

To Be An Effective, Justice-Seeking People

Lecture I in the 2011-2012 Minns Lecture Series

What Was and Is Required:

Three Forums on the Renewal of Unitarian Universalism in the 21st Century

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I am grateful to the Minns Committee for the chance to continue the discussion begun last April at First Church in Boston about the spiritual renewal of Unitarian Universalism. As I listened last spring to colleagues I admire – Larry Peers, Marilyn Sewell, Rob Hardies, Rosemary McNatt, Peter Morales, Christine Robinson, Ken Beldon, and Vanessa Rush Southern, I thought, hardly for the first time, of the words of Micah, “What doth the Lord require of thee,” of us, “but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” and of a hymn by nineteenth-century Unitarian poet James Russell Lowell with the line, “New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth.” So today I want to begin the discussion of what was in my experience, and perhaps is changing, and is yet required of us. I’m grateful to two younger colleagues I admire, Paige Getty and Nate Walker, for giving precious time to better discern the future we now face.

It is now forty years – a very Biblical span – since a Unitarian Universalist congregation first called me their “minister.”¹ Recently I published *Universalists and Unitarians in America: A People's History*, concluding with two chapters about the fifty years since the consolidation of the two denominations in 1961. So let me trade on the perspective of both my own experience and my historical studies to begin provocatively: Unitarian Universalism as a religious movement is *not* in decline! We like to think so because we are afraid of our own power. By some measures, our faith has never been stronger institutionally nor, since Lowell’s time, better positioned to be widely influential. Let me cite two statistics. During the eight years I served as UUA president, from 1993 to 2001, I personally preached at the dedication of over 160 new, renovated or expanded church buildings. There was no way I could get out to all of them. More recently, between 2009 and 2010, in the midst of an economic crisis, total contributions to UUA congregations increased by over 10 percent. *We are* growing. Not everywhere; but mostly.

Our association, in my view, does our collective morale a great disservice by focusing on voting membership numbers, asking for support via a head tax, rather than as a percentage of budget, like every other denomination I know. No wonder surveys of religious identity say that there are four times as many people who identify as Unitarian Universalists than we have on voting rolls! Why, my own congregation counts fewer than 300 voting members, but when I count the number of men, women, and children who consider me their minister, it’s closer to a thousand!

¹ “Minister to the Congregation,” Unitarian Church in Summit, NJ, 1971–72; Assistant Minister, First Parish in Lexington, MA, 1972–73, both prior to my ordination and installation as the fourth Minister of the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Church in Knoxville in November 1973.

So why do we do this? It's not just that we love been hyper-critical, although that's a part of it. Ken MacLean was once asked by a parishioner what all Unitarian Universalists have in common, across all theological differences. Ken began, "Well, we're inclined to be skeptical, you know." To which the man replied, "I don't believe *that* for a minute!" But I suspect other dimensions. We are embarrassed by our relative economic privilege and in denial about our potential power; for if we were to admit more fully to power, we'd have to consider how more justly to use it.

"What doth the Lord require of thee . . .?" I have told this story before, especially when I was a candidate for the UUA presidency, but I can't begin these lectures without repeating it again. The first time I entered a Unitarian Universalist sanctuary was just after Dr. King was killed. Like many young people now camped out in Occupy Wall Street, or Boston, or similar protests, my despair about the moral condition of my country drove me to it. I had not inherited this faith, but as a scholarship senior at Harvard, Class of '68, I denounced the War in Vietnam as racist and futile – though it threatened my father's security clearance as Navy shipbuilder. And voted to break with tradition and have our graduating class itself invite our own Class Day speaker, rather than just listen to a probable apologist for war speak at the alumni exercises.

We asked Sen. Robert F. Kennedy to speak to us. And he accepted. Then in March, when LBJ announced he would not run for re-election, Kennedy's staff called to say the senator was sorry, but he could not be in Cambridge in June after all; he'd be in California, running in the primary. My friend and classmate Bill Sinkford, who had met Dr. King at a UUA General Assembly, helped persuade MLK to replace of RFK. Then in early April, Dr. King was killed in Memphis.

I took my despair into the sanctuary at First Parish in Harvard Square. Frankly didn't listen to what was being said. What I saw were two plaques hanging then on each side of the chancel. One with words still used in *this* church, "In the freedom of the truth, and in the spirit of Jesus, we unite for the worship of God and the service of man"; the other, with the words of Micah.

That fall I had heard Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, King's ally in the struggle for racial justice and against the war. He talked about that very text, pointing out that it is first a question, not an answer. To be prophetic is not to predict the future, he said. It is to raise deep moral and spiritual questions. Those who do this are often so threatening to existing power relations that the powerful scorn them, try to silence them, even try to kill them. When that happens, Heschel said, there is no solution to be found in isolated questioning – although one may hope that the disillusioned – after considering *why* they entertained illusions in the first place – may have the spark of hope rekindled within them in their hour of need. The only real solutions are in communities that live in the spirit of the prophets, not pretending to have all the answers, but to keep living together in the questions that most matter. He said this as a Holocaust survivor. Remembering that, I then began to wonder if something might be being asked of me,

beckoning me toward serving communities marked by that questioning, spiritual yearning for justice.

Mind you, over the years, I've found that many Unitarian Universalists who claim to want justice in the worst way, often go about seeking it in some of the worst possible ways indeed; too often bringing more self-righteousness than compassion or humility, or even thoughtfulness, to their knee-jerk reactivity. During my Knoxville ministry, for example, I had to persuade my activists – justly proud of the work the church had done back in the early 50s, organizing an inter-racial day camp for children even before school desegregation, organizing inter-racial sit-ins to desegregate public facilities – that by 1980 organizing a counter-demonstration to a planned Klan rally would just bring the very last vestiges of the KKK far more attention than they deserved.

“New occasions teach new duties.” Serving in the Bible Belt, later in Dallas, it was similarly difficult to persuade UU activists not to over-react to the pretensions of groups like Falwell's Moral Majority – with was never either – or its replacement, the so-called Christian Coalition, and instead to put their energy into interfaith organizing on behalf of protecting pluralism.

Along the way, I got some deep lessons in spiritual discernment when it comes to serving justice. Vocation is discerning where one's gifts, passions, and situation meet the world's many needs. When, for example, I found myself driving every day from a home on one side of a large state psychiatric hospital to a church located not far beyond the other, I responded when the new hospital chaplain asked me to co-lead a program preparing longer-term patients for discharge. Only to find myself questioning how justly deinstitutionalization was being implemented, then starting group homes, then advocating for decent support services for the homeless mentally ill – until I saw homelessness itself become institutionalized, and began refusing to help any charity that didn't have an active advocacy component for decent housing first. Similarly, when the Knoxville church, back in the 70s, began work on environmental issues, we didn't just set up a recycling center in the absence of a public one, we also advocated for a container deposit law – until we realized that the Speaker of the Tennessee House, the largest beer distributor in the state, would allow that to pass roughly when that place we Universalists don't believe in freezes over!

“God, give us grace to accept with *serenity* the things that cannot be changed, *courage* to change the things which should be changed, and the *wisdom* to distinguish the one from the other.” That's the original version of the Serenity Prayer as theologian Reinhold Niebuhr first delivered it one summer Sunday in the midst of World War II at the little church in Heath, Massachusetts. As his daughter, Elisabeth Sifton, has argued in her book about the prayer,² it was *not* meant to be just about personal spirituality; it was a prayer for discernment in momentous public matters; in the hard work of serving justice in an unjust and violent world.

We need such discernment today more than ever. For we good progressive people have a terrible tendency to try to serve justice in futile or ineffectual ways. In local congregations, all too often our social justice work is unfocused. This isn't just a UU issue. As a United Methodist

² Elisabeth Sifton, *The Serenity Prayer: Faith and Politics in Times of Peace and War*.

pastor in Seattle, my friend Rebecca Parker once had a congregant tell her, “I’ve learned what social action in the liberal church really means: ‘You’re free here to start your own little justice effort. Just don’t expect the church as a whole to help much. Everyone here has their own.’” Ouch!

On the other hand, the UUA often sets a poor model for its congregations by trying to coordinate social justice work by taking votes on earnest resolutions. Local spiritual discernment should proceed in the opposite direction, not top-down, but bottom-up. At All Souls, New York City, where in the late 80s we had nearly 800 lay volunteers in various social ministry projects, we developed a model I later called “the pyramid of religious response.”³ The base rests on concrete acts of service, preferably in face-to-face relationship, partnering with people directly affected by injustice: “I was hungry, and you fed me; I was a stranger and you gave me shelter; naked and you clothed me; sick, you tended me; a prisoner, and you visited.” [Mt. 25].

But a prophetic church does not stop at being pastoral and charitable. It also asks real questions. It educates its members and others. *Why* are there homeless families with children in drug-ridden welfare hotels? Who owns that hotel? What? White, South African investors? And the city pays them how much? When it also owns many boarded-up, vacant buildings, seized in lieu of taxes?

This is why I still do a public issues forum or an adult ed class nearly every Sunday, before preaching and leading worship. Social education and reflection needs separate attention, lest the minister get too far ahead of the people with sermons that seem didactic or even self-righteous. We *don’t* know all the answers. But we can begin to discern and debate some tentative solutions, and then invite at least those who have ears to hear to join us advocating for better solutions.

Our work in the New York welfare hotels in the late 80s not only produced influential books – Jonathan Kozol’s narrative, *Rachel and Her Children*, and UU economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett’s *When the Bough Breaks: The Costs of Neglecting America’s Children*. It also got us mobilized to protest outside City Hall during budget hearings – and the credibility to suggest more public-private partnerships to renovate abandoned apartments for homeless families and youth. Finally, we voted to put part of the All Souls endowment into a revolving loan fund for such projects, while asking all the other wealthy houses of worship on the Upper East Side to do likewise, joining us in Crossing 96th Street, a partnership pairing privileged congregations with far poorer communities in East Harlem. All Souls partnered with an African American UCC congregation, the Church of the Resurrection, while my favorite pairing was the one between a very privileged Episcopal church on Fifth Avenue, the Church of the Heavenly Rest (sometimes called “Celestial Snooze,”) with an East Harlem Catholic parish, *La Iglesia de la Santa Agonia*. The whole gap was there: celestial snooze vs. holy agony! God save us from both! Or at least from further division.

³ See John Buehrens and Forrest Church, *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalist*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 69–71.

When the secular left organizes, as the last century has demonstrated, it is often as a firing squad – in a circle. But I agree with Harvard’s Stephen Pinker,⁴ and with historians of religion Karen Armstrong and Robert Bellah. Religion is *not* the primary cause of violence, the New Atheists’ reactive pot shots at their parents’ gods notwithstanding. Competition for political and economic power still is, and always has been. And religion – while perfectly capable, like anything else, of being co-opted for evil purposes – has more often functioned in human cultural evolution to damp down reactivity, revenge, the cycle of self-destructive blame and retribution. What is required, after all, is for religions to go beyond defending their sacred texts as true in every part – true then, true now – and “return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate.”⁵ “For the letter killeth,” as St. Paul said, “while the spirit giveth life.”

There are two other ways progressive religion can go wrong in our time in trying to serve justice. First, it can leave its analysis at the level of blaming others, without seeing that, as the seventh principle of Unitarian Universalism suggests, and as Dr. King explicitly said, “We are [all] caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,” an interdependent web. So when I read the first declaration issued by Occupy Wall Street, I found it both spiritually and practically flawed, although I am in great sympathy with the outrage behind it. Practically, however, it goes off in all directions at once; which is a sure way to go nowhere. Each of its twenty-three bullet points calls for the amelioration of a different issue, ranging from mortgage foreclosures to industrialized farming, from political donations to student debt. The spiritual flaw is that each blames the same enemy: “They.” As though the 99 percent were not involved in same social system as the 1 percent.

Now please excuse what may seem to some as mere resignation, but midway in my forty years of justice-seeking, I think we all went through what our greatest twentieth-century UU theologian and ethicist, James Luther Adams, would have dubbed an “epochal event.” It was not “the end of history,” but it was “the fall of the Wall,” or “the end of the Cold War,” and conclusively showed, at least for our era, the abject failure of state-controlled, non-market projects seeking economic justice. Just ask Deng Xiaoping. Markets have been around in human evolution for millennia, and even corporations for centuries, and neither is going to go away soon. No more than beer distributors or race track children promoting casinos are leaving speakerships in our state legislatures.⁶

So what should and now can be changed? When Tom Friedman says that now *The World Is Flat*, I add, “Yes, more than in the past; but also heavily tilted, to benefit those with wealth or power.”

⁴ See Pinker’s 2007 TED lecture on the myth of violence as increasing, http://www.ted.com/talks/steven_pinker_on_the_myth_of_violence.html.

⁵ From the interfaith Charter for Compassion, www.charterforcompassion.org.

⁶ This is a reference to the former Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, Sal DiMasi (D-Revere), whose father was employed at a race track in the district DiMasi went on to represent, and which he hoped to save, economically, by introducing slot machines and casino gambling, regardless of other costs to the Commonwealth and its culture. DiMasi was convicted in June 2011 of conspiracy, extortion, and honest services fraud.

The very search for fairness in markets, in my view, gave rise to all the great historical religions. The ancient Hebrew prophet Amos heard cheating market-place merchants in his time saying, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? And the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the *ephah* small, and the *shekel* great, and falsifying all the balances by deceit?”⁷ High religion – that is, the sense of a high God above the tribal gods – emerged, in my reading, only when, in the Axial Age, tribes and ethnic groups in the great river valleys and regions of confluence, from the Yangtze to the Indus to Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent to the Nile, and through the Greek Aegean, began to frame variations on a rule of reciprocal compassion: “Don’t argue over whether his *ephah* is right, or your *shekel*. Instead, treat both your neighbor and the stranger in the marketplace as you yourself would want to be treated.”

It’s not a perfect rule. But neither are God’s people; neither then nor now. As the rabbis argued, and as I think Channing believed – although not always all of his more optimistic disciples – within us we all wrestle with both the long-view, all-of-us-in-this-together, connected, caring *yetzer* or inclination; and the short-sighted, quick-reward, to-hell-with-the-other-guy, evil *yetzer*, which the animating Spirit that made us all also placed within us, but which is not meant by God, in the long arc of evolution, to prevail. As MLK, then a Ph.D. student at BU School of Theology, heard Dana Greeley quote Theodore Parker as saying, “The moral arc of the universe is long. . . but it bends toward justice.”

King’s rhetoric, by the way, drew not just from the Bible, from the prophets Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and Jesus, who was “more than a prophet,”⁸ but also from founding documents of this nation – Jefferson’s words, “We hold those truths to be self-evident, that *all* [emphasis added] men are created equal. . .” and from abolitionist Unitarians like Parker and Lowell – whose line I’ve previously quoted and is embedded in a poem, later turned into a stirring hymn, which begins, “Once to every man and nation/ comes a moment to decide / in the strife of truth and falsehood, for the good or evil side.”

The danger here, I might say, is to deny God’s transcendent universalism, or intention to save all. To pretend that only *we* 99 percent are just, and the rich 1 percent are all evil, fit only for eternal damnation. Admittedly, even Jesus himself thought it as difficult for a rich man to enter the Commonwealth of God as for a camel to pass through the eye of needle. But then he allowed that, with God’s power, in us all, all things are possible. Which now brings me to a key question in this lecture:

How are we Unitarian Universalists, who are both wealthier and more potentially influential than we would like to admit, to use that power and privilege to serve justice more effectively?

Mind you, I can’t offer a final answer; perhaps only more questions. As the great jurist Learned Hand once wrote, “The liberal spirit is the spirit that is not too sure that it is right . . . [it

⁷ Amos 8:5, KJV. An *ephah* is a unit of measure, as for grain, like a bushel; a *shekel* is a unit of monetary exchange. Christian anti-Semitists have sometimes used this text, not to admire the self-critical impulse in ancient Hebrew religion, but to characterize Jewish merchants and bankers as cheaters. I reject such bigoted interpretations.

⁸ Words attributed to Jesus in Matthew 11:9 with regard to John the Baptist, whom he calls a messenger. In Islam, there are many prophets, but only a few true messengers of God, of whom the Prophet Mohammed is the final one.

is] the spirit which seeks to understand the mind of other men and women; the spirit which weighs their interests alongside its own without bias. . .” But perhaps experience and a sense of history can suggest a few principles. Much has changed over forty years, and much, sadly, remains the same.

Several weeks ago I joined over one hundred UU ministers in the Greater Boston area in signing an open letter in support of the Occupy Boston protests. I will not repeat that entire statement here, but it alluded to how the nation’s poverty rate is higher now than when Dr. King inspired people of all races and classes to march for “jobs and justice.” It identified – correctly in my view – growing economic inequality and the domination of electoral politics by the wealthy and by unlimited corporate money as subverting “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

During the forty years that I have been in ministry, America has suffered morally and spiritually from its very material success. My generation, the post-war Baby Boomers, became entitled, expecting and expending more than any in history. Many were seduced by politicians promising American global dominance without paying taxes for wars; anti-government crusaders trying to “starve the beast” and increasing our deficits. Our national earnings, once invested, turned our economy from a US industrial dynamo into a globalized, financialized leviathan – seeking out high rates of return, even at the cost of environmental degradation or child labor elsewhere, largely unseen behind screens of distance and denial. Our very high-tech success brought into the global marketplace for labor, especially in the last twenty years, more than two billion educated young people, in India, China, and other developing countries. No wonder US joblessness persists and wages are stagnant. This new paradigm is shocking. Some Americans seek scapegoats in anti-immigrant xenophobia or promote protectionism. Protest movements on the Right, like the Tea Party, simply blame government, and seem to want to accelerate the race to the bottom by cutting taxes, shredding the social safety net, undoing US environmental protections, *et cetera*.

Last June, at the UUA General Assembly, my predecessor as UUA president, William F. Schulz – now, after fourteen years heading the human rights group Amnesty International USA, serving as president and CEO of UUSC – gave an insightful talk about what makes for an effective social change movement. He cited four factors. First, he said, effective social change movements have identifiable adversaries. From Tahrir Square to Tea Party gatherings, those in government make far more identifiable adversaries than largely impersonal economic forces and corporations. Second, rather than a rigid ideology, successful social change movements develop a message that appeals to a broad audience. Third, and most important, they operate on more than one level. He quoted, of all people, Charles Koch, a chief financier behind the Tea Party movement, as saying, “To bring about social change [requires] a strategy that is vertically and horizontally integrated; [spanning] everything from idea creation to policy development to education to grassroots organization to lobbying to litigation to political action.” To which Dr. Schulz added, “corporate accountability,” something Mr. Koch does not much believe in. Finally, he spoke about how successful social change movements change cultural norms, not just

among elites, but broadly. The most successful and promising progressive social change movement of our time, he said, has been the effort to end discrimination in marriage, providing all loving, committed couples, gay and straight alike, with the rights and responsibilities of marriage.

I found those insights interesting. Ten years ago, after leaving the UUA presidency, I joined the first steering committee for Freedom to Marry, the campaign to win equal marriage nationwide. Although I was at first the only non-gay ally and religious leader in the room, for most of the last decade I have been national co-chair of Freedom to Marry. I presided at a recent board meeting, which I opened by quoting Schulz quoting Charles Koch, as we celebrated this year's important victory in New York State, and our multi-level strategy for building what has become a majority for equal marriage across America into more successes, both legislative and through the courts. Along the way, I've watched us learn to involve corporate accountability, and change our own messaging from an emphasis on rights to language about love and commitment. Later this year, as I conclude my ministry in Needham, I am also going to step aside from Freedom to Marry. Not because the final victory is won, although I am convinced now that it inevitably will be, but because the cause that seems most urgent to me now is the one represented by the Occupy movement: growing economic inequality and the subordination of democracy to corporate power. Read the late Tony Judt's last book, *Ill Fares the Land*, about how growing economic inequality brings with it growing, costly social problems; or *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. Or the work of UU Chuck Collins, whose wife, the Rev. Tricia Brennan, was once assistant minister of this congregation. Chuck was the cofounder of United for a Fair Economy, wrote *Wealth and the Commonwealth* with William Gates, Sr., and now directs the program on Inequality and the Common Good at the Institute for Policy Studies. He's currently encouraging UU congregations to organize their members and others for common security in this time of economic crisis. I'm going to be talking with him, and with UU leaders in the field of promoting corporate accountability through stockholder democracy and activism. And with my friend Paul Sherry, past president of the United Church of Christ, who has devoted his efforts to Faith Advocates for Jobs and Interfaith Worker Justice. But I am still in discernment about how and where personally to help make a movement for greater economic justice and authentic democracy more effective today.

Corporations are not going away. Neither is globalization. Clear thinking needs to recognize that. Courageous public pressure on corporate misconduct, however, needs to be increased, exponentially and globally. I loved it that recently the non-profit stockholders of News Corporation tried to remove Rupert Murdoch and his family members from the corporate board. During the savings and loan scandals of the 1980s there were a thousand attorneys who worked on federal prosecutions. Today there are only a hundred, forcing settlements out of Wall Street criminals like CitiCorp to pay for having issued rotten derivatives and then bet against them at the same time. The insider self-dealing is not confined to a few notorious cases. Going all the way back to the collapse of Enron, which should have been a warning to people like Alan Greenspan that rigged markets do not self-regulate, I am still outraged at the behavior of people

like Wendy Gramm, wife of the former US senator from Texas, Phil Gramm. With her husband's influence, she became chair of the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission, where she led the exemption for all federal regulation of trading in energy futures. Then she went on the board of Enron. She even chaired its audit committee, no less. Yet, when Enron's phony accounting led to destroying tens of billions in people's retirement savings, she went unprosecuted. Meanwhile, kids in the ghetto go into the prison-industrial complex for minor drug offenses, and immigrants with children born here are deported for traffic violations. Since 1972 the rate of incarceration here in liberal Massachusetts has increased by 800 percent. But many of the greatest criminals escape a justice system gone awry.

Among my greatest teachers over the last twenty years in combating real injustice, I want to cite Kathy Sreedhar, who is stepping down this year after twenty-six years leading the Unitarian Universalist Holdeen India Program. "To find yourself," spiritually, "you sometimes must go to a stranger." And, ironically, the most effective social movement for economic justice I know in the world is in India, among a network of activist partners discovered and nurtured in our name by Kathy.

I'm thinking now of Elaben Bhatt, founder of SEWA, the Self-Employed Women's Association. Ela was a labor organizer in the textile mills of Ahmedabad, where Gandhi had his first ashram. But then the mills closed there, just as they had earlier here in New England, and the jobs went to places where labor was even cheaper. When Kathy gave Ela her first grant, she was working with six others to organize women in the "informal sector" of the economy. Now SEWA has over 1.2 million women in cooperatives and unions fighting for a living wage. Ela founded Women's World Banking, and is now one of the so-called global elders, with Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, Desmond Tutu, and others.

Much younger is Martin Macwan. When I first met him, fifteen years ago, he was using his first UU Holdeen India grant to training dalit ("untouchable") women in about fifty villages to respond effectively to so-called atrocities, of rape, violence, intimidation, and murder by members of higher castes. When I saw him two years later, his movement, Navsarjan, meaning New Creation, had spread to two thousand villages. That does not happen unless lives are being changed. Six of his co-workers had been killed, however, by people whose vested interests were being threatened. Six attempts had been made on his life. Leading me to say, "Martin, it's time we made you untouchable in the good sense, through international recognition. I nominated him for the Robert Kennedy Human Rights Award, which was given to him in 2000, in a ceremony I attended in Washington, DC. Martin by then was the MLK of India, as chair of the National Dalit Human Rights Campaign.

Our UU Holdeen India partners have become the most effective social change network I know anywhere in the world. They have developed, with our help, the kind of multi-level capacities Charles Koch speaks of – from the Advocacy Institute of India and other training centers for activists to think-tanks on budget analysis, human rights strategies, and women's issues. They too are experiencing a shift beyond caste or race discrimination – although both persist, along with sexual injustice – to economic injustice and the corporate corruption of Indian

politics. Perhaps we should study them. But if we were to look more closely, we might notice that here in the United States, the Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program of the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock, Long Island, also has a network of social justice partners that is both broader and deeper than we realize. Around the country, more and more of our congregations are participating in congregationally based community organizing, like the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, which played a key role in winning healthcare reform here in Massachusetts. More and more of our younger ministers are developing innovative ways to pursue justice-making, from engaging directly with corporations the way Nate Walker has to engaging a suburban congregation at multiple levels in social justice work the way Paige Getty has.

We Unitarian Universalists must not pretend to be who we are not. We are not, for the most part, new immigrants, or poor, or union members, or unemployed – although many of even our well-educated young adults are now having difficulty finding employment, and, if my congregation is typical, and I think it is, are often back living in the home they grew up in. Yet we are overall more numerous, prosperous, and potentially influential than we'll admit – just hard to organize. We too often use our education and intellect to be hyper-critical and impatient of one another. The late James Luther Adams advised us not to deny our own power, but rather use the power of organization and the organization of power more effectively to serve social justice. Not by placing our faith in any immaculate conception of our own virtue, but rather by practicing the social incarnation of the good we seek, and by grounding all our social justice efforts in a deeper spirituality and theology. If I have only tried to echo that timeless wisdom here today, perhaps it is enough. Thank you for your kind and patient attention.