. To do that, instead of thinking in terms of a linear model (as most developmental models do), I began thinking in terms of two dimensions, a graph with an x-axis and a y-axis. Eugene Roehlkepartain uses a two-axis model for describing faith maturity in his book *The Teaching Church: Moving Christian Education to Center Stage*. While my model differs in most respects from Roehlkepartain's model, his two-axis model strongly influenced my thinking.

The x-axis represents developmental stage, and the y-axis represents what we could call degree of socialization, or perhaps faith maturity, or depth of faith. The phrase "faith maturity" comes from Roehlkepartain, who remarks that "any attempt to synthesize faith into a measurable concept is tricky at best, and treacherous at worst. Any construct inevitably reflects the perspective of those involved." And, inevitably, it cannot account for the nuances and specific emphases of everyone across the theological spectrum. The peculiar theological diversity of Unitarian Universalism makes our task particularly treacherous when it comes to talking about faith. The concept of degree of socialization is perhaps less problematic, though to my knowledge it has received little or no attention from UU writers on religious education.

But how to describe the position on the y-axis, the degree of socialization? Based on my observations of learners, I thought it was pretty safe to start with what I called new learners, people with a low degree of socialization to (and embeddedness in) a UU religious community. The 1997 Youth Programs Review Committee used a

typology of new, mid-, and deep UUs: "Of necessity, much of our adult programming is aimed at new UUs. But our youth who have participated in YRUU have moved past that stage and need opportunities for religious depth . . . , opportunities which we have not been offering."

As new learners progress, they face a number of discrete educational tasks as they become socialized into a UU community, and eventually they may progress to becomes deep learners. I have found these educational tasks useful as markers, as a rough form of assessing where a learner stands on this axis.

This is a working model, developed to meet my needs as a UU religious educator. To be more useful, we need to better define what happens as someone moves along the y-axis. However, the model has helped me better understand how youth can appear to be further along in their faith development than some adults. The model has helped me to understand the conversion experience of older learners who join UU congregations, and how some long-term members gradually drift away from a UU congregation. Above all, it has helped me place children, youth, and adults in a unified model of lifespan religious growth and learning.

I'd like to introduce you to this descriptive method by presenting portraits (or very short case studies, if you will) of individuals who are characteristic of the different types of learners.

Young Children: Anne

Anne is a bright, complex girl who has just turned five. She comes to church with her parents nearly every week, and attends the first fifteen minutes of Sunday morning worship as do all children. Anne used to have trouble sitting through those fifteen minutes, but lately she has made real progress in learning how to sit still and be attentive. Her parents tell me that now she really gets something out of those fifteen minutes. Anne exemplifies a type we can call "young children."

Young children have to learn all the little things we take for granted: how to come to church once a week, how to sit still, and how to be respectful of older people ("no running in coffee hour!"). They have to learn what to do when it's time to sing a hymn (and what a hymn is), when it's time to pray or meditate, and when it's time to go to Sunday school classes. Young children have to learn how to do religion, learn the basic tasks of being in a specific religious community.

Children: Leslie and Carol

Leslie and Carol stand out in my memory as two paradigms of older children. They were best buddies and started coming to the church when they were each eight. They quickly learned where to go and what to do Sunday mornings. They quickly learned lots of stuff about Unitarian Universalism, Bible times, and world religions, and they liked to share their knowledge. By the time I left that congregation, Leslie and Carol were ten and often sat with each other and apart from their parents when they were in church. They were just beginning to find out that they had individual religious identities, separate from their families. Call this type of learner "children."

Children face two main educational tasks. First, they must continue to learn how to do religion; for example, how to sit through a whole sermon and maybe even get a little something out of it. Second, they are ready to learn about our heritage and the sources we draw inspiration from: What was it like to live in biblical times? If we traveled back in time to meet great Unitarians and Universalists, what would they be like? Some older children, like Leslie and Carol, may face a third educational task: discerning who they are as religious individuals. But children concentrate on learning about our heritage and how to do religion.

New Youth: Mary

In addition to long-term and deep youth, there are youth who are new to Unitarian Universalism. Mary, a friend of Bob's, began coming to youth group a few months ago. She hasn't come to a Sunday morning worship service yet. She's beginning to have some idea what this faith tradition stands for, but for now she's concentrating on finding her place within the small community of the youth group. Call Mary and those like her new youth.

New youth, while developmentally different, face much the same tasks that young children and children face. New youth have to figure out how this community works and how to do religion, and they have to learn something about the faith tradition and its heritage. According to the 1997 Youth Programs Review Committee, "Anecdotal evidence suggests that many religious educators, no doubt overburdened with the younger ages, continue to give a low priority to . . . the congregation's youth." Many people have noted that while we religious educators often do not adequately

help new youth and long-term youth with the educational tasks that immediately face them, the youth themselves often do a stunning job of helping each other.

Long-term Youth: David

David, who is quiet and thoughtful, grew up in his church; he recently turned fifteen. He knows a fair amount about our faith heritage. He has begun to discern his religious identity: his individual religious identity, who he is in the faith community, and his role as a religious individual in the wider world. He has just begun to question why we do religion the way we do it, and he is struggling to find words that are adequate to this task. David exemplifies long-term youth, youth who have been a part of a UU faith community for some time.

Long-term youth have one main educational task: They have to figure out who they are. This task has at least three parts: They have to figure out who they are as religious individuals, who they are as part of a faith community, and who they are as religious persons in the wider world. As long-term youth wrestle with these questions, they often need to go back and learn more about our heritage. Like David, long-term youth may begin theological reflection as they grow into their UU faith, or they may discern that they really don't belong in the UU faith community. But discernment remains the chief task of long-term youth.

Deep Youth: Bob

Bob is seventeen, already a gifted teacher, indeed one of my best Sunday school teachers. He has already made a preliminary reckoning about who he is as a religious being. This year, he has been teaching the course "Why Do Bad Things Happen?" to fifth and sixth graders. While teaching this course, he has begun to reflect on why we UUs do religion the way we do, and he has had to come up with words to talk about what he's been reflecting on. This reflection is leading him to a deeper understanding of himself as a religious being and of his role in the wider world. I call young people like Bob deep youth, the deep indicating perhaps the depth of their growing embeddedness in their faith community, or the depth of their faith maturity.

Deep youth face new educational tasks. Long-term youth may have begun theological reflection, but deep youth have started to apply their beginning theological reflection to their lives. Appropriately nurtured, this in turn will lead to further theological reflection and further application.

Just as there are three types of youth, there are three types of adults: new, long-term, and deep. Again, there are distinct developmental differences, but in terms of the dimension of depth of faith, there are marked similarities between long-term youth and long-term adults, deep youth and deep adults.

New Adults: Diane

New adults come in at least three different varieties: those who have come to Unitarian Universalism from another faith tradition, those who come from no faith tradition, and those who stay with us for a while before moving on to another faith tradition.

"Come-outers" have come out of another faith tradition into Unitarian Universalism. These people constitute a large number of our adult members. Raised as Catholics, Protestants, Jews, etc., they already know how to do religion in some form. But their initial educational task is to learn how Unitarian Universalists do religion—little things like hearing members of the congregation reading their part of responsive readings in unison, or getting used to unfamiliar words sung to all-too-familiar hymn tunes. While come-outers face educational tasks similar to young children, there are two main differences: developmental differences and the complication of unlearning old habits.

Diane went to church all of two or three times as a child. When she reached adulthood, she felt some need for a spiritual home, but didn't know where to look. A romantic partner introduced her to Unitarian Universalism. She pretty much liked what she saw there. If asked what her religion is, she will probably respond that she's a Unitarian Universalist. But although she likes being able to identify herself a part of a faith community, she doesn't yet understand what it means to be a part of a congregation. For example, why do people waste a perfectly good sunny Sunday morning listening to a sermon? Diane has not yet learned some of the subtleties of doing religion.

Diane is a "come-inner." Come-inners weren't part of any faith tradition and have come in to Unitarian Universalism. Like young children, new youth, and come-outers, they must first learn how to do religion. In addition to developmental differences, adult come-inners lack the parental support of young children, the peer group support of new youth, or the background in religion of come-outers.

"Pass-throughers" stay for a time in a UU congregation, but wind up moving on to another faith tradition. Peter had been raised a mainline Protestant, discovered a UU congregation, and became very active there for a couple of years. As he better discerned who he was as a religious being, he discovered that he was not a UU. He went on to help found an evangelical Christian congregation. While we can't predict who is going to wind up being a pass-througher, recognizing their existence points out that we need to offer new adults opportunities to discern their religious identity.

Long-Term Adults: John

Long-term adults are quite similar to long-term youth. While they may become deep adults, often they remain just long-term adults, somewhat active in their congregation but avoiding greater depth of faith through discernment or theological reflection. John goes to worship services once or twice a month, does volunteer work in the congregation about once a month, and gives money each year, but that's as involved he gets. He doesn't demand much from his faith and doesn't want his congregation to demand much from him. Parish ministers and religious educators may ignore the educational needs of long-term adults like John because such individuals are so undemanding. The best way to reach such people educationally is through Sunday morning worship services and/or through rites of passage (marriages, child dedications, memorial services)—and here the educational role of the parish minister is key.

Deep Adults: Kathleen

When I knew Kathleen, she worked as the director of a child care center. She taught the preschool group in the Sunday school, served on her congregation's governing board, and had held many other leadership roles. Worship services and sermons fed her soul, and she only taught every other week so she could attend worship services. At the same time, she was deeply committed to teaching, and it, too, fed her soul. She also committed herself to promoting nonviolence and multiculturalism in and out of the congregation and saw her commitment as an outgrowth of her deep faith as a UU. She told me that the conversations she frequently had with others in the congregation (including the children in her preschool class)—about death, the meaning of life, deep conversations about everything under the sun—were in some

sense life-altering and in turn continued to keep her deeply involved in the congregation.

Like Bob, the deep youth, Kathleen practiced her religion in various ways. This led her to reflect on who she was as a person of faith, and that reflection led back to further involvement in the faith community and the world. As you would guess, deep adults face similar educational tasks as do deep youth: theological reflection, practicing their faith, further discernment of who they are as persons of faith.

Having seen my descriptive model in action, you have probably figured out the five tasks I have used as rough markers of socialization into the UU religious community (movement along the y-axis). I do not claim that my list of educational tasks is complete; again, these are educational tasks that I have found useful as markers that help me know where a learner is along the axis of embeddedness or faith maturity.

First task: Learn basic UU religious skills; learn how we UUs do religion. Anne has learned how to come to church once a week, what a worship service is, what a hymn is, that we get religious inspiration from certain books and certain sets of words, and so on.

Second: Learn what it means to be a UU; learn and explore our faith tradition, our UU identity. Leslie and Carol learned lots of stuff about our Jewish and Christian heritages, other world religions we draw inspiration from, and our own UU tradition. Probably this task comes to mind first when thinking of the tasks of religious education.

Third: Learn to discern who we are as persons of faith, as religious beings. This task consists of at least three parts: discerning your religious identity as an individual member of this faith community, discerning your role within your faith community (which will change over time), and discerning your role in the wider world as a faithful person.

Fourth: Engage in theological reflection; think about how you do religion and how to find the words to talk about what you think. We often cede this educational task to the theological schools.

Fifth: Having discerned who you are as a religious being and gone on to theological reflection, establish and refine your religious practices. You might learn

new techniques of prayer or meditation, learn a new role in the local congregation, engage in social action or learn how to find a job consistent with your faith.

These last three tasks can become an ongoing cycle leading to continued growth and deepening of faith. As you refine your religious practices, this leads you to further reflect on who you are as a religious being, and this in turn will lead to renewed theological reflection. This reflection/praxis/discernment cycle arises from the tension between theory and praxis, where theory and praxis are understood more in terms of philosophical hermeneutics. In his book, *Philosophical Profiles*, Richard J. Bernstein says, "One of the most important and central claims in Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is that all understanding involves not only interpretation, but also application."

As we religious educators assist learners to face each educational task, we can begin to see whom we can consult for help. Parents and parish ministers can help us as we assist learners facing the task of learning how to do religion. Historians and other scholars of religion will give us invaluable aid as we plan to teach our religious heritage. Parents, parish and lay leaders, and youth advisors can help as we assist learners with discerning who they are as religious individuals; theologians, parish ministers, and lay leaders can help with learners who are discerning their roles in the faith community and the wider world. And, obviously, theologians will be a great help as we help people learn to engage in theological reflection. Whether or not the typology I have outlined in this essay proves useful, it is important that we religious educators continue to reach out to ministers, parents, theologians, scholars, and so on so that we may improve our ability to meet the needs of learners in our UU congregations.

It is my belief that we religious educators have become iso-lated from (and perhaps have isolated ourselves from) parish ministers, theologians, and scholars of religion. A funny thing: These groups all share a common concern for the religious growth and learning of individuals in our congregations. Why don't we religious educators engage in more conversations with parish ministers, theologians, and others? Think of Sophia Fahs and her groundbreaking work in curriculum development from 1938 to about 1960. As she developed curricula, Fahs engaged in conversations with theologians, biblical scholars, educational psychologists, religious

educators, parish ministers, and others. Fahs's successors, at least up to Hugo Holleroth, did the same. Fahs even reached out beyond the tiny worlds of Unitarianism and Universalism and tried to engage other religious liberals in conversation.

But I believe we religious educators must do more than engage in conversations, enjoyable as those may be. We must also begin to question, and to modify, our own educational practice. For example, most UU religious education programs rely heavily on the technique of schooling for educating children and adults. But a person facing the task of discerning who he/she is as a religious individual will not be well served by yet another class. A retreat would be a better option, or perhaps the religious education department and the parish minister could sponsor discernment committees, similar to the clearness committees some Quakers use, or the mid-program review committees used in some theological schools. As individuals discern their roles within a faith community, schools and classes may help, but an apprenticeship or mentoring program might also work well. Howard Gardner, writing about children in *The Unschooled Mind*, says, "It is highly desirable for children to observe competent adults or older peers at work—or at play." And, I would add, at the task of doing religion. As we engage in continued praxis, and in a theoretical dialogue with our various colleagues, we may find that closely graded schools based solely on a developmental model of learning are not the be-all and end-all of religious education.

In calling for us to move beyond a paradigm of classrooms in schools, I am only echoing what others have said and continue to say. In *Fashion Me a People*, Maria Harris writes that one "misunderstanding gripping the educational imagination is the false identification of education with only one of its forms: schooling. In this view, the participants in education are always instructors or learners; the place of education is necessarily a school (or a setting that replicates a school); the stuff of education is books and chalkboards and lesson plans; and the process involved is mental activity."

Even within the context of schooling, we religious educators should question our current practices. Are our curricula based on the finest scholarship available, and have they benefited from the insights of the best liberal theologians? Do our teaching strategies meet the real needs of all learners (as opposed to perceived and/or

politically expedient needs)? Do we support all learners as they face educational tasks? Do we have adequate assessment practices, such that we can know where learners stand? Do we fully realize that religious education programs cannot be separated from other congregational functions (at least, if we want to ensure real socialization into the religious community)? If we answer "no" to any of these questions, we are moving away from open conversation and toward the isolation and ghettoization of religious education. I want us to move toward open conversation.

I like to think that, along with individual conscience and freedom, cooperation and interdependence lie at the core of our UU faith tradition. It is my dream that in this next generation of UU religious education, we religious educators will reach out to—and deepen our conversations with—children, youth, and adults; parish ministers, theologians, and scholars; parents and guar-dians; lay leaders; and the wider faith community. In so doing, we can only get better at helping each other meet the challenges of our respective educational tasks and allowing others to help us. We can only get better as religious educators when we work together in a community of learners/instructors, a community committed to the continual religious growth and learning of all members of that community.

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THEMES IN NORTH AMERICAN UU HISTORY

From The New UU, Workshop 2
http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/newuu/workshop2/160263.shtml

Though it has roots going back to early Christianity, Unitarian Universalism as an organized movement on this continent comes from two particular religious traditions—Unitarianism and Universalism—which consolidated in 1961 to form the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Though both Unitarians and Universalists have conceived of and practiced their faith in individual and original ways, certain themes emerge in their—our—story.

The four themes we will consider during this workshop are freedom of thought, or noncreedalism; on-going revelation; the power of Nature; and building the Beloved Community.

Freedom of Thought and Noncreedalism

Both Unitarians and Universalists resisted and challenged codified beliefs. Initially, Unitarianism developed within the standing order churches of Massachusetts, the direct descendants of the Puritans and Pilgrims. Some ministers started to preach about the ability of people to become more like God and cited Jesus as an example, rather than a savior. Orthodox ministers and church members interpreted this new movement as a violation of creeds accepted within the church. They worked to exclude the new way of thinking and those who promoted it. But the "heretics," who came to be called Unitarians, refused to leave their congregations. Many a congregational battle was pitched, usually over the calling of an unorthodox minister. When the orthodox lost, they often left their churches. Many New England town squares still feature a Unitarian church near a Congregational (now United Church of Christ) church, a circumstance that dates to this tumultuous time at the beginning of the 19th century. Ironically, Unitarians were labeled for their idea of God (a single God, rather than a Trinity), which was not as central to their thinking as their concept of human beings as more divine then depraved.

Universalists, on the other hand, left their churches over the heretical idea that God would ultimately save all people, not just those who were chosen, or those who believed. Rejecting the idea of hell, they had set aside part of the creed, so they too, rejected creeds.

Later challenges arose in both Unitarianism and Universalism about whether it was necessary to be Christian, or even to believe in God. Many Unitarians, especially Westerners, joined the Free Religious Association, insisting on absolute freedom of conscience, a notion which, despite arguments, prevailed. Universalists, though a bit more conventional, consistently added a conscience clause to their statements of faith. By the 20th century, they, too, as a group, had set aside many conventions of Christianity. In the 20th century, humanism became an important theological force in Unitarianism.

On-Going Revelation

Because Unitarian Universalism supports freedom of thought and belief and does not require subscribing to a creed, we are free to look for truth in many different places. "Revelation" is the word traditionally used to describe how God becomes known to human beings. We have adopted the word to describe truth more generally. We look in different places for truth which keeps emerging, rather than being sealed, or confined, to a particular book or tradition. We look to our own personal experience, trusting it as much, or more than, the words from the past.

Beginning with the Transcendentalists, Unitarians began to find truth in religions other than Christianity. Emerson, for example, studied the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a Hindu scripture. In 1893, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, a prominent Midwestern Unitarian leader, brought the Parliament of World Religions to Chicago, hosting participants from a breadth of religious backgrounds to share their thinking. By that time, Universalists, too, had begun broadening the concept of Universalism beyond the idea of universal salvation to embrace what is universal in human experience.

With revelation not limited to biblical sources or the authority of (mostly male) clergy, women claimed their place in our religious tradition. Thus, Unitarians and Universalists became early supporters of women's rights, including suffrage, the ordination of women, and the economic independence of women from their fathers and husbands.

Around the same time, many Christians were shaken by scientific ideas. Charles Darwin proposed his theory of evolution. Unitarians and Universalists had already realized that science, too, was a source of truth, so had little difficulty with Darwin's ideas. Even harder than Darwin's theory for many orthodox Christians to accept was the 19th-century movement of historical-literary criticism of the Bible, which examined biblical texts as products of a particular time and place. Again, Unitarians and Universalists had no problem with such ideas, because they embraced the ever-widening sphere of truth from a variety of sources.

The Power of Nature

With science as an esteemed source of truth rather than the source of an inconvenient conflict with religion, the Transcendentalist movement, an outgrowth of Unitarianism began to look to nature for life lessons. Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Nature" inspired Unitarians to see not only the authority of the natural world, but also to understand humanity, or human nature, as something that was part of the natural order. These Transcendentalist ideals inspired later humanists, as well as mystics and theists.

Once feminists discovered goddess imagery in the 1970s, Pagans began to find a place in Unitarian Universalism. "Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions... " was added to the Sources in 1995. These theological commitments to the Earth and Nature—from Transcendentalism to Paganism—have been played out through environmental activism in Unitarian Universalist congregations since the 1970s.

Building the Beloved Community

Both Unitarians and Universalists have focused on this world, rather than the next. Their "this-world" orientation has often moved them to the leading edge of social change.

Examples of Unitarian and Universalist work to build a Beloved Community include:

- Universalists issued a statement against slavery in 1790.

- Many active 19th-century abolitionists were Unitarian or Universalist.

- Unitarians, especially Henry Whitney Bellows, were among the founders of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which improved conditions for soldiers in the Civil War.

- Universalists were the first religious body to ordain a woman, Olympia Brown, in 1863.

- Unitarians and Universalists, from Horace Mann to the Transcendentalists to Angus MacLean and Sophia Lyon Fahs, championed progressive education.

- The 20th century saw Unitarians active with the NAACP, including John Haynes Holmes (an early member) and A. Powell Davies.

- Many Unitarians and Universalists have been pacifists, including a few, like John Haynes Holmes, who opposed both world wars.

- Proportionately more clergy from Unitarian Universalist congregations than from any other religious group answered Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s call to Selma to march for voting rights in 1965.

- Unitarian Universalists passed their first resolution for gay, lesbian, and bisexual rights in 1970 and have supported equal marriage strongly across the continent.

A FREE AND RESPONSIBLE SEARCH: THE STORY

The Reverend Frances Manly
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Niagara
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Once upon a time, not so long ago after all, when we were just discovering what it means to be Unitarian Universalists—for we are always, always just discovering ourselves— we had a set of principles. They were pretty good principles, good enough at least that in 1961 the Unitarians and the Universalists were able to agree on them when they merged to become the Unitarian Universalist Association. The principles were in the by-laws of the new Association, but not much of anywhere else—not on posters and bookmarks and tee shirts, not in the hymnal, not in the church school curricula— and from what I hear not many people were much aware of them. They never caught the imagination of the movement the way our present Principles have done.

That first set of principles lasted well enough through the nineteen sixties and seventies; but by the early eighties a lot had changed, and some people were feeling as though it was time to take a new look at who we were and where we were going. They looked at our principles and said, it's time for a change. They saw "the ideals of brotherhood, justice, and peace," and they wondered, where is the place of women in those ideals? They saw that the only religious tradition that was specifically mentioned was the Judeo-Christian tradition, and they wondered, where is the place for humanists and theists and feminists, for all our theological diversity? They thought about how they wanted not only to teach our children about religions but to invite them into the religious experience of being Unitarian Universalist, and they asked, what is here that can feed our children's souls and give them ideals to grow into?

Surely, we can do better than this, they said; if we all work together we can make a better statement of the things that are really important to all of us, a statement that includes us all. We can make a statement that builds on what we've been in the past,

that declares to the world and to ourselves who we are now, that will help us keep growing into the future.

And so they set to work. They took it to the General Assembly in Philadelphia in 1981, and the delegates there realized that this was much too big and important to be done quickly, or by a few people. Maybe some of them were thinking politically, that if the revised principles were really going to be accepted, then a whole lot of people needed to be involved in creating them; and of course, that was true. But consciously or unconsciously, I think they also understood that the kind of meaning they were reaching for couldn't come from just a few individuals; it was something that could only be found in the collective wisdom of the whole community of faith.

So they created a committee charged with setting up a great process which would involve thousands of people in congregations all across the continent over the next two or three years. In churches and fellowships and societies, large & small, groups met to wrestle with questions like, should we change our principles? Should we even have any formal principles? What does it mean to have principles in our by-laws? What's missing? What doesn't belong? What kind of language should we use? Who is included here? Who is left out? What ideals and values are really important to us? What they were really asking themselves was, what does it mean to be Unitarian Universalist? And even deeper down, what does it mean to be human?

Out to the congregations it went, and back to General Assembly, and out to the congregations for more reflection and discussion, and finally back to General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio, in 1984. I wasn't there. (My first GA came five years later.) Maybe some of you were there; if you were, I hope you'll find time to tell me— to tell all of us—what you remember about it. Because, though not everyone realized it at the time, it was one of the great moments in the history of our movement. After all the years of study and work and preparation, there was still arguing and amending and wrangling, like a congregational meeting a hundred times over—but in the end, there was agreement. And something new was born. Not just a revision of the old

statement, but a whole new covenant: a new and solemn promise to ourselves and to each other about what we value most and how we will strive to live.

It was the free and responsible search for truth and meaning on a grand scale. Our whole liberal faith community was struggling together to define those things we hold most important, working together to articulate a statement of meaning in which each of us, in all our diversity, could find a place.

And they were successful, maybe even far beyond their own hopes. I think that is clear from the way our Principles have caught the imagination of our movement. These principles may be only the most recent in a long line of professions, affirmations, and statements of faith, and sooner or later we will almost certainly change them, as indeed we did a few years ago when we added "earth-centered religions" to the Sources section. But for now, they really seem to work for us. We put them on posters, on bookmarks, on T shirts, on mugs; we recite them, and we teach them to our children; we use them to remind ourselves and others that our words and our actions are grounded in something beyond our own individual opinions and impulses.

To me, the whole process that produced these Principles is wonderful—literally: I am filled with wonder. Because it worked so well. Because of what came out of it. And above all, because the process itself shows us some of the most important things the Principles are about. Yet this is a part of our Unitarian Universalist story that we hardly ever tell, hardly ever to adults, even more seldom, if ever, to our children. Maybe it's so recent it still feels more like news than history. But it's a story we need to hear.

Several years ago, when I was still fairly new to Unitarian Universalism, I found myself leading a workshop on our tradition at a multifaith conference. Fortunately, it was a very small workshop. One of the participants was an official in the local Presbytery, who asked me some very good questions, some of which I could actually answer. I was doing the best I could, but I was beginning to wish she would go away and talk to

the Zoroastrians, when she threw me a real curve ball: "Do you have a myth of origin?" she asked. I had no idea what she was asking. I gave some kind of stumbling answer—I can't remember what—but I knew that whatever she was asking, I hadn't answered it. I kept thinking about it for a long time afterward because it had puzzled me so, and because I sensed that it was important.

Finally it dawned on me that what she was asking for was the core story of Unitarian Universalism. Where did we come from? What story do we tell each other to remind ourselves of who we are and who we might yet be? What story lifts up our collective dreams and visions and inspires us to action to bring them into being?

Part of the reason the question was hard to answer was that we don't really have a single story the way some other religions do. For Christians, it's the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; for Jews, the working out in history of God's covenant. For Buddhists, there's the Buddha sitting under the Bo tree; for Muslims, the story of Mohammed.

We tell all these stories, too. But what's our story? What do we have that's our very own? Most of the time, when we try tell our story, we tell the stories of our heroes. We tell about Michael Servetus, burned at the stake by John Calvin; Francis David, who died in prison in Transylvania; we talk about Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Ellery Channing and Theodore Parker; John Murray and Hosea Ballou; Clara Barton and Margaret Fuller and Julia Ward Howe. And on and on—all the individuals who in some sense created our faith and bequeathed it to us.

But even if we told every story of every outstanding individual who was ever a part of the story of our faith, every single one of them, we would still have told only a part of our story. We still wouldn't have the story that fully expresses our deepest understanding of who we are and our place in the world. Because the profound insight that's embodied in our Principles, and embodied in the story of how our principles came to be, is that we don't exist—either as Unitarian Universalists or as just plain human beings—purely as individuals. There's no such thing as a completely

separate, autonomous individual. The one idea that was completely new in the Principles, that had never been in any of our statements before, was the idea of the interdependent web: the insight that for all our rugged liberal individualism we are inherently, radically, essentially connected to all that exists—to one another, to the natural world, to the universe, to whatever there might be beyond what we know of the universe. Each of us, on the one hand, an individual of inherent worth and dignity. On the other, an essential part of the interdependent web of all existence. Neither one more basic or more fundamental than the other, but both. Each of us, "connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community, and to each other."

One way to understand this is by contemplating the principles, thinking about what they mean and how the individual statements come together into a larger statement that is greater than the sum of all them. But another way, and maybe a better way, is by telling our story. Not just the stories of the famous individuals, but the stories of our community, the stories that show how deeply we are connected, and how much those connections are a part of who we are as a faith community. Stories that show how our free and responsible search for meaning is not something we carry on in isolation from one another, no matter how brilliant and insightful we may be, but something that depends as much on our connections as it does on our separateness. We need to tell what may be the greatest of all our untold stories, the story of our movement's own great collective search for truth and meaning. For only when we carry in our hearts and souls the stories that ground the ideas in our heads—only then will we truly know who we are.

First and Last Principles

The Reverend Frances Manly
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Several years ago, the Welcoming Congregation Committee of the church I was serving sponsored a program called "Bible Based Bigotry"—a panel discussion about the bible and homosexuality. We had advertised the program in the gay press, and about half the people attending were from outside the church; among them were three women from a fundamentalist Christian church whose mission was "saving" homosexuals. Not surprisingly, they had a lot of questions about what they had heard. They were clearly feeling frustrated by what must have seemed to them a pretty vague and slippery way of reading and interpreting what was for them the literal Word of God. Finally one of them asked a panelist, "Do you believe in Absolute Truth? And if you do, where do you find it?" The panelist answered, simply, "No, I don't believe there's any such thing as Absolute Truth. So the second question isn't really relevant."

I don't think the questioner liked that answer, but for many Unitarian Universalists it comes close to the heart of our theology. Maybe somewhere, in the abstract realm of Platonic forms, in the deep structure of the universe, in the mind of God, there exists Absolute Truth. But here in the world where we live, we're pretty sure that there is only incomplete knowledge and partial truth. Each one of us, each denomination and religion, each holy book, each theology and philosophy, each science—at best each has a part of the truth, one particular perspective on it. However true it may be, it is not and never can be complete or absolute. We do our best to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, but we can never tell the whole truth.

On the other hand, we are deeply committed to an ongoing search for truth and meaning. At the very center of our Principles is the covenant with one another to affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. But I think the Principles do more than just point us toward the search; I think they also embody in their very structure an important clue about where we need to be looking.

To see this clue, however, we need to look at the Principles a bit differently from the way we usually read them. More often than not, we approach the Principles as a more or less arbitrary collection of separate ideas—as I have sometimes flippantly remarked, the only seven things we could all agree on. What we're going to do this morning is very different. We're going to look at the Principles as a single, unified statement, like a poem. I suggest that when we do that, we find that the whole statement has a meaning greater than the sum of its separate parts, and that each part of it takes on a deeper meaning from its relationship with the whole. And an important part of that meaning, as I see it, is a message about the very search for meaning that is at the center of our theology.

Let's see if I can show you what I mean. I see the Principles as representing points along a continuum. At one end is "the inherent worth and dignity of every person"; at the other is "the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." At one end, emphasis on the individual, separate, alone, unique; at the other, the acknowledgment that nothing and no one is truly separate and alone. Taken to the extreme, at one end we have the idea that each one is all that counts; at the other, the idea that All is One. Here are two apparently irreconcilable ideas, a paradox; yet as people of faith we have entered into a covenant to affirm and promote them both equally. Is it really possible? And what does it have to do with our search for meaning?

Let's look a little closer. We like to point out that ours is a tradition of "deeds, not creeds. "But what deeds? The Principles point us toward certain very specific moral and ethical values: justice, equity and compassion in human relations; acceptance of one another; the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process; the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all. But why these particular values? Where do they come from? Without an authoritative source of ethical imperatives, on what grounds do we teach values such as love, compassion, and justice?

I think their placement in the series makes clear that this is not an arbitrary list. Rather, it seems to me that all of these values grow directly out of the relationship between the first and last principles; they grow out of the tension between individualism and interdependence, each one pulling at the other, each one challenging the absoluteness of

the other. Each of the principles in between represents a particular balance, a response to this tension at a particular point along the continuum.

At one end we have the inherent worth and dignity of every person. If indeed each and every person is important, as we say in the children's version of the Principles, then it follows that all people should be treated fairly; and therefore in our second Principle we covenant to affirm and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations. The emphasis is on the individual; the emphasis is on relations between people, one individual to another, on seeing and treating and, above all, *valuing* each person as a separate, autonomous individual.

At the other end we have the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part, the metaphor expressing our deeply felt knowledge that no one and nothing even exists except in relation to everything else. From this perspective the same ethical concern that calls for justice, equity and compassion for every individual now looks at the whole and lifts up the broad vision of world community and peace, liberty and justice for all. The placement of these two statements reminds us that it is not possible to have justice for *all* unless there is equity for *each*, nor can there be justice for each unless there is peace and liberty for all.

We can see a similar balance in the third and fifth principles. Acceptance of one another as individuals translates in the context of the larger community into the right of conscience, the affirmation of our right to speak and to act publicly—that is, in the context of the community— according to the deepest and highest truth we know. Parallel to the encouragement of spiritual growth within our congregations is the affirmation of democratic process—itself always a balancing of tension between each individual and the whole—as the means by which any human community, from congregation to nation to the whole world community, can grow toward its highest ideals and values.

And in the middle, precisely at the point where these two opposing ideas intersect, in the one principle that is not paired with any other, what do we find? We find the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. To me this suggests that meaning is not to be found just anywhere, and certainly not only within the individual or only within the whole,

but precisely in the tension between our existence as separate individuals of worth and dignity and as interdependent parts of an indivisible whole.

Now so far this all is pretty abstract. Let's play with it a little and get a little closer to what it might actually mean in our lives. What does it mean to say that we find our meanings in the tension between the one and the all, between separateness and relatedness, between the first and the last principle?

For some of us—probably for most of us, I suspect—the first thing it means is that we need to learn to see ourselves and our relationship to the world and to one another in a very different way. In this country and in our free religious tradition we tend to be pretty good at understanding ourselves as fully autonomous individuals, masters of our fates and captains of our souls, as the poet says. It's ingrained in us from childhood; we feel it in our bones. (My Canadian friends and colleagues tell me that this is not so strong in born-and-bred Canadians as it is this side of the border.) So the first challenge our Principles sets before us, both as individuals and as a religious community, is to learn to feel our interdependence as deeply as we feel our separateness. It's not enough just to say glibly that we are somehow all in this together; we must learn to feel deep down how the least movement on the farthest edge of the web of life travels to every part of it and shakes the very ground where we stand.

What might that look like in practice? Here's one possibility, out of many:

As a movement, we pride ourselves on our theological diversity, on our willingness to learn from many religious traditions, on our respect for beliefs that are different from our own. But too often that respect goes no farther than tolerance, a kind of peaceful co-existence among the humanists and the theists, the agnostics and the pagans, the atheists and the liberal Christians. Now tolerance is good; our ancestors suffered and died to gain the right to the religious tolerance we enjoy today. But our Principles ask more of us than just tolerance. You'll notice that the Principles don't affirm the *individual* search for truth and meaning, but a *free and responsible* search; and the way the Principles are arranged makes clear that a free and responsible search for truth and meaning is not and cannot be entirely individual because as human beings we are not and cannot be entirely individual. Our Principles suggest that we will come much nearer to whatever truth we are

able to know only when our search is grounded as deeply in our relationality as it is in our individuality. Or, to put it another way, our Principles insist that while each of us must search for truth and meaning *for* ourselves, we do not and we cannot carry on that search *by* ourselves.

Our Principles suggest that if we are truly engaged in a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, then the diversity of viewpoints represented in our Sources, and in our pulpits and religious education programs, is far more than just a matter of equal time, far more than just making sure that everybody gets to hear what they want to hear at least some of the time. It's more than just making sure that we all understand one another. Instead, it means that we need to make sure we are really listening to one another, all the time, the atheists and the Christians, the theists and the humanists, listening not just for what is missing but for whatever is there that can help to enrich and deepen the meanings we have found from our own perspectives. It doesn't mean that we ever will or can or should find some single statement of truth and meaning that we will all agree on. It does mean understanding that by searching together as a community each of us can come a little closer to whatever ultimate meaning there may be, than any one of us, or any one theological perspective, can possibly do separately.

Or on a broader level: Someone remarked to me recently that the reason that human rights discussions between the United States and China don't seem to get anywhere is that we're not speaking the same language—and I don't mean English and Chinese. When we talk about human rights, we tend to mean things like personal liberty, freedom of speech, press, and assembly, the right to vote, things like that: the rights of the individual. When China thinks of human rights, she said, they mean the right of everyone to have enough food to eat, a place to live, adequate health care. They can't understand how a nation as rich as ours can let so many of its people go hungry and homeless and sick and still have the nerve to lecture them on human rights. On one side, the rights of the individual over against the whole; on the other, the rights that grow out of a sense of interconnectedness and mutual responsibility. Which are the "right" rights? How do we balance the one against the other?

This is not a hypothetical or rhetorical question. As a nation, we are continually in the midst of exactly this kind of search for meaning. Sometimes the issue is health care; sometimes it's welfare reform; at other times it may be racial justice or social security. Whatever the specific question, the underlying issues are the same. Much of the discussion is political: Democrats vs. Republicans, what will Congress pass, what will the President sign, how will this affect the next election? What we're not acknowledging, in most of this, is that we're engaged in a national search for meaning. Our struggle to come to consensus on any of these issues is by its nature a struggle to discover and define who we are both as individuals and as community, what our values are, how we relate to one another and to the whole.

On the one hand, we say that in a nation as wealthy as ours, no child should have to go hungry—but we can't figure out how to take care of the children without also coddling the parents. On the one hand, we say that every able-bodied person should work for a living—but we don't provide the job training, the child care, the wages, even the jobs themselves that would make that possible. On the one hand, we say that as a society we are responsible for our poorest and most vulnerable, but on the other many of us are unwilling to give up much of what we have to carry out that responsibility. On the one hand we argue that each person must make his or her own way in this world, but on the other we freely accept the relative wealth and comforts which come to us not through our own doing but because we were born to the right parents at the right time in the right place in society.

The rights and responsibilities of the individual on one side, the rights and responsibilities of the whole interdependent community on the other. And in between, we struggle toward answers; we search for truth and meaning, the meaning of our lives as human beings in community, paradoxically individual and interdependent at the same time.

I don't pretend the have the answers. In the context of the search for meaning, the precise answer we may someday agree upon isn't even the point. The point is that what's going on here is not just about welfare.

What it's really about is meaning: who we are, how we relate to one another, what we can expect from one another, what we must hold on to no matter what, what we are willing to

give up for the common good. In a nation which has traditionally been profoundly individualistic, it's about recognizing the depth of our interdependence, about learning to feel our connections as strongly as we feel our separateness. Perhaps the greatest contribution that liberal religion could make to the debate about any of these great national issues would be to refuse to let the discussion begin and end with the details and the politics, to raise up the profound questions of meaning that underlie all the specific disagreements, to insist that we recognize and honor both poles of the debate, to model the strength and courage it takes to remain at the point of tension because it is there and only there that we can pursue the free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

It isn't easy to stay at the point of tension, to live in the midst of a paradox. It's easier by far to sing the songs and chant the slogans of oneness and interdependence to make ourselves feel good while continuing to live our lives as though we were completely autonomous individuals. But somewhere in the middle, where the worth and dignity of every individual stands forever in dynamic tension with with the interdependent web of all existence of which we are all a part, where the strong light from the beams of the first and the seventh principle cross to light our path, exactly there, and only there, can we come to know who and what we are. There is where our free and responsible search must lead us; and there, if anywhere, is where we will find whatever is ours to find of truth and meaning.

SIX-WORD STORIES OF FAITH

Part 1: Introduction to Six-Word Memoirs

From the *SMITH* magazine website: http://sixwordmemoirs.com/about/about-six/

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>
> ***The Story of Six***
> *Since the Six-Word Memoir® debuted as a project of SMITH Magazine in November 2006, nearly 1 million short stories have been shared on Six-Word Memoirs and its younger cousin, SMITH Teens. In classrooms and boardrooms, churches and synagogues, veterans' groups and across the dinner table, Six-Word Memoirs have become a powerful tool to catalyze conversation, spark imagination or break the ice.*

Watch a video of the magazine's co-founder, Larry Smith (about 15 mins)
http://youtu.be/TvdAb0_AmmE

Part 2: My Six-Word Story of Faith

By Andrea Lerner, District Executive of Metro NY, delivered at Star Island RE Week August 2015 and used with permission.

…Sharing an exercise that I experienced at the Leading Edge conference at Middle Collegiate Church – writing Six-Word Stories of Faith. The experience there, and the participants sharing through Twitter with the larger world, resulted in a social media stream of UUs writing their six-word faith stories.

Of course this story changes over the course of our lives. As a Methodist Sunday School student, my first Faith story would have been "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know" coupled with a sense that ALL the children of the world were equally valued. "They are precious in his sight." Learning, as I grew, that the church and the larger society did not practice this value in reality was one of the greatest disillusionments of my young life.

That, and the questioning mores of the 60's, led me to dismissing religion as irrelevant and useless, and my story shifted more to "religious practice is an empty shell."

An Interfaith marriage and becoming parents led to more questioning and a new appreciation for timeless stories not meant to be literal, but instructional and transformative. "We are meaning makers, living stories."

Parenting our children in the elementary school years found us scrambling to protect them from a hostile world, and yearning for them to have a place to develop their own identity in safety, so my story again shifted to the idea that we are people with "Souls not molded but beautifully unfolded."

Harlan Limpert, the Chief Operating Officer of the UUA, and former Director of District Staff once asked us, "Given what you know about yourself as a teenager, what were the odds that you would grow up to be serving the UUA?" At first, I thought – Just about zero. Thinking about it more, though, my trajectory made absolute sense. It's almost universal that our early disappointments in the "fairness" of life instill in us a need to make meaning, or as one of the UUA tag lines has read, "Nurture your soul, Repair the world."

Equipping leaders. Building capacity. Sharing possibilities.

Some of the #MySixWordStoryofFaith examples shared online were artistically expressed:

Congregations, too, have their faith stories – and some of them are expressed beautifully through their mission statements.

One of the gifts that Twitter has given us is that we learn to hone our message carefully

into less than 140 characters – a mini-elevator speech if you will.

So let's practice – Take a few minutes and craft your personal six-word story of faith.

Note: We will do this exercise during the module. Feel free to think about your faith

journey and jot down your evolving six-word stories of faith in advance.

You can search Twitter for tweets with the #MySixWordStoryOfFaith hashtag even if
you're not a member.
https://twitter.com/search?q=%23mysixwordstoryoffaith&src=typd

THE THOMAS JEFFERSON BALL: REFLECTIONS AND RECONCILIATION

General Assembly 2009 Workshop
http://www.uua.org/economic/ga/144270.shtml
presented by *Rev. Hope Johnson and Rev. Barbro Hansson*

In 1993, General Assembly (GA) was held in Charlotte, NC, in the Thomas Jefferson District. The GA Planning Committee decided to hold a Thomas Jefferson Ball, inviting delegates to attend the ball in period costume. (Although he never joined a Unitarian church, Thomas Jefferson is often claimed by Unitarian Universalists as an early North American Unitarian.)

Some delegates to the 1993 General Assembly questioned the propriety of the Thomas Jefferson Ball. These delegates, including African Americans and their white allies, read a statement in the first plenary session of the 1993 GA, protesting the event. The ensuing conflict sent ripples throughout Unitarian Universalism, raising awareness that different groups of people could have very different perceptions of the same event.

Rev. Hope Johnson, then a lay leader in the Community Church in New York City, and Rev. Barbro Hansson, then a lay leader in, and president of, the Thomas Jefferson District, were both in the middle of the conflict. In this GA presentation, they shared how they were able to confront their diverse perspectives and reconcile with each other.

Johnson told how she and other members of Community Church in New York City found out about the Thomas Jefferson Ball before General Assembly began. Johnson said her sister asked, "Well, what am I supposed to wear [to the Ball]?" In other words, should African Americans go dressed as slaves, "in rags and chains"? The delegation from Community Church decided to organize a protest of the Ball and began contacting other congregations.

Upon arriving at GA, Johnson said she met with the African American Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministers (AAUUMM) and helped draft a statement to be read at plenary. In the end, she was the one chosen to actually read the statement. She said she rewrote the statement to make it less negative. "I headed for plenary," said Johnson, "and when I delivered the statement, you could have heard a pin drop. And you know that

saying, about your legs turning to jelly? I remember experiencing that feeling for the first time in my life."

Meanwhile, Hansson, the District President, was excited by the prospect of having the 1993 GA occur in her home district (although she was not involved in planning for the Ball or other GA programming specifically). When Johnson delivered the statement protesting the Thomas Jefferson Ball, Hansson was taken by surprise.

"When Hope walked to the microphone in front of [then-UUA Moderator] Natalie Gulbrandsen," Hansson said, "Yes, you could hear a pin drop. And as that pin dropped all kinds of things began to churn inside me, because I heard what Hope was saying." As president of the Thomas Jefferson District, Hansson knew she had to respond in her capacity as a lay leader. When she saw Leon Spencer, an African American man who served as UUA Trustee from the Thomas Jefferson District, walk up on stage to meet with Gulbrandsen to help plan a response to the protest, Hansson knew she had to participate as well. She said to herself, "'You are a leader, you are responsible, you can do something.' And as I thought those words, I went up the risers and went up to Leon and placed myself right next to him."

Thirteen people had gathered on the stage around Gulbrandsen, including both Hansson and Johnson. Gulbrandsen asked that group to go and talk the situation over together and return in an hour to report back to the plenary session.

"So, how do you fix something like that in 60 minutes?" said Johnson. "I have to say it was a difficult place to be." As one of the thirteen people charged with developing a response, Johnson said, "I realized that I had done something awful in terms of [being the president of] the district that was hosting this."

This group of thirteen came to the conclusion that the Thomas Jefferson Ball should be held as planned and that individual delegates should attend or not attend according to their individual consciences. At the end of their 60-minute deadline, they reported this to the plenary session.

"And then we moved on from there," Hansson said. "The drama was finished for the moment." However, she noted that the repercussions continued for a long time thereafter.

Hansson and Johnson shared their own personal story of reconciliation. At the end of the 1993 GA, they wound up talking for three hours together in Hansson's hotel room, getting to know each other as people. "We became friends," Johnson said. "We had so much in common. We each were single parents. We each had a daughter. We each came from someplace else: I am from Jamaica," Johnson said, and Hansson is originally from Sweden.

After GA was over, Hansson sent Johnson a greeting card showing two girls sitting together on a swing; one of the girls on the card was white and one of the girls was black. Johnson said, "And that card I have with me always."

"That GA, in addition to paving the way for Hope and me to become friends, or actually sisters, also was the time when I felt called to ministry," Hansson said. "I suspected some day that Hope would do the same." Indeed, Johnson also became a Unitarian Universalist minister.

"So that is our story of how our paths intersected at a critical time," said Hansson, "a time of conflict and chaos. We found that we are very much alike."

Johnson said that their friendship continues to this day. "And so it [their friendship] continues and it is our joy to be here," said Johnson. "As sisters."

Reported by Dan Harper; edited by Dana Dwinell-Yardley and Deborah Weiner.