

**Ministerial Packet:  
Rev. Joanna Fontaine Crawford**



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**Dear Live Oak Search Committee,**

**Thank you for your interest in my packet and in considering me as a potential candidate to be your minister.**

**I look forward to reading your packet, too, as we explore whether we are the right match for one another. I hope to find a church that is both rooted in their identity as a Unitarian Universalist congregation, and holding a spirit of curiosity and adventure.**

**Writing about church, the late Rev. Gordon McKeeman said:**

*Strange place, this house -- here we cry, sing, laugh, hurt, dance, touch, survive, celebrate, grow, search, doubt, hope, rejoice, pray, trust, care, learn, think, wonder, be, become!*

**This brings together much of my thinking ... yes, church is a strange place, because we need it to be so many things. At times, we need it to be a safe place, a sanctuary where we may be comforted, where we can heal. At other times, we need it to be what jolts us with adrenaline, daring us to take steps toward the bold undertakings we are called to do.**

**It is a bold undertaking you have embraced, to search for your congregation's next minister. I look forward to getting to know you.**

**Shine on,**

**Rev. Joanna**



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## About Me

I was sitting alone, at the back of the plenary hall at the 2004 General Assembly, watching the Service of the Living Tradition, arguing with the voice inside me that kept urging me toward ministry. I had strong, cogent arguments on my side. The voice said, “Yeah, yeah, I understand. But why don’t you, just once, say ‘Yes’ out loud ... just to see what it feels like?”

Feeling ridiculous, I quietly said, “Yes.” Tears began rolling down my face. I sternly explained to myself that I really *was* being ridiculous, and mopped off my face.

The Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt walked to the pulpit and began speaking: “When it happened, how did you know?... Did you pose cogent intellectual arguments against taking the path, arguments that should have convinced you, but didn’t?... How long, exactly, did it



take you to form the words that gave voice to the longing that filled you to overflowing? What did it take to hear and to finally say: Yes. This is what I want. I want to be a minister. Yes.”

One month later, I was enrolled in seminary.

I was raised Unitarian Universalist, in Houston, Texas. I received a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Texas and worked primarily in marketing/advertising in my 20’s, moving into the new field of web design in my 30’s.

Before seminary, I was an active lay leader in my home congregation and district, holding the positions of President, Worship Chair, Stewardship Chair, and others in my church, and Webmaster for the Southwestern UU District.

I’ve been blessed to work in congregations where an entrepreneurial spirit and interest in innovation have been encouraged – I’ll tell you more about that, in the “Placements” section of this packet. Those experiences have led to an appreciation for how new technologies can help us, whether it’s creating Facebook graphics that can be easily shared (a great way for even shy folks to share our faith), or using multimedia to make UU history come alive.

The greatest strength of a church, though, is never technology – it’s the people. It’s from being in relationship with each other that we are comforted, celebrate, learn, and as Unitarian minister A. Powell Davies said, “grow a soul.” This isn’t just theory with me. Being a member of a Unitarian Universalist church has brought me back from heartbreak; in a UU small group, I found answers to questions when I had lost all of my faith. To me, that’s the strength and the wonder of Unitarian Universalism. We change and grow, often in dramatic ways. And through it all, we can remain in the same church, surrounded by love.

## My Family

My husband, Tom, and I met when we were students at the University of Texas. We were both on the Fencing team and over pizza after practice, a bunch of us started talking about birthdays. I said that my birthday was June 20, and Tom said, "Mine, too!"

(I didn't believe him. I mean, really, isn't that the worst pickup line ever?)

We do, in fact, share the same birthday -- he's a year older -- as well as similar outlooks about the call to make the world better. He's very supportive of my ministry, and understands quite a bit about ministerial life, having been a "PK" (preacher's kid) himself.



We both enjoy Halloween, too.

Tom and I have been married 23 years, and have four children: Jackson, 17; Kaziah, 14; Lilyanne, 11; and Marennna, 8.



Lily, Jackson, Kaziah, Marennna, 2012

## Placements

### First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston

In 2012, I joined the team of ministers at First UU Houston in a bold, new venture – taking three existing congregations and merging them into one church in three locations. During the first year, I worked exclusively as the satellite minister for what was then called Northwest Community Unitarian Universalist Church, readying them to vote on whether they wanted to merge with First UU Houston. Part of that process was to operate as though we had already merged, so the members could fully sample this new model. It was both an exciting time, and an anxious one, for the members. In January, they voted overwhelmingly for the merger, and we began the formal transition that comes with consolidating a church, but retaining individual spaces, budget lines, and to a certain extent, character.

In my second year, my position expanded as I became a minister at the “Museum District” branch of First UU church (our largest of the three locations). I preach monthly at both locations, function as the lead minister at First Unitarian – Copperfield (formerly Northwest Community), and oversee special projects at First Unitarian – Museum District, such as their capital campaign and new website.





## Church of the Larger Fellowship

I had the benefit of two very different internships. One was with The Church of the Larger Fellowship, an online, international, Unitarian Universalist congregation. As I came on board, they were transitioning between being a mail-centered (with some email lists) church to becoming an internet-based congregation with social media presence and weekly online worship services.

I learned so much with the CLF: about ministering to a large church, how to create compelling video, how to be part of a collaborative ministry team, and how powerful and deepening online relationships can be.



Congregations and Beyond with Rev. Meg Riley



I think the most dramatic affect on my ministry was not the technical expertise I gained (as exciting as that was), it was seeing how being ready to move swiftly can be a crucial part of ministry.

In my second year with the CLF, Meg Riley called me on April 13, 2013, to tell me that there had been a bombing at the Boston Marathon. The CLF team sprang into action, creating an online prayer service that was livestreamed that night, producing Facebook graphics and announcements to publicize the time and link to the service, and spreading the word through all our networks. Hundreds showed up for that service, where they could connect via chat with others, listen to hymns, and watch a quickly filmed video done by their senior minister, where she spoke directly to them. A few days later, when the Boston area was on lockdown, we ran videos all day, the ministers taking shifts all day long to be present online for anyone who needed conversation or pastoral care.



## Northwoods Unitarian Universalist Church, The Woodlands

I wanted to get ministerial experience with a traditional “brick and mortar” UU church, so even though I was doing a two-year, part-time internship with the CLF, I added in an internship at Northwoods UU Church in The Woodlands, Texas. There, I got to be a part of the ins and outs of parish ministry, from Board meetings, to leading adult education classes, to preaching, to providing pastoral care to members, to going to the state capital as a participant in the Rally Against the War on Women.



Rally Against the War on Women with Rev. Ellen Cooper and Ryan Hoffland, DRE

## Methodist Hospital, Houston, TX

One of the requirements for UU ministry is to do a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), or chaplaincy. I did mine at Methodist Hospital in downtown Houston.



CPE is often called, “Boot Camp for Ministers,” and for good reason. It’s a combination of boots-on-the-ground work as a chaplain and classes to support that chaplaincy. It’s long hours, rigorous emotional work ... and absolutely wonderful. Unitarian Universalism sets us up for success in ministering to the diverse clientele – I was frequently called on to meet with Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Christian patients and their families.

It was in CPE that I learned about the importance of mere presence. I stood with a family at the bedside of a man being removed from life support. I was completely silent ... I didn’t talk, or lead them in prayer, or anything. I just stood there. As we turned and left his bed, his wife slipped her hand in mine and said, “You don’t know how good you are at this!”

I was awed ... because I knew that it had nothing to do with me. Sometimes, just “being there” is the most important thing any of us can do.



## Worship

I love the worship arts; I love paying attention to all the factors – music, readings, the ambiance of the space itself, the opportunities for church members to connect with each other and with what we call in our Sources, “the transcending mystery.”

Ultimately, my philosophy of worship is pretty basic and pragmatic. What defines the value of a worship service, to me, is “Does it work?” And by “work,” my goal is singular in nature, but complex in possibility: transformation. Was the congregant transformed in some way? Did he decide to make a change in his life? Did she reach a new point of understanding? Did he discover something missing in his life – peace, grace, an inexorable pull to accountability? Did they *experience* worship?



Worship literally means ‘worth-ship’: to accord worth, true value, to something, to recognize and respect it for the true worth it has.”<sup>1</sup> I believe every worship service should be experiential, inclusive, and missional.

### Experiential

Worship isn’t a performance. We’re all a part of it: the preacher, the choir, the children, the people taking notes on their order of service, or singing quietly, or holding a fidgety baby. I love this quote from one of my favorite books on worship: “...in order for worship to reach its full vitality, we need to remember that there are no observers in worship.”<sup>2</sup>

### Inclusive

Deliberate inclusivity should extend past class/cultural lines, enveloping those marginalized from our worship services through age, disability, and any other arbitrary barriers to feeling welcomed into community. Multi-generational worship should accommodate and involve all those in the church community, from small children to elderly seniors. We are the Big Tent religion, and the more inclusive our services, the more dynamic the worship experience.

### Missional

I believe strongly that the purpose of church is two-fold: we are gathered to strengthen our souls, and we are sent out to strengthen the world. Worship should empower both – strengthening, healing, and encouraging us, and then motivating us to go back to our own spheres of influence – work, school, home – to live out our deepest held values.

*To read some of my sermons, see Appendix, page 20*

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<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 7, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 91.

## Rites of Passage

One of the great privileges of ministry is being able to be there for the important moments in people's lives and assisting them in articulating and honoring the sacred in those times.

I never take this for granted. I enjoy helping couples to craft wedding ceremonies that reflect their love for each other, and that connect them not only to each other, but to the families and communities that will help support their marriage. One meaningful (and fun) thing that I do with weddings is to ask both participants to privately email me, telling me a few things that they really love about their intended. These are woven into my homily – it's always wonderful to see their faces as they hear what the other said about them.



Beach wedding for Kat and Rick

*To read Kat and Rick's wedding ceremony as an example, see Appendix page 40*



Doing a Pagan handfasting as part of a wedding ceremony



Dedication for a baby whose parents I'd married 3 years before.

As Unitarian Universalists, baby and child dedications are something we very deliberately do in community – it's our way of acknowledging the miracle who is amongst us, welcoming the child into the community, and affirming our intention to support the efforts of the parents/guardians to love and nurture a little human being.

Memorial services and funerals are also part of the work of a minister. I've officiated at many different funerals of very different circumstances, but I am always mindful of the trust that family and friends give me, and I work with them to both celebrate the life of the person they remember, and open a space for them to grieve and deal with the myriad emotions that come at such time.

*Sample Memorial Service: Appendix pg 46*



## Writing

I'm a writer and have been one ever since Ernie and Bert taught me how to put words together. Happily, writing is a part of a minister's job, whether it's writing sermons, newsletter articles, thank you notes, letters to the editor, or in this social media age, meaningful 140 character Twitter "tweets."

I was an English major in college, crafting poetry and plays, and wrote advertising copy in my first career of marketing.

As a Unitarian Universalist, I have had articles in UU World, and many of my blog pieces have been featured in UU World and UU World "Interdependent Web."

Some samples of my writing:

UU World: "Let Mission Drive Us," Summer 2011  
<http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/183382.shtml>

UU World: "Reclaiming My Space in the Sisterhood"  
<http://www.uuworld.org/spirit/articles/130168.shtml>

For CLF's Quest for Meaning: (Pastoral Care pages)  
<http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/author/10035>

"The Challenge of Being 'All of the Above':"

[http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/the-challenge-of-being-all-of-the-above\\_1](http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/the-challenge-of-being-all-of-the-above_1)

"New Baby": [http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/new-baby\\_1](http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/new-baby_1)

"Missing God": <http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/missing-god>

"The Spiritual Act of Complaining":

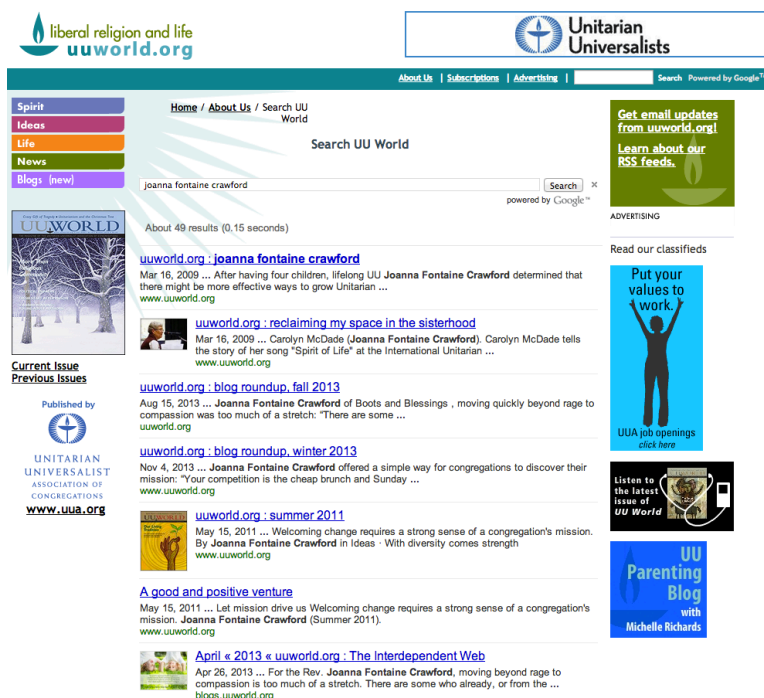
<http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/the-spiritual-act-of-complaining>

"Accepting Help": <http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/accepting-help>

"Suicide of a Loved One":

<http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/suicide-of-a-loved-one>

My blog: <http://bootsandblessings.blogspot.com/>





## Religious Education

Heather looked up at me with shining eyes, stammering, “This ... it’s ... an epiphany!” She was taking the What Moves Us class and had just read about Forrest Church’s metaphor of The Cathedral of the World. Her classmates agreed with her assessment. Heather’s classmates had an average age of 45 years old. Heather was 15.

My philosophy of religious education lies in the lifespan nature of religious education, and the power and inspiration found in Unitarian Universalism itself. “How” we do religious education is just as important as what we teach. Education is part of our very doctrine – when we say that revelation is not sealed, we are committing ourselves to a theology of continuously learning, of experimenting, assessing, changing, and modifying. Religious education is not something you outgrow, no longer need, just as Worship is not something you have to be “grown up” enough to go to and appreciate.

The content of what we teach must inspire in church members of all ages an appreciation that, in the words of Rebecca Ann Parker, “When someone enters Unitarian Universalism, they do not arrive at no place, they arrive at some place.” We are a non-creedal religion that expects its members to dive in and to struggle with the big questions, testing ideas with knowledge, reason, and their own experience. But we are not the “None of the Above” church, we are not the Tabula Rasa of religion. We have a rich heritage, a strong systematic theology, and a living tradition. I believe we should offer a nutritious meal for the journey, to all ages.

*Outline of Universalism 101 class I created while at Northwoods UU Church – Appendix, page 50*



## Beloved Community

Many Unitarian Universalist churches talk about “Beloved Community,” but not everyone knows how abundant and far-reaching it can be. As someone who has studied the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr. extensively, I sought to learn more about this concept.

MLK learned about the concept of “Beloved Community” through the writings of Josiah Royce. For Royce, Beloved Community was a goal. It was the best of everyone, working for the best of all humanity, and encompassing all of humanity. It starts with a community loyally working toward that end, ever expanding -- “the enlargement of the ideal community of the loyal in the direction of identifying that community with all mankind.”

There are things we can and should do together, as a church. But equally, we should individually be creators of Beloved Community in our own lives, in our own particular spheres of influence, whether that’s at work, on the soccer field, or even at the bar where everyone knows our name.

We have different callings. In 2010, I organized and participated in an event for St. Baldrick’s, a charity that raises money for childhood cancer research. And by “participated,” I mean ... I shaved my waist-length hair to raise money. (Promise: I will NOT ask you to shave your head.) We have different passions, or as my colleague David Owen-O’Quill says, different answers to “Who does your heart break for?”



As a church, we will also have things we can do together, that represent our religious values to the world around us. In 2011, my church was heartbroken at the suicide of a gay teenager in our area, and others who were receiving press coverage at that time. We wanted to change the accepted narrative that

religion in Houston equaled judgment and rejection. I organized an event called “Bring Your Gay Teen to Church Day” to bring attention to the fact that there were loving, accepting churches in Houston. Local print and television news featured the story, which was picked up by the Associated Press and shared around the country.

 Sunday December 15, 2013

Home Local US & World Sports Business Entertainment Lifestyle Jobs

[Lifestyle > Houston Belief](#)

### Sunday is Bring Your Gay Teen to Church Day

Open doors await them  
Homosexuality and religion have a complicated past, but some area churches hope to bridge that gap this Sunday

JEANNIE KEVER  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE | February 19, 2011



I think “Beloved Community” means experiencing a bit of ultimate hope through life in our congregations, through being a good neighbor in the world around us, and working to change the things that keep us apart from justice and wholeness.

For more information about “Beloved Community,” see my longer essay:

<http://bootsandblessings.blogspot.com/2013/05/beloved-community-now-and-not-yet.html>



After giving the benediction at Houston's Memorial Day service



At the Rally Against the War on Women

## Denominational

"You stand on the shoulders of giants," the Rev. Mark Edmiston-Lange said, extending the right hand of fellowship to me at my ordination.

It took my breath away for a moment, because I know it to be true. Unitarian Universalism has in its history powerful people who have made a difference in our religion and in the world.

I've been involved with our denomination since before seminary, working as a volunteer webmaster for the Southwestern District for two

years. I now serve as a member of the UUA's Presidential Search Committee, which is charged with nominating at least two candidates for the next UUA Presidential Election.



UUA Presidential Search Committee



I am a part of the UU Ministers Association, at the local "cluster" level, as well as regionally and nationally. I am a founding member of "The Red Pill Brethren," a group of missionally-minded UU ministers, religious educators, and lay leaders. And – just for fun – I'm one of the hosts of the weekly Unitarian Universalist webcast "The VUU."



"The VUU" live at General Assembly 2013

## What Others Say ...



"She has, repeatedly, awed me with her boldness of vision and her ability to turn vision into reality. I feel incredibly fortunate to have been able to work with her at the CLF in our formative stages of developing online ministry and am incredibly excited to watch where her ministerial journey will take her in the next 25 years or more!" – Rev. Meg Riley, Senior Minister, Church of the Larger Fellowship

"... she is only the second person in the past ten years to graduate from the MDiv program with a perfect 4.0 gpa. Obviously, her academic and intellectual abilities are beyond question. These abilities include much more than the ability to learn facts and score well on exams. Joanna is a thinking person. She analyzes, critiques, evaluates, and draws conclusions." – Dr. Chuck Pitts, Acting Dean, Houston Graduate School of Theology



"Her extroverted enthusiasm for life, while never overwhelming, allows her to engage others with warmth and grace, even in the most difficult of circumstances...I see aspects of her ministry resonating with her Universalist theological commitment to that Love that can embrace every person, through any struggle they may face." – Rev. Eric Posa, friend and colleague



"The congregation has felt well-served by Joanna's presence and skills during her time here. In particular, those she has counseled have felt she is a keen, compassionate listener and her worship services have been energetic, well-crafted and moving expressions of our faith. Joanna is a capable leader, communicating directly and pleasantly, but also clear on what she needs which will make her a great staff leader. She has the vision and organization necessary for good program development, and doesn't hesitate to consult others, or outside resources, for help in the planning. In a group, she's a natural leader without stepping on others' toes, and an instinct for helping all participate in the group process. She's an excellent

public speaker, a skilled writer, and her outgoing nature helps her relate easily to volunteers."

– Rev. Ellen Cooper, Minister, Northwoods Unitarian Universalist Church



“My only hesitation in providing a reference for Joanna is that my evaluation of her is likely to be so over-the-top enthusiastic as to be unbelievable. I have had the pleasure of working with Joanna while she has served her internship with the Church of the Larger Fellowship, which I serve as minister for lifespan learning...Joanna is a gifted preacher who is grounded in theology that she has carved out through painful experience. She offers a warm pastoral presence, and genuine care for those she is in contact with. She’s hard-working and reliable: when she says she’s going to do something, it gets done, and done well...She is an evangelical UU with a vision for who we can be and how we can share our good news in a world which sorely needs us.” – Rev. Dr. Lynn Ungar, Minister of Lifespan Learning, Church of the Larger Fellowship



“Joanna seems to have been preparing for this journey her whole life, with her long commitment to studying and learning from spiritual truths and faith traditions. She lives



the truth that being a minister is more than a job, but a calling that is within her spirit. She gives testament to the many ways that she has inspired her religious communities to grow and seek spiritual truth and meaning, and application to daily life. She takes seriously her study and developing knowledge and skills. She represents a fine character with a great personality mix of intelligence, charm, wit, intuition, maturity, and empathy. Her ministerial

presence offers us inspiration and a call to be our best possible spiritual selves, amidst the delight of being human.” – Northwoods UU Church Internship Committee

## **Videos**

### **First UU Church of Houston**

Give Me Those Good Old-Fashioned UU Family Values

<http://youtu.be/5E1Sqodk20I>

What Will You Give Up?

<https://vimeo.com/79456551>

Live As If ...

<http://vimeo.com/76434324>

### **Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Galveston**

What Shall We Say About 9/11?

<http://vimeo.com/28909229>

### **Church of the Larger Fellowship**

Golden Mortar of Faith

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqU6DI9FHyw>

Reverend MLK: Ministry, Discipline, Salvation

<http://youtu.be/CQqshlFsinc>

Joy on a Rainy Day

<http://youtu.be/CteE7Fx7xL8>

Hospitality, Congregations and Beyond

[http://youtu.be/WcZhe6J2N\\_E](http://youtu.be/WcZhe6J2N_E)

Bald Transformation

<http://youtu.be/BCdaY7RzTyk>

Gratitude and Other Curses

<http://youtu.be/rzxm-gBsmm4>

### **Video for online magazine “The Radical Spirit”:**

<http://www.theradicalspirit.org/post/18517723170/becoming-missional-joanna-fontaine-crawford>

## **Appendix**

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**TESTIFY!**  
**Joanna Fontaine Crawford**  
**Bay Area UU Church, 2009**

Today, as you might have picked up on ... I want to talk to you about evangelism.

Evangelism? No, I don't mean converting others. I mean evangelizing, which means sharing the good news. Because as I'm here to remind you that we have some very good news.

There's a joke about a high spirited visitor coming in to a Unitarian Universalist service and as the sermon progresses, he begins calling back, "Amen!" and "Speak it!" and "Hallelujah!" An usher comes over and tries to shush him. "We don't do that here." The man says, "I can't help it, I've got religion!" The usher says, "Well, you certainly didn't get it here!"

Well, you just might get some religion here this morning and I wanted to start out by confirming that yes, you are in a Unitarian Universalist church. Hallelujah, can I get an amen?

We have good news, we need to share our good news, and we need to testify to how this religion and church have made our lives better.

I love this religion. Unitarian Universalism. This is a religion that says that all people are born with the capacity for greatness. Unlike other religions that say we are born bad and any goodness in us comes from the outside, from a supernatural being who strikes fear in our hearts making us go against our human nature, which is inherently sinful ... our religion says No ... that our innate instinct is not to hurl rocks, but to extend a hand of love. Ours is a religion that believes in a holy spirit that operates through our nature and because of our nature ... not in spite of it. Whether we call this holy spirit "God" or "inspiration," it propels us to do great things ... to create art, to feed the hungry, to march for justice, to sing songs, to clean the wounds of a world battered by damaged hearts, misunderstood values, and random circumstances that can sweep a whole village away.

Our religion celebrates the wisdom that can be found in ancient books, modern science and the natural world. Wisdom found in the analysis of a lauded Ph.D. and in the bedtime story told by a pipeliner tucking his little daughter in at night.

Ours is a religion that does NOT require faith ... there is no requirement for faith in God, faith in your fellow humans, not even faith in Unitarian Universalism itself. And I say, with all the sincerity in my heart, Thank God for that. Because we all lose faith. We all lose our way. Ours is a religion that you can stay in when you have lost faith in everything, up to and including yourself.

One of our readings, that we often use for a chalice lighting, was written by Albert Schweitzer. He wrote, "At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from

another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

This is a religion of candles, some burning steadily, some flickering constantly as if being buffeted by winds. I know that if my candle goes out, if my faith and hope in a world that can be made better is extinguished, someone will come along to share their flame. They won’t always know it, and so it is like a spark, errant on a breeze, lighting my flame again. Sometimes, it is something said in passing, or from the pulpit, that catches hold, bringing me roaring back to life. Sometimes it is something said in anger, or frustration, something I don’t agree with ... it pours oxygen on the fading light, making it full again.

Yes, this is a religion that believes in a Holy Spirit.

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Just about anytime you go to a larger UU event – like General Assembly, or SWUUSI – our family version of summer camp – you’ll hear the song, “Spirit of Life.” I went to the UU Women’s Convocation several months ago and heard it’s composer, Carolyn McDade, tell the story of when she wrote it.

It’s often sung as if its an anthem, but it’s not. It’s a prayer, a plea. Carolyn was an activist for many causes and just feeling without hope, she returned home from a meeting. She told her friend, ‘I feel like a piece of dried cardboard that has lain in the attic for years. Just open wide the door, and I’ll be dust.’ She said she was “tired ... with the world.”

At home, she sat down at her piano and poured out her plea, her prayer:

Spirit of Life, come unto me.  
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.  
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;  
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.  
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;  
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me

The world falls short, and perhaps even more painful, we fall short. That’s what sin means – missing the mark. We seek redemption. We seek a spirit inside or outside that will raise us back up, help us find our path, set our feet walking again. Spirit of Life ... come to me. Come to me.

And at the same time, we have this community, this church, that calls back to us ... offering hope. Come, come, whoever you are ... ours is no caravan of despair. Come, yet again, come.

Come yet again and have your candle relit, your spirit replenished.

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We are a religion that believes that revelation is not sealed. I kind of took this for granted until I began seminary ... a non-Unitarian Universalist seminary ... and as part of my systematic theology class, the professor announced, unambiguously and with great certainty, "Revelation is sealed."

The canon is complete, the Bible is closed.

Well, I say with just as great a certainty that my religion informs me that revelation is *not* sealed. We continue to learn and discover every day. Medicine, archeology, physics, spirituality ... hopefully economics ... Revelation is NOT sealed, and there will always be more knowledge, more "good stuff" revealed. Long after we are dead and gone, there will be further discoveries, human potential can and will progress.

We are blessed because we have found a religion that puts no limits on human ingenuity, puts no boundaries around what is religious truth. In the words of Unitarian minister and prophet A. Powell Davies:

"Why should any of us be confined within a single area of religious culture? When I read Amos and Jeremiah, I say 'Would to God I were a Jew.' When I read the Parable of the Good Samaritan, I say 'Would I were a Galilean.' When I read the 13th of 1st Corinthians, I wish with all my heart that I might be a Christian after the manner of the Apostle Paul. When I think of Buddha and his Eightfold Path, I say, 'I, too, would be a Buddhist.' And when I remember the trial of Socrates, I say in awe but with exalted spirit, 'Oh that I might be so brave a humanist.' And thus at the end, there is nothing I can say but that, like Emerson and Channing, I want to live with the privilege of the illimitable mind."

We have a treasure in this religion, we have a theological base and a spiritual home. And we are part of the treasure, as our experiences and our beliefs serve to strengthen and enrich this religion. And so this is a treasure that we should ... we must ... give away. Giving others some of this good news and it is good news. Back in 2001, at SWUUSI, Rev. Bob Hill spoke about the people out there who are faced with fundamentalist dogma on one side and empty rampant materialism on the other. They're searching for something ... redemption, purpose ... and buying a new car doesn't make it better. And they may be reading books, great books, but the greatest book in the world won't take the place of a community that will both challenge and nurture them. This community. This beloved community right here. They don't know that their tribe is here, waiting for them. We have to share who we are with others.

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So, how do you share the good news of Unitarian Universalism?

First and foremost, by living your life, and incorporating Unitarian Universalism in it. Living in integrity, living your values. In a year, you should be a better person. In a year, the world should be a better place because of something you did. This is our religion.

There is a saying that you may be the only gospel some people read and I think that goes double for Unitarians. There are people who will never read the works of our theologians like Rebecca Parker or Thandeka, or A. Powell Davies or Theodore Parker, who in 1850 wrote these words that a century later would inspire Martin Luther King, Jr, "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one... And from what I see I am sure it bends toward justice." No, many people will not read their words, but they will see their values in action as you live your life with dignity and purpose.

And, as you're living your life ... don't be shy. Let people know that you are called to live your life in that way. You're a Unitarian Universalist.

Do we have any facebook addicts here? (Count me in the club.)

Facebook is a great way to do passive evangelism. Whenever you find a great article about Unitarian Universalism, or a blog post, or a video, or a sermon – just post it on Facebook. Pow, all of your friends can see it now. But it's not like you're emailing them. It's just there, for them to peruse, if they're interested. But you're taking it to them. They don't have to search for it.

Along with all the high tech ways, there is what is probably the most successful way.

Your voice. Tell people.

We talk about crafting an elevator speech. Have most of you heard about this? It means to have a succinct way of explaining Unitarian Universalism, so simple and short, that you could explain our religion on an elevator ride.

You know what I say? Throw it away! Throw it away! There's no heart or soul in an elevator speech, throw it away!

Okay, don't really. It has its place. I certainly use mine in certain situations.

But I'll tell you when I don't use it. I don't use it when I want to evangelize.

When I talked to this friend of mine when we were in a playgroup together that met at McDonalds, I didn't use an elevator speech. I told her about my church. And the things we did. And the kinds of programs you might hear. I told her about the lady who's now taken care of all my kids in the nursery. I told her about my friends, and the stuff we did, and the love we had. I told her about the religion and what I loved about it.

I gave her my testimony. AND, most importantly, I invited her to come.

She's now a professional Director of Religious Education at the Houston UU Fellowship.

I testified.

Whew – I’ve already used the words evangelism and “Holy Spirit”, now I’m even throwing testimony at you.

But you know what, I bet just about everyone here has a testimony. It may not involve a burning bush, but it’s no less meaningful. A story about finding this place. A story about the community you became part of. A story about people caring about you, a place where you can be yourself, a religion where your doubts are also something to be treated with reverence.

Maybe yours is a testimony about the power of acceptance. Of spiritual growth. A haven. A place to breathe. A place to argue. A place to truly listen, knowing that others will truly listen to you.

Everyone here has a story of a philosophical, spiritual journey. We are a priesthood of all believers and every person in here has a prophetic voice. You should share your story. It is unique and there is wisdom within it.

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I don’t know about you, but when asked about my religion, I have been caught off-guard and, deer in the headlights, I have said some things that as they were coming out of my mouth, I couldn’t believe. Sometimes the answers were incomplete, at other times, they were just ... stupid.

Part of that was rooted in this assumption that our religion is so unique, so different from anything anyone else knows, that there has to be an early warning. Kind of the equivalent of telling someone about Thai Tom Yum soup – “It’s really delicious, but there’s squid inside.”

So I have something a little different to propose.

Anyone here who has worked in sales is probably familiar with the term, “Assume the sale.” That’s why, after listening to the salesperson’s spiel, they say to you, “And how many subscriptions can I put you down for?” They *assume the sale*.

What if we did that ... in a matter of speaking.

What if, rather than make the assumption that everyone who is not us would find us strange, unusual, unique, full of squid, we assumed the opposite? What if we operated from the assumption that ours was the most mainstream, the most normal, the most instinctive religion? Because I think it is. How many people have you met – or maybe you were one – who said, “I was a Unitarian Universalist, I just didn’t know it!” We’re a very intuitive religion.

So what if, when someone asks, “So what is Unitarian Universalism?” we casually say, “Oh, great church. We’re a very open religion, most anyone would feel comfortable there. We

believe in personal responsibility, democracy, kindness. Thinking for yourself, learning, what we do affects others ... you know, traditional American values.”

“But do you believe in Jesus?”

We seek to find wisdom through all the great teachers – Jesus, Buddha, Yoga, philosophy – and YOU.

“Me?”

Oh, yeah. You know, sometimes, a church member can say something from their experience, and it just really resonates. At our church, people will really want to hear your thoughts.

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And then ... invite them to come. With you. Set a date.

We are blessed. Because we read the right book or talked to the right person, or were born into the right family, we learned about Unitarian Universalism and found our way here. And here, we have something wonderful. We have a religion that fills our hearts and minds, that calls us to live lives of the highest integrity and the fullest compassion. We have wonderful people here.

And we need to be not a bunker but a beacon!



**A Kingly Patriotism**  
**Joanna Fontaine Crawford**  
**Northwoods UU Church, July 1, 2012**

So, we're getting ready for the 4th of July, buying suntan lotion, bringing out the flags, washing the yellow Standing on the Side of Love tshirt ... well maybe that's just us. Getting ready for Independence Day.

Funny thing about history. As Tim Wise points out, when marginalized people talk about slavery, segregation, reparations for indigenous people, you'll often hear, "Come on, that was so long ago, why don't you get over it already?" But you know, on Wednesday, if you go up to the guy at the parade with the flag on his cap and the big "God Bless the USA" button, and ask: "Why can't you just get over it? I mean, why do you insist on living in the past? That whole 'breaking away from the British' thing was like more than 200 years ago. Isn't it time to move on?" ... you might get punched in the face. As one of your minsters, I cannot recommend that course of action.

We draw a picture of patriotism and it includes people waving flags, proud of our country. But for too long, those of us with a more nuanced view of patriotism, those who do not subscribe to a "love it or leave it" mentality have allowed jingoism, ultra-nationalism, militarism, and social conservatism to become the definition of the term.

We're taking Patriotism back and we're rooting it in a patriotism based on liberation and transformation. This, too, is our history, because our history, as a country, is made up of all colors, and many different, often heartbreaking stories. The stories based upon white people of privilege are not the only history of the United States. There are whole other stories that make up who we are as a country.

When I was in college, a friend of mine was in the Miss Black UT pageant. Now, in Austin, this was a big deal. You had parents, grandparents, little kids, all in the audience. At the beginning of the program, they said, "Please rise now for the Negro National Anthem." Everyone rose and everyone, 4 generations at least, knew this song, which was the first hymn we sang this morning, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." I'd grown up in Oak Ridge North which back then was about 100 miles from Tamina (local reference: Oak Ridge North was predominantly middle class white, Tamina was poor and African-American), I'd never heard of this. It was probably the first time my eyes were opened to the idea that my view of the USA was limited, was in a box. There were others with different views, different stories, even a different national anthem. And whereas my national anthem spoke of a military victory that had happened, theirs' spoke of yearning for a better future ... "Lift every voice and sing til earth and heaven ring, ring with the harmonies of liberty." It was written in 1900 for a celebration of Lincoln's birthday at a segregated school, written to honor the guest speaker, Booker T. Washington, and since then has been a significant part of our American story, sung at graduations, in black churches, at celebrations ... and yet, completely unknown by so many of us. When the Rev. Joseph Lowery gave the benediction at President Barack Obama's inauguration, he quoted the third stanza of the song nearly

verbatim. Just because we don't know it's there, doesn't mean there's not another story going on underneath the story we do see.

One person who did know this story, it shaped him, was Martin Luther King, Jr. and it is upon his model of patriotism that I model my own. A Kingly Patriotism, is one in which you love your country so much, you work for its transformation.

King loved the USA. He loved it. He loved it for what it could be. He certainly loved those fighting injustice alongside him. It was he who delivered the eulogy for Unitarian Universalist minister the Rev. James Reeb who was murdered in Selma. One way that he loved his supporters was also to push them to do more and to be better. In 1966, he delivered the Ware Lecture at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly. His title was "Don't Sleep Through the Revolution" and he urged the UUs there to deal with the myth of exaggerated progress. He said, "Certainly we have made progress in race relations. And I think we can all glory that things are better today than they were ten years ago or even three years ago...On the other hand, we must realize the plant of freedom is only a bud and not yet a flower." He told them, "I've heard it said that the day of demonstrations is over; this is something that we hear a great deal. Well, I'm sorry that I can't agree with that. I wish that I could say the day of demonstrations is over, but as long as these problems are with us, it will be necessary to demonstrate in order to call attention to them. I'm not saying that a demonstration is going to solve the problem of poverty, the problem of housing, the problems that we face in the schools. It's going to take something much more than a demonstration, but at least the demonstration calls attention to it; at least the demonstration creates a kind of constructive crisis that causes a community to see the problem and causes a community to begin moving toward the point of acting on it."

And he didn't just love his supporters. He loved – he made it a spiritual discipline to love – his opponents. He felt that love was the root of non-violence, saying, "we have been able to stand up in the face of our most violent opponents and say, in substance, we will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with our soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you...Throw us in jail and we will still love you. Threaten our children, bomb our homes, send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hours and drag us out on some wayside road and beat us and leave us half dead; and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you...But be assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves, we will so appeal to your heart and your conscience that we will win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory."

Transformation of country, transformation of fellow citizens. That is King's view of patriotism.

TENT CITY

I got to take part in this kind of patriotism a week ago Saturday.

I went down to Sheriff Joe Arpaio's Tent City with 2500 of my closest friends for a vigil, in order to bring attention to a problem there.

Earlier in the day, they had announced that there was going to be a counterprotest, with armed counter protestors. This bothered some of the folks from Boston and Maine. We Texans felt relieved. Most of us assume unless proven otherwise that anyone around us, including the little old lady at HEB, has a concealed weapon – to be able to actually see the guns, we felt, was an advantage.

By the time the second bus full of yellow-shirted, peace-loving, reusable bottle-toting, hippie-song-singing Unitarian Universalists arrived, the Tea Party militia folks decided they had other things to do.

Before the vigil, a small group of UU ministers were allowed to tour Tent City.

I had kind of heard ... Tent City is out in the desert by the city dump. It is a jail, not a prison, so most of those who there are awaiting sentencing for minor crimes or – the majority – are undocumented aliens facing deportation. Sheriff Joe Arpaio brags that inside the tents it can reach 145 degrees in the summer. Inmates receive 2 meals a day, there are often maggots in the food. Arpaio brags, "It costs more to feed our police dogs than our inmates. The dogs never committed a crime, and they're working for a living." There is no salt or seasoning used in the food. Arpaio's own words are, "I already have a concentration camp. It's called Tent City." Just to add to the humiliation, all inmates, male or female, must wear pink underwear and socks.

Just down the road is the Maricopa County climate controlled animal shelter. The animals are not allowed be outside all day in Phoenix's extreme heat because that is considered cruelty to animals.

I was tweeting from the vigil. About 10:15 PM, someone tweeted back, asking me what the temperature was. I pulled it up – 100 degrees.

Look, I'm from Texas. I know that illegal immigration is a complicated issue. There is no simple solution. It's a mess, a lot of people benefit from it, our agricultural and construction industries rely on it. It's a mess and we don't know whether to scratch our watch or wind our elbow.

But hearing this ... seeing this ... being there – this is inhumane. We literally don't treat dogs this bad.

Amnesty International has condemned Tent City as not being an "adequate or humane alternative to housing inmates in suitable ... jail facilities."

This is not, of course, only happening in Arizona. The Ware lecturer this year was PBS Journalist Maria Hinojosa. For many years, she has investigated the state of immigration in this country and she was unflinching in what she told us. She explained that there are two

legal systems in our country, one for citizens and one for the undocumented. There is no due process, there are very few rights in the latter.

One of the really complicating issues in this is that we now have privately run detention centers and prisons. She described one right here in Texas, where “Because it is privately run they have more lax requirements for guards who work there...because it is privately run and they do not have any federally mandated standards they can skimp on food. They can skimp on health care...” She described a world where an undocumented workers can be arrested, put in an ICE detention center, raped by a guard ... and if they complain, they’re deported the next day. Right here in my country. My state.

When we did the vigil at Tent City, we were joining with the local activist groups already in place. It was a humbling experience. Because at the end of the night, we boarded air-conditioned buses to take us back to our clean, mostly luxurious hotels. The local activists, most of them Latino, waved, and thanked us for what we had done. It was humbling and yet I feel we did what is right. You can’t always remove your privilege, but you can use it to bring light and press where there is none.

We got quite a bit of press. The AP picked it up and it got carried worldwide, in London, in New York and even here in the Houston Chronicle. I’ve read many of the articles about it ... and I’ve read the comments left behind. They are disturbing. That “inherent worth and dignity” thing we have in our first principle ... well, to some, that really is a radical idea. And they do not subscribe to it. They genuinely see others as subhuman and not worthy of any humane treatment.

They had some words for we UUs, too. On that, I can take comfort. He who defines patriotism for me, Martin Luther King, Jr. was branded a traitor for daring to say that the Vietnam war was wrong.

I went to the vigil at Tent City because I am a patriot and because I am religious. MLK said, “The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church will free itself from the shackles of a deadening status quo, and, recovering its great historic mission, will speak and act fearlessly and insistently in terms of justice and peace, it will enkindle the imagination of mankind and fire the souls of men, imbuing them with a glowing and ardent love for truth, justice, and peace. Men far and near will know the church as a great fellowship of love that provides light and bread for lonely travellers at midnight.”

Those who had been inside Tent City told us that yes, the prisoners inside could hear us. They knew they weren’t alone. And so we sang, we chanted.

Shut down Tent City  
Goodbye Sheriff Joe  
People are saying, No more deportation,

Let my people go!

Let my people go. I am a patriot. My people do not just come from within US borders, they also come from other lands because they want what so many of us have – a better life for their children, little pink houses for you and me.

I am a patriot and so I feel it is my duty to learn more, speak up more, and work for the transformation of this country and my people.

Deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day.

**“What Shall We Say About 9/11?”**  
**Joanna Fontaine Crawford**  
**Galveston UU Fellowship, September 11, 2011**

What shall we say about September 11, 2001?

Shall we speak about our experience that day? Where we were, who we were with? Watching the morning show, or hearing from a co-worker or friend that they heard a commuter plane had hit a building in New York?

Watching the video then, and saying, that’s not a commuter plane.

The incomprehension, not even fear yet. And then watching the second plane hit and suddenly, any futile hope we had that this was an accident was eradicated. Then, the fear.

We were not listening to a radio, hearing a news report hours later. We were there. When the second plane hit, we saw it happen. We – across the country, and across the world – were witnesses. We were there. And it happened to us.

We stood by, helplessly, witnesses to the growing horror. We watched the flames. We saw falling bodies. The news switched then to live video from the Pentagon. We heard about a crash in a field in Pennsylvania. And then, like something from a movie, we saw buildings melt and crumple in on themselves.

We were there.

We saw people begin rushing down to the World Trade Center area, holding up pictures of loved ones. They crowded the television cameras to ask, “Have you seen this person? This is my husband ... my wife ... my child ... my parent.” Panicky voices made us tremble, we longed for moments of reunion, we prayed for miracles. They were very few. At last, we could take no more. We couldn’t take being there anymore. We turned off the television.

Shall we speak of the immediate response? Of firefighters and police rushing into burning buildings, emt’s and chaplains ready to give aid and comfort. Co-workers helping each other down stairs and out the doors. The total death toll of the Sept. 11 attacks was 2,977. Bu there were more than 17,000 World Trade Center workers there when the planes hit. This is significant, too.

Shall we speak of the reaction around the world? Of the people in some parts of the world dancing, but so many more, grieving with us, leaving flowers at US embassies, having candlelight vigils and holding up signs that said, “Today, we are all Americans.” Many of those who died that day, were not Americans. All told, 115 nations lost citizens that day.

We responded. Donating money, pizzas to those digging through the rubble, blood from our own veins. “Let us help,” we pleaded.

Politicians responded. With prayer on the capitol steps, with patriotism, with calls for us to go to the mall. Politicians responded, and some said, "This means war."

What shall we say about September 11?

Shall we talk about fear? We were terrorized. We were. We didn't know what was coming next. We didn't fly for a while. Hardware stores ran out of plastic sheeting and duct tape as we tried to protect ourselves from airborne anthrax. We removed portions of our constitution and sliced away sections of our national soul as we decided that torture, spying on our own citizens, imprisonment without trial and throwing away habeas corpus were all acceptable ways to deal with this consuming fear.

But just as there were fearmongers, there were heroes. Librarians, stood up to the FBI and the so-called "Patriot Act," which said that not only could the government go in and see everything you had read, but that library staff were forbidden from telling you they'd done so. Librarians fought the gags being placed on them – and won.

The fear changed how some Americans looked at others. Dark skin, a beard, a scarf, a turban ... suddenly, they took on ominous meaning. Stomachs clenched. Neighbors called Homeland Security to talk about the family next door.

And yet ... many responded to this fear by extending a welcome to the Muslim community, hosting interfaith events, and learning more about the religion of Islam.

Shall we speak about war? Under the previous administration, it was a "Global War on Terror," under the present one, it is the "Overseas Contingency Operation." Utilizing the fear of a terrorized nation, it has justified unilateral "preventive" war as well as violations of international law. The battlefields are many, including the Philippines, the Horn of Africa, the Sahara, Afghanistan and Iraq. It has cost \$2.6 trillion dollars. In Afghanistan and Iraq, there have been 6,226 US military deaths. In Iraq alone, there have been an estimated 1,455,590 Iraqi deaths.

We are a community of faith, a religious organization. What, then, does religion say about 9/11?

The religion of the terrorists said that this was a holy act that they did, for which they would get a heavenly reward. But their dominant religion was not Islam, it was hate and politics. The same can be said of the televangelists who said that 9/11 was a just punishment by God for the pagans, feminists, gays, lesbians, and ACLU members in our midst. Their religion, too, is hate and politics.

A criticism, a valid one in my opinion, is that a weakness of liberal religion is our hesitancy to address the issue of evil. Perhaps that is because we know that evil is not something external to us, we are woven into its very fabric. Evil is not a source, it is a result. We have

to address that and not only condemn the evil of individuals who would fly planes into buildings but also question how our country and its choices are woven into that evil.

Of all the religious commentaries written about September 11, perhaps the best came from the satirical newspaper, "The Onion," which ran the headline, God Angrily Clarifies 'Don't Kill' Rule. In the article, they report from God's press conference:

"Look, I don't know, maybe I haven't made myself completely clear, so for the record, here it is again," said the Lord, His divine face betraying visible emotion during a press conference near the site of the fallen Twin Towers. "Somehow, people keep coming up with the idea that I want them to kill their neighbor. Well, I don't. And to be honest, I'm really getting sick and tired of it. Get it straight. Not only do I not want anybody to kill anyone, but I specifically commanded you not to, in really simple terms that anybody ought to be able to understand."

Growing increasingly wrathful, God continued: "Can't you people see? What are you, morons? There are a ton of different religious traditions out there, and different cultures worship Me in different ways. But the basic message is always the same: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Shintoism... every religious belief system under the sun, they all say you're supposed to love your neighbors, folks! It's not that hard a concept to grasp."

What shall we say about 9/11?

Shall we talk about going forth?

Revolution has come to the middle East. It has come to Egypt, to Libya, to Tunisia, and more. The United States played a pivotal role in this ... but not in the way we might have imagined. No, our role was not military nor is it anything our government can take credit for. Instead, there were American architects ... software architects, who created Twitter and Facebook. These tools enabled the people of these countries to communicate far beyond those they personally knew, to create networks of action.

Innovation and creativity have helped launch revolutions. Relationships based on religious tolerance are flourishing, such as those between young Coptic Christians and Muslims in Egypt. Our way forward is by nurturing these relationships, fostering creativity, having more light shined on what our government is doing and finding our own ways to be not just American citizens, but global citizens. Figuring out our mission in our neighborhoods and the world. Fighting oppression everywhere through the choices we make – economic, political, and personal.

As we decide, individually, what the meaning of 9/11 will be to us, we have to look at it from all perspectives, from the personal to the political, from the historical to its sense of still being part of our present.

As we consider what we shall say about 9/11, I think it only fitting that we allow those died that day to have their say. These are some of their last words, compiled by UU Sylvia Stocker.



Joanna: On September 11, 2001, people in the towers and people in the planes telephoned their loved ones to impart one final message. Today we remember their last words...

The last words of an unnamed 24-year-old son to his mother, and his mother's response...

Mike: Mom, the ceiling's falling down. I'm going to die. I love you.

Bets: Go and hold someone's hand. Be with someone. I don't want you to die alone.

Joanna: The last words of Lauren Grandcolas, aboard Flight 93, to her husband...

Bets: We have been hijacked. They are being kind. I love you.

Joanna: The last words of Melissa Hughes, trapped in the World Trade Center, to her husband...

Bets: Sean, it's me. I just wanted you to know I love you and I'm stuck in this building in New York. A plane hit the building, or a bomb went off. We don't know, but there's a lot of smoke and I just wanted you to know that I love you always.

Narrator: The last words of Mark Bingham, hero aboard Flight 93 to his mother...

Mike: I want you to know I love you very much and am calling from the plane. We've been taken over. There are three men and they say they have a bomb. I don't know who they are. I love you, I love you, I love you.

Joanna: The last words of countless men and women facing terrifying and violent death . . .

Bets: I love you.

Mike: I love you.

Joanna: And in the towers and on the Manhattan streets below, hundreds rushed into peril to save lives and put out the flames.

Crushed in a mountain of debris, their last words remain mute. Tonight we remember them with these words of Walt Whitman.

I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,

Tumbling walls buried me in their debris,

Heat and smoke I inspired, I heard the yelling shouts of my comrades,

I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels,

They have clear'd the beams away, they tenderly lift me forth.

Today, we speak their last words for them . . . I love you.

Mike: I love you.

Bets: I love you.

Narrator: And let the people say:

Congregation: I love you.

Please stand, either in body or in spirit, for hymn #123, Spirit of Life.

**Baby, You're a Firework**  
**Joanna Fontaine Crawford**  
**Northwest Community Unitarian Universalist Church, February 20, 2011**

Good morning. And Happy Sabbath. The holiday that comes once a week where we get to celebrate what we value. And hopefully for the first time of many, I wish you a Happy "Bring Your Gay Teen to Church" Day.

In case you haven't heard, or read yesterday's Houston Chronicle, or any of my 785 Facebook status updates, today, across the Houston area, 22 Churches representing 9 denominations, are standing on the side of love and loudly welcoming gay and transgender teens to our churches.

Now of course, to all of these churches, every Sunday is Bring Your Gay Teen to Church ... bring your gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning and straight teen or toddler or grandma to church day. Because they are welcoming and affirming churches.

But for a lot of people here in Houston, this is a radical notion. They have only been exposed to the concept ... to the lie ... that religion equals judgment and condemnation. At best, they have heard "Love the sinner, hate the sin," or to paraphrase Pastor Joel Osteen, "We love gay people ... We just think they are sinners and need to change."

We have a different definition of love.

And so 22 churches this morning are saying to our GLBTQ – gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning teens ... we think you're awesome just the way you are. And you are welcome here.

This message is going out at big, beautiful churches ... it's also going out at small, beautiful churches, who might temporarily be meeting at a day care. And in fact, it started at a just such a church. We were talking about what we could do to publicly stand on the side of love. And for all of us, these suicides of teens because they were gay and being bullied ... it broke our hearts. It ripped our hearts out. And we said What If ... What if some of those teens were going to churches where they were loved and accepted not in spite of who they are, but because of who they are. Genuinely loved for all the things that made them, them. And what if their parents were told "That is a fine kid you got there," rather than being questioned about what they did to "make" their child gay.

Maybe we could make a difference. There are wonderful videos out there of adults letting gay teens know that "It Gets Better." Videos where they talk about how high school is not the world. And once you get out of there, it gets better. The videos and the project are great.

But what if we could help it get better ... right now.

And then other churches and other ministers got involved. And yeah, we knew it was a little cheesy sounding – Bring Your Gay Teen to Church. I don't believe anyone thought that we'd

get to our churches today to find them suddenly bursting with gay and transgender teens. (Though we might privately hope so.) For a lot of teens, it's a little pointed. And that's okay. Maybe over the next month or so, we will see some new families.

But the big thing was, we wanted to send a clear and unambiguous message that there are churches in Houston that stand on the side of love, that are welcoming and affirming to all. Where gay and transgender teens can feel safe and valued for who they are. And make no mistake, we wanted to stake our claim. We want to put a flag in the ground – maybe a rainbow flag – and say, Houston is our city, too.

Now I don't know if you know this, but there are people outside of Texas who think that Houston is a city of nothing but fundamentalists and religious conservatives. (On some days, we might feel the same way.)

But it's not. This is Houston, where we have an out lesbian mayor, we have a transgender federal judge. This is a city full of progressive businessfolk and doctors and artists and musicians and religious people. 22 churches, all standing together in support of GLBTQ teens. This is our town. And I don't know about you, but I lovvvvve telling my Northeast or California friends, "You know, if you want to visit a progressive, accepting town, you should come down and visit Houston." I'll be your tour guide.

This is our town. And we are making a public stand and will continue to do so. Because see, it's not enough to have churches where our gay teens feel safe. Is that enough for you? (Congregation: "No!")

We are building the beloved community and we're not stopping at our doors. We owe it to those teens like Brad, and like Jaxn Hussey, who was willing to put both his name and his face out there in yesterday's Chronicle story. And their straight teen allies, who wear "boycott homophobia" tshirts and say, "Man, that ain't cool," when someone says, "That's SOOOO gay." We want a community, a city, where gay and transgender teens are safe to be who they are, whether they are in church, or at the mall, or in their high school. This is our town.

Don't tell us we live on the buckle of the Bible Belt, because we've read that Bible. We know what Jesus said about homosexuality. (Nothing.) But he said a lot of stuff about loving each other. We are Christians and we are Buddhists, and Jews, and Hindus, and Muslims and Atheists and Pagans and we are Houstonians. Standing on the Side of Love. And it's not enough for us that it gets better ... later. We are working to make it better now.

And we, right here, are Unitarian Universalists. We support and promote the sacred principle that all people possess inherent worth and dignity. That you celebrate the love between two people, not condemn it.

And people are listening.

Reading the Chronicle article about Bring Your Gay Teen to Church Day, Jim Swimm of New York wrote, "Sunday is 'Bring Your #Gay Teen to Church' Day my hometown - Houston, TX! #TexanShame lessens slightly." Tiffany Gonzalez tweeted a link, writing "Love casts out fear." Brenda Allen facebooked, "That brought tears to my eyes. Houston is a major American city, but it's still in Southeast Texas, where I grew up. God bless those churches!!"

Dr. Stephen Sprinkle, Professor at Brite Divinity School, wrote, "Thousands of congregations in the Houston metro area deny the acceptability of homosexuality and gender non-conformity, declaring queer youth sinful or worse. But a cadre of deeply committed faith leaders and their communities are determined to get out the word in America's fourth largest city that sexual minority youth are acceptable to God, and most certainly to them."

There were a few negative comments. One said "...almost two dozen Houston-area churches have designated Sunday as Bring Your Gay Teen to Church Day.' Unbelievable. Surely this is the end times."

You bet, honey! It's the end of the world as you knew it. And I feel fine!

As Katy Perry sings, "You're original, cannot be replaced  
You just gotta ignite your light, and let it shine  
'Cause baby you're a firework."

Whether you are a teen or a kid or an adult ... you are beautiful and you are amazing and there is no one else like you. Religious thought has always marveled at this. In the Hebrew Bible, the Psalmist writes, "O Eternal One, you have explored my heart and know exactly who I am ... for you shaped me, inside and out. You knitted me together in my mother's womb long before I took my first breath ... I am your unique creation, filled with wonder and awe. You have approached even the smallest details with excellence, your works are wonderful."

In Buddhism, each person is seen as both "a unique individual and as part of an infinitely interpenetrating matrix of all being. The primal energies eternally shaping the cosmos also mold each individual."

Science marvels at the mathematic improbability of each of us. Every single person is unique; even so-called identical twins are each unique and different individuals.

You are original. You cannot be replaced. We need you. We need your unique light. And those in the future whom you may not have even met yet, need you and want you and are so happy that you exist in all your uniqueness. You are profoundly loved.

And we are all standing together.

Please stand now, either in body or in spirit, for "Standing on the Side of Love."

Closing Words:

In the words of the prophet "Lady Gaga" --

I'm beautiful in my way  
'Cause God makes no mistakes  
Don't hide yourself in regret  
Just love yourself and you're set  
I'm on the right track baby  
I was born this way

May we go forward, and claim our town, and strengthen our world.

Amen, I love you.

## **The Wedding Ceremony of Kat O'Steen and Rick Jones**

### **April 17, 2010**

*This was for a beach-side, small wedding. On Kat and Rick's first date, they watched Babylon 5. They were thrilled to have a bit of that woven into the service. Rick has a son from a previous marriage, so they wanted there to be something about and for him – we did a “sand ceremony.”*

#### **Announcements**

“I invite you now to silence your cell phones so that we may be fully present for Kat and Rick as we celebrate this joyous and sacred occasion.”

#### **Processional**

##### **Welcome (or Invitation):**

We are gathered here this day in the presence of this company and all that is sacred, to join Katharyn and Albert in marriage. This is not the beginning of their relationship. They already love each other, feel a deep commitment to each other, and have made plans for a future together.

The purpose for this ceremony is to declare their commitment to live together, love and support each other, and face the years and whatever may come at each other's side. That love which we all seek speaks to our deepest dreams and desires. Kat and Rick invite you to rejoice with them that they have found such love in each other to sustain them throughout their lives.

##### **Recognition of Those Not Present**

Not all who would bless Kat and Rick in their marriage and future lives together are able to be present today.

Of the friends and family unable to be here, we hold them in our thoughts – knowing they are holding Kat and Rick in theirs.

Others are present only in spirit and memory, and we acknowledge them with love and reverence.

They are all present in our memories and in our hearts. Their spirits and their blessings continue to be present. Let us take a moment to silently honor these, and all others who have so deeply touched our lives. (silence) Amen.

#### **Wedding Homily**

Rilke calls love “the work for which all other work is merely preparation.” And so we are here today to witness and celebrate as Kat and Rick commit themselves to this great work with their marriage.

It is a privilege to be here, seeing the care this couple takes with each other, with Jack. Kat and Rick, I asked you each to privately tell me why you love the other. And your answers showed that while you appreciate what the other brings to your life – Rick, you put it succinctly, “Kat gets me,” the larger message from each of you was about the other person as an individual. It is obvious that you are not marrying the other person because they love you, you are marrying each other because you love who the other person is. Rick, you said of Kat, “I love that she’s a genuinely good person whose first inclination is to help, be it a dog loose in our neighborhood, or people halfway around the world.” And Kat, of Rick, you said, “I love what a good man he is; I love his empathy, his compassion, the way he is responsible and treats others with respect.”

You see each other as whole people. And you love each other. Both of you see this commitment as one for always and forever.

And now - you add a new dimension to your relationship by committing to marriage. I’m sure you already know that in marrying one another, you are making courageous promises. When we marry, we promise not only our own growth but also our willingness to witness and withstand the ongoing growth of another human being. That is because in marrying, two people promise to love not only as they feel right now, but also as they intend to feel in the future. In marriage they say, “I love you today,” and also, “I promise to love you tomorrow, the next day, the next week, the next year, and so on.”

Kat and Rick, you will not be the same couple a year from now, five years from now, twenty-five years from now. Time and circumstances will change you and your relationship. You marry each other as you are today, but you may come to feel you have had many different marriages together over time.

The promises you make today will also change you. They are meant to, because as you endeavor to fulfill them your relationship deepens – in trust, in delight, in love and in joy.

It is great work you embark upon today – the greatest, for which you have been preparing all your lives.

And as they said in Babylon 5:

No matter the blood, no matter the skin,  
No matter the world, no matter the star,  
We are One.  
No matter the pain, no matter the darkness,  
No matter the loss, no matter the fear.  
We are One.

### Statement of Intent

Now we come to that part of the ceremony where each member of this couple voices their affection for each other, and where they call into being the devotion needed to sustain their marriage in the years ahead. We now engage in the creation of family.



Katharyn Jean O'Steen, will you have this man to be your husband; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

Bride: I will

Albert Meyrick Jones III, will you have this woman to be your wife; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

Groom: I will

### Personal Wedding Vows

Minister: Kat and Rick, it is time to say the pledges which will marry you. Please join hands, face each other, and repeat after me.

I take you, Rick, To be my husband;  
Loving what I know of you,  
Trusting what I don't yet know.  
I will love you when we are together,  
And when we are apart.  
When life is peaceful,  
And as it challenges us.  
I will hold your family as part of my own.  
I will honor your goals and dreams,  
Always helping you to fulfill them.  
From my heart,  
I will seek to be open and honest with you.  
I will cherish our relationship as a precious gift.  
I will share my life and all that I am with you.

I take you, Kat, To be my wife;  
Loving what I know of you,  
Trusting what I don't yet know.  
I will love you when we are together,  
And when we are apart.  
When life is peaceful,  
And as it challenges us.  
I will hold your family as part of my own.  
I will honor your goals and dreams,  
Always helping you to fulfill them.  
From my heart,  
I will seek to be open and honest with you.  
I will cherish our relationship as a precious gift.  
I will share my life and all that I am with you.

## Community Blessing

This is a moment of celebration. Let it also be a moment of dedication.

The world does a good job of reminding us of how incredibly fragile we are. Individuals are fragile; relationships are fragile, too. Every marriage needs the love, nurture and support of a network of friends and family – you! So on this wedding day, I ask you not only to be friends of Kat or Rick, but friends of Kat and Rick together, friends of this relationship.

In the moment of silence that follows, I ask each of you, in your own way, to silently confer a prayer, blessing, wish or hope upon this wedding.

(A moment for silence.)

May the love you have found grow in meaning and strength until its beauty is shown in a common devotion to all that is compassionate and life-giving.

May the glow of your love help brighten the face of the earth.

May all our lives be graced with color and courage, and may the source of all love touch and bless us. Amen.

## Ring Ceremony

May I have the rings, please? [officiant holds ring in hand]

Kat and Rick have chosen unique wedding rings. Like most wedding rings, these have no beginning and no ending, symbolizing the love between them that will never cease. But theirs are special. They are “gimmel” or puzzle rings, three different metals woven together into a beautiful design. They are perfect for a couple whose relationship weaves together friendship, love, and family into one unified whole. And as Kat said, “And they’re fun!”

Kat and Rick, please turn and face each other.

Kat, please repeat after me,

This ring I give you, in token and pledge, of our constant faith, and abiding love.

Rick, please repeat after me,

This ring I give you, in token and pledge, of our constant faith, and abiding love.

Sand ritual

Kat and Rick, as you stand near this sand by the ocean, you have committed here today to share the rest of your lives with each other. You entered this relationship as two distinct individuals, but from this day forth your lives will be melded together. Often marriage is viewed as the coming together of two persons. In reality marriage is much broader. As we give thanks for the love that brings Kat & Rick together, we also recognize the merging of families taking place, and the additional love and responsibility the family brings to their relationship.

This relationship will be symbolized through the pouring of sand from individual containers. Your parents have already filled the base of the container with sand, representing symbolically the heritage from each of your families as well as the love, relationships and history that came from each of you as individuals.

Kat and Rick, today you are both getting a very special wedding gift. Rick, you are getting an additional loving parent for your son. And Kat, you are getting all the fun and challenge of a son, Jackson. Jack, please come forward and pour your sand into the container.

Kat & Rick, I ask you now to pour your own sand into the vessel. As you pour these grains of sand into this container you will always be reminded of this place where you stood and made your commitment to each other  
(Kat & Rick to pour sand in container.)

The same sand that was here a few moments ago has not disappeared, or changed. It has been enhanced by it's partner to create something bigger and more beautiful than it was just moments ago. Just as these grains of sand can never be separated and placed back again into your individual bottles, so will your marriage be. Although your individuality remains, far more important is the reality that you are no longer two, but one - never to be separated from the other.

I ask you to take your beautiful container home, find a special place in your home where you can see it everyday. Gather a little sand from the special places you visit and experience as you travel together during your lifetime and place that sand into this special container. When you do, it too will become indistinguishable from the sand you have here now. As the level of the sand increases, so will the bond of your love. The more experiences you have together as a couple, the stronger your relationship will become. When you gaze upon this container, may you remember all the happy memories you've had together, beginning with this day.

#### PRONOUNCEMENT OF MARRIAGE

Minister: Kat and Rick have chosen each other from the many men and women of the earth, have declared their love and purpose before this gathering, and have made their pledge, each to the other, symbolized by the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of rings. Therefore, I declare that they are husband and wife. May the home you are creating and will share with Jackson be bright with laughter and love, and may it bring strength and happiness to the lives of all of you, and to those you touch.

Let all others honor them and their home. May they carry into their marriage the beauty and joy of this time and place, and keep their marriage a safe haven for each of them, for the rest of their lives. Let us pray together:  
Spirit of Life and Love, God in our midst, we thank you for the many blessings of life and love. We are grateful for the love that has brought us here today, for the commitment that we celebrate, and for the life of joy and challenge that Kat and Rick have begun together. We ask blessings upon them, upon their families now joined in love, and upon their work together in the world. May they have a marriage of mutual respect and affection and may they bring joy and love to each other and to those around them. Amen.  
Kat and Rick, will you seal your marriage with a kiss?

I joyfully present to you Rick and Kat Jones, husband and wife.  
You may now congratulate the happy couple.

## **Memorial Service: Oliver Stone**

### **August 20, 2009**

I welcome you all to this time of memory, reflection, and celebration of life. This temporary congregation is a diverse group. We bring many different understandings of the meaning of life to this ceremony, and many different hopes for what lies beyond this life. Unitarian Universalists honor those differences, and we celebrate the fact that they are transcended by what unites us: our relationship with Orville and his family, our grief for our loss, our hope that we can be of support to his family, and our intention to honor and celebrate his life, and take what we most need and admire into our lives.

This is the light of faith and hope and love, which shines in our lives, and on this time together. We light this chalice, and invoke the larger light, that shines on life and death and shines beyond both. (light chalice)

### **Pondering Death's Meaning**

Orville Louis Stone went by many names – Orville, Stoney, Louis. His favorite names included Uncle, Dad, and Grandpa. Family was very important to him; he was still the patriarch of his family when he went up to his family reunion a couple of weeks ago in Indiana, and so perhaps it is fitting that he gave his extended family the blessing of one more visit before he left this life.

When death comes so quickly and unexpectedly, as it did for Orville, there is something deep within our human nature that calls us to “rage, rage, against the dying of the light”, in the words of Dylan Thomas. Death is like life, in that they are two constants of the human condition. Death and life unite us together in our own humanity.

When death comes after a life well lived, as it did for Orville, then our grief is tempered by the recognition of all we have gained from knowing that life.

But when death comes at all, our spirits rage against the dying of the light. We grieve not only for the loss of our friend and loved one, but also we grieve for the reminder that life is transient, fragile, and precious. We grieve our own mortality, reflected in the life of the one who we will miss deeply.

Do not be perplexed by the emotions you feel now, they come from your connection to Orville... from your own humanity. They may be rage, fear, anger, loss, or regret. You may be feeling guilt or remorse, or deep sadness. Such is natural, and part of your connection to Orville, part of being human.

Do not deny your emotions, accept them. Try to understand them. They are doors into life's deeper meanings. They are doorways into the divine.

Death always brings us face to face with life. There is opportunity in this moment for us to begin to live again, to re-commit to living fully, loving extravagantly, and being all we are called to be in this world.

The paradox of such an occasion is death calls us to life, and to living.

As we read in the third book of Ecclesiastes:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:

A time to be born and a time to die;  
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted;  
A time to kill and a time to heal;  
A time to break down and a time to build up;  
A time to weep and a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn and a time to dance;  
A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together;  
A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;  
A time to seek and a time to lose;  
A time to keep and a time to cast away;  
A time to tear and a time to mend;  
A time to keep silent and a time to speak;  
A time to love and a time to hate;  
A time for war and a time for peace.

Orville liked Albert Einstein and his idea of religion. Einstein wrote, "My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind." Orville expressed to his daughter Laura that he thought he was given a special insight into the concept of a higher power because of his scientific background and understanding (or lack of understanding) of the way the universe works.

On his dresser, Orville kept the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

*Violinist*

And now, Orville's son, Chris Stone, will share with us more about Orville's life.

Eulogy

Remembering

Now we pause:

- To gather our individual feelings and thoughts
- To remember the man that was -- how he touched our lives and how our lives touched his life
- To meditate upon the meaning of this occasion.
- To focus on a memory, one memory that portrays what Orville means in our lives.

The Memory

Now, we invite anyone who wishes to come forward, light a candle, and, if you would like, share a memory of Orville's life.

(sharing)

I light one final candle for all those memories of Orville too hard, or too private to share.

Meditation

Let us offer a prayer of meditation for all these memories of Orville.

Holy One, whom we call by many names and by no name, we give thanks for the life of Orville Louis Stone; for his lively love, for his loyalty, for his wisdom, for his friendship. Though we know that his spirit lives on in our lives, we also honor our sadness. Grant us a healing of our hearts, bit by bit, and day by day, that we can soon find an easing of our loss and a zest in our lives again. Help us to take the values of Orville's life into our own lives and live fully with them, that he might live in us and with us, for all of our days.

1st Corinthians Chapter 13

If I speak in the ecstatic tongues of men and even of angels, but have not love, I am as a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.



If I give away all I have, and even if I deliver my body to the fire, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Love never ends; prophecies pass away; tongues of ecstatic speech cease; knowledge, it, too, will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect, and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, then the imperfect passes away.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put away childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

Three things are abiding: faith, hope, and love. But of these three, the greatest is love.  
Amen

The family would like to invite you back to The Buckingham for a reception to continue sharing memories of Orville's life. There are maps available.

Thank you for your presence today to honor the life of Orville Louis Stone. And now, as we say a final farewell to one we held dear, let us be comforted and trusting that a human life is full of meaning and purpose even in death.

## **Religious Education: Universalism 101 Outline**

### **Session 1: History of Universalism**

Defining universalism

Early Church

Origen

Clement of Alexandria

Gregory of Nyssa

Pre-Institutional

Julian of Norwich

Reformation

Post-Reformation

Anabaptists

German Brethren

Friedrich Schleiermacher

London

James Rely

John Murray

Judith Sargent Murray

Coming to America

George deBenneville

Influenced Elhanan Winchester

Hosea Ballou 1771 –1852

Ultra Universalist

A Treatise on Atonement

1785 First Universalist Convention

1803 Statement of Belief: Winchester Profession

1899 The Liberty Clause

Reaction to Universalists

Institutional

Tufts College

Olympia Brown

Caroline Augusta White Soule

Quillen Hamilton Shinn

21st Century  
The Humanist Manifesto 34 signers/1 Universalist  
Formation of “The Humiliati” – emergent Universalism  
1961 Unitarians and Universalists consolidate.

## **Session 2: Theology**

Video: Mark Morrisson-Reed, Dragged Kicking and Screaming into Heaven

Types of Universalism:  
Reconciliation  
Restorationists  
Ultra-Universalists

Issues in Universalism  
Free Will  
Justice  
God’s Will

Basic theological arguments  
How could a loving God ...  
How could heaven be heaven if one soul were in hell?

Creed/Belief/Profession

## **Session 3: Practice**

Religious ritual  
Prayer  
Baptism  
Communion

Equality

Passive Resistance

Slavery

Recent History  
Clarence Russell Skinner  
The Social Implications of Universalism

Declaration of Social Principles

Twelve Reasons for Joining the Universalist Church - 1943  
Universalist Service Committee

Question for Discussion: If you believe every person is profoundly loved by God, how does that affect your behavior?

Universalism Today

Other Religions

Jodo Shinshu

Rob Bell

Pastors Fired for Universalism

Discussion: Should Christians who come to hold universalist convictions join UU churches? Why/why not? Should UUs who become convinced of Christian Universalism leave and join liberal Christian churches? Why/why not?

**Ministerial Record**  
**Rev. Joanna Fontaine Crawford**  
**jcrawford@uuma.org**

**Why are you seeking a ministry now?**

I have been blessed to work in innovative ministries, such as the multi-site First UU Houston, and our international online UU church, The Church of the Larger Fellowship, and that has instilled in me a passion to find a congregation that seeks both to support our members from within, and to build Beloved Community beyond our walls. Helping First UU Houston as they transitioned to being one church in three locations has been a marvelous, educational experience, but I am seeking a situation where full-time ministry is more sustainable.

**Describe the new ministry you hope for:**

I yearn for a church that I can love and pour my heart into; a church that has some history, has tried things and failed, tried other things and succeeded. A church that isn't too afraid of making mistakes, because that means it's going to be willing to take risks, and even more importantly, it's going to be willing to dream.

I am looking for a church with heart – a heart full of love for not only its members but also for the people outside its doors, who haven't found their way in yet. Because this is what Unitarian Universalism is all about: it's about having the faith that love is infinite, undying, and there's plenty to go around for all of us, so we need to love one another within the church, and then take that love outside the church because there are people out there starving for acceptance, for nourishing food for their minds and souls, for a listening ear, for relationship, for purpose.

Purpose. Another word for that is *mission*. I hope to find a church that understands that a church doesn't have a mission, a *mission* has a *church*, and they're willing to be claimed by their mission, and to allow it to lead them into some new areas.

I hope for a church that is both open to innovation and grounded in our Unitarian Universalist heritage. We are not a "none of the above" religion. We have a rich history and theology that we draw from. We stand on the shoulders of giants – people who have literally "changed the world with their love."

**Education**

University of Texas at Austin, Bachelor of Arts, English, May 1991  
Houston Graduate School of Theology, Master of Divinity, December 2011

**Awards, honors, and published writings:**

The "Academic Excellence" award, Houston Graduate School of Theology  
Graduated HGST summa cum laude, 4.0  
"Preacher of the Term," HGST Fall 2009  
"Let Mission Drive Us," UU World, Summer 2011

"Reclaiming My Space in the Sisterhood," UU World, March 2009

For CLF's Quest for Meaning: (Pastoral Care pages)

<http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/author/10035>

"The Challenge of Being 'All of the Above':"

[http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/the-challenge-of-being-all-of-the-above\\_1](http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/the-challenge-of-being-all-of-the-above_1)

"New Baby": [http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/new-baby\\_1](http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/new-baby_1)

"Missing God": <http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/missing-god>

"The Spiritual Act of Complaining":

<http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/the-spiritual-act-of-complaining>

"Accepting Help": <http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/accepting-help>

"Suicide of a Loved One":

<http://www.questformeaning.org/reflecting/post/suicide-of-a-loved-one>

My blog: <http://bootsandblessings.blogspot.com/>

Curator: <http://dailymlk.wordpress.com/> (archived)

<http://dailyjla.wordpress.com/> (new)

### **Personal and family situation:**

I met my partner Tom in college, when we were both on the University of Texas fencing team. We've been married for 23 years and have four children, ages 8, 11, 14, and 17.

### **Background and development:**

**From your late teens forward, describe your higher education, the three or four most important events in your life experience, the context in which you felt called to ministry, and your professional development, continuing education, and work history; include every ministry (include dates by month/year) and what you bring from it and your other work to a new ministry:**

Originally a theatre major, I graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a B.A. in English. I worked in the corporate world in my 20's, primarily in marketing/advertising, moving into web/graphic design in my 30's. After being an active lay leader in my home church and district for many years, I was called to ministry.

While in seminary, my youngest daughter was diagnosed with cancer. She is now a healthy survivor. This affected not only my family, but my own theology and sense of call. I went through a period of spiritual struggle, emerging with a more grounded, deeply examined system of belief.

I am a "born and raised" Unitarian Universalist, so my religious upbringing was within that context. The seminary that I attended, the Houston Graduate School of Theology, is an ecumenical, multi-cultural divinity school. I am grateful for that experience. I was in the racial minority of this school; most of my classmates came from traditionally African-American denominations such as National Baptist and African-Methodist Episcopal (AME)

and this opened up an entire world to me. Additionally, I took – and enjoyed -- classes from Starr-King School of the Ministry to supplement the education from HGST. I graduated summa cum laude with a 4.0 gpa.

I had the benefit of two internships. I began as Intern Minister, Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF), Aug. 2011 – June 2013 (half-time) and added another part-time internship at Northwoods UU Church, Jan 2012-July 2012, to give me more experience in a traditional “brick and mortar” church. These gave me a wide-range of experience few ministers get – at the CLF, I was responsible for weekly worship services that were all done online, through video and live chat on Livestream. At Northwoods, I had the opportunity to experience the breadth of traditional parish ministry, from preaching, to religious education, to administration.

In August 2012, I began working as the minister for First Unitarian – Copperfield as they transitioned to merging and becoming a satellite of First UU Houston. In August 2013, the position was expanded as I began also working at the main campus of First UU Houston.

This experience working for our first fully-staffed multi-site UU Church has been invaluable. In addition to seeing the ins and outs of multi-site work, I have been able to both work solo as a satellite minister for the Copperfield campus and work collaboratively with the three other ministers of FUUH.

I am comfortable with using all the tools at hand to further the mission of a church and of Unitarian Universalism, and I look forward to working with a congregation open to melding tradition and innovation.

**Denominational and community activities:**

**Describe with dates active membership in and significant volunteer service to local congregations, the UUA and its districts, and civic, political, social service, and interfaith organizations and programs:**

- UUA Presidential Search Committee, June 2013 – June 2019
- “Life on Fire” missional church conference, Sept 2013, Organizer and Worship Leader
- UU General Assembly 2013 workshop leader: “Loving the Hell Out of the World”
- City of Houston Memorial Day Ceremony: presented Benediction, 2013
- Southwest UU Ministers’ Association retreat 2013: worship leader and workshop facilitator
- Southwestern UU Summer Institute 2012 workshop leader: “The Great Online Third Place”
- Southwest UU Women’s Conference 2012, worship leader
- “Bring Your Gay Teen to Church Day,” (Houston progressive interfaith event), Creator and Organizer, 2011
- Co-founder, Houston Clergy Council, 2010
- Southwestern UU District Site Designer and Webmaster, 2002-04



- Northwest Community UU Church, lay leader, positions included President, Vice-President, Worship Chair, Religious Educator, Webmaster, Stewardship Chair, Fundraising, Covenant Group Trainer (over 1998-August 2012.)

**Professional Organizations:**

Houston UU Ministers Association

Southwest UU Ministers Association

**Non-professional interests:**

When not doing something fun with my family, you can often find me with my nose in a book, listening to music, trying out a new recipe, or exploring the latest thing on the internet. I play guitar sporadically and not well, but I enjoy it.

**Ministerial development:**

**What are your current developmental needs, and how might a congregation assist you in addressing them?**

This will be heavily influenced by the church, and the local context, of where I am called. Though I've had the benefit of being in churches both large and small, traditional and ground-breaking, I know that each new church will have opportunities for my own professional growth. My hope is that this church will be supportive of my participation in continuing education workshops, General Assembly, etc.

**Describe a mistake you have made in the past, and how you have addressed it:**

A word which many people use to describe me is "enthusiastic." However, enthusiasm without discernment can lead to problems. After the local success I had with a Houston program called, "Bring Your Gay Teen to Church" (this was to educate Houston that there were many non-fundamentalist, loving and welcoming congregations that would welcome LGBTQ youth), an activist approached me about taking the program nationally. Busy with other things, I essentially handed the program to him without requiring him to submit to me his business plan, list of supporters, etc. Rather than first concentrating on finding ally churches and denominations, he focused on fundraising. The program flopped. Lesson learned: first step, "due diligence."

**Ministerial roles and functions:**

**How would you wish to function with lay leadership? Comment on your leadership style:**

My style is very collaborative: I enjoy helping people to find and develop their own gifts for leadership and ministry.

In many sports, like tennis and golf, there is a place on the racquet or club called "the sweet spot." When you manage to hit the ball right there, your effort is repaid with the maximum response. The ball SOARS.

For volunteer work, the sweet spot is that area where your gifts and your interests coincide. When I am able to support a lay leader in finding that sweet spot, coaching them through the inevitable frustrations that will come, and cheerleading their efforts, the whole church soars.

**How would you wish to function with (paid) church staff?**

In a full-time position, I agree with the model described by Rev. Stefan Jonasson, UUA Director for Large Congregations, in which the senior minister is “chief of staff.”

**How would you wish to function as part of a ministry team?**

With both the CLF and with First UU Houston, I have been a part of a collaborative ministry team made up of ministers, DREs, and music directors. I have enjoyed the experience and look forward to collaborating with church leaders, educators, musicians, and staff.

**How would you wish to function in the communities beyond the local congregation?**

All of us – even the minister -- live outside the walls of the church building. We each go out, into our own spheres of influence – work, school, neighborhood, coaching the little league team, etc.

I feel that church should empower and strengthen each of us to live out our values in the wider community, so that in the process, we may transform it. As minister, I will seek out relationships with other clergy and community leaders who can be allies in our work, and will look for opportunities to represent our values so that others may learn who we are by what we do.

**What has been your experience in leading organizational change in multicultural settings?**

As mentioned above, my seminary experience was rich ... and unique. I attended an evangelical, multi-cultural, ecumenical seminary. The majority of my classmates came from the African-American church traditions of AME and National Baptist.

I picked my battles, but decided that there were two that I was especially willing to speak out on, my “hills to die on” – LGBTQ issues and women in ministry (many of my female classmates were not allowed to preach in their own churches).

It was not so much an organizational change that I worked for, as a cultural one. I was a part of many discussions that continued beyond the classroom, and into the breakroom or parking lot. These discussions taught me much about finding common agreement but also being willing to stand one’s ground on crucial issues.

At my graduation, I was awarded the school’s highest honor, the Academic Excellence Award. As the dean announced my name as the winner, he talked about me being liberal,

and a Unitarian Universalist, and said that "...we Conservative Evangelicals are much better off for our years spent with her." I cherished that more than the award itself.

**What is your approach to the religious education of children, youth, and adults?**

I am a strong believer in both the lifespan nature of religious education, and the rich religious heritage that we can draw from, whether we are equipping members for their day to day lives, or giving them the historical or theological education many crave.

The content of what we teach should inspire in church members of all ages an appreciation that, in the words of Rebecca Ann Parker, "When someone enters Unitarian Universalism, they do not arrive at no place, they arrive at some place."

We are a non-creedal religion that expects its members to dive in and to struggle with the big questions, testing ideas with knowledge, reason, and their own experience. But we are not the "None of the Above" church, we are not the Tabula Rasa of religion. We have a rich heritage, a strong systematic theology, and a living tradition. We should offer a nutritious meal for the journey, to all ages.

**What do you see as the role of music and the arts in the life of a congregation?**

It is impossible to overvalue music in a worship service. Music helps to establish and set the energy flow of a service; it taps in to our emotions and memories. As we experiment with worship, art affects our experience, whether through the textiles or décor of the sanctuary, art chosen for the cover of the order of service or slideshow, or artistic elements integrated into the service.

**What involvement do you desire in the stewardship of a congregation, most particularly its financial affairs?**

Stewardship is a sacred piece of any UU church; it is about building up, safeguarding, and using wisely the resources of a congregation. As minister, it is my responsibility to be involved in this. I presently am working with the stewardship team of First UU Houston in a capital campaign – I volunteered for this particular piece of our ministry collaboration because I wanted to gain experience in this area.

**Theological orientation: What is your dominant theology, and how do you deal with other Unitarian Universalist theologies with which you may not be in sympathy?**

My dominant theology is Unitarian Universalist, as outlined by Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker in her presentation at Collegium 2003, "Under Construction: Knowing and Transforming Our Theological House." This is heavily influenced by process theology.

Above all, I agree with Unitarian minister A. Powell Davies who wrote about how different religious beliefs fulfilled him in different ways:

"Why should any of us be confined within a single area of religious culture? When I read Amos and Jeremiah, I say 'Would to God I were a Jew.' When I read the Parable of the Good Samaritan, I say 'Would I were a Galilean.' When I read the 13th of 1st Corinthians, I wish with all my heart that I might be a Christian after the manner of the Apostle Paul. When I think of Buddha and his Eightfold Path, I say, 'I, too, would be a Buddhist.' And when I remember the trial of Socrates, I say in awe but with exalted spirit, 'Oh that I might be so brave a humanist.' And thus at the end, there is nothing I can say but that, like Emerson and Channing, I want to live with the privilege of the illimitable mind."

**Additional information: Finish introducing yourself in any way you would like to.**

One thing that I take very seriously is our call to experience and create "Beloved Community." I believe we can and should foster wholeness both in our church communities and in the world at large.

But taking something seriously and always acting serious are two different things. I like to have fun. I think silliness can be a virtue. And one of my heroes is the late Molly Ivins who said,

"So keep fightin' for freedom and justice, beloveds, but don't you forget to have fun doin' it. Lord, let your laughter ring forth. Be outrageous, ridicule the fraidy-cats, rejoice in all the oddities that freedom can produce. And when you get through kickin' ass and celebratin' the sheer joy of a good fight, be sure to tell those who come after how much fun it was."

So may it be!