

I am Evangelical UU. And I'm here tonight to convince you to become Evangelical UUs, as well.

Tony Larsen, Unitarian Universalist Minister in Racine WI says that Unitarian Universalism teaches us to "Love our Neighbor as ourself, to search for the truth with an open mind and to make the world a better place to live."

My colleague Wendy Perkins, a Canadian Unitarian Minister says that "Ours is a religion that encourages our hearts to love, our minds and spirits to grow, and our hands to serve".

How do you talk about Unitarian Universalism? Or Do You?

Unitarian Universalism is a well kept secret and UUs are the ones keeping this secret. We appear to want to keep this all for ourselves.

Michael Durall, a UU who consults with churches from many denominations on Growth calls us an "Almost Church."

As a denomination, we have a similar problem as many mainline protestant churches – we're adding only about the same number of new members as are dying or leaking out the back door. But, unlike the Presbyterians or Methodists, we started with significantly fewer members.

I know this from my own efforts at Woodinville Unitarian Universalist. Bill Graves was one of the founders of that church. We chartered at 150 in 1992, rose to 160 dropped to less than 100 and now finally is back around 160. There are, by my quick count only 25 early members still active (although there are a few who still have their names on the book, but only show up for Christmas eve.)

UU growth rate from 1994 to 2003 has averaged only 1000 new members a year in the entire UUA (.8% or an average of 1 new member per congregation per year – there are 1008 churches) and while some churches may be up one year, they'll drop down the next year so that only 60 churches show numerical growth over the 10 year period and most of that is in the large UU churches like Portland First UU, All Souls UU Tulsa. All Souls New York, and Dallas First UU.

Maybe, for you, that's not a problem, but some of us, fear that unless we grow, at least some, we will not be around.

The solution to our continuance is to "Grow the Faithful."

"Be fruitful and multiply..." isn't that the mantra?

Shall we turn to 13-children families?

Adopting orphans like the Shaker's scheme was to?

Our best numerical source is adults who are looking for a spiritual home. SO HOW DO THEY KNOW WE'RE HERE? (Run ads? Billboards?)

86% visit for first time because someone invited them. WHEN DID YOU LAST INVITE SOMEONE TO SERVICE?

National UU 2002 poll Average UU invites someone to the service

1. 1 time every 6 mos?
2. every 3 years?
3. every 11 years?
4. every 27 years?

Well, the average was 27 years!

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"We're bigger than 10 years ago."

"But who would I invite?"

"We're different – not a lot of other people out there like us?"

"Why should I invite any one?"

"It's not easy to do!"

"I wouldn't know what to say!"

It is my experience that most UUs have gotten bogged down in how to give their witness without coming off as weird or as a proselytizer. "What can I say that would allow anyone to even consider what I value in this church?"

Many current UUs are “Come-outta’s” – Those who have left other churches because of their rigidity. Our recent new members are mainly “Come-inna’s”. – those who have never been part of a church.

Most of us are Come-outta’s, Which means that what we were looking to avoid isn’t a part of a current seeker’s screen. We have to figure out how to speak to the Come-inna’s who are still church searching.

So what I’m proposing may be uncomfortable for you. But, as your grandmother might have said, “It’ll be good for you”. Becoming an Evangelical UU can become a rich spiritual journey.

George Lakoff has written a popular controversial book called *Don’t Think of an Elephant*. In the book, he points out how liberal politicians and groups have failed to pay attention to do what he calls “Framing your message” – doing what the add agencies do to get you to buy cars, breakfast cereal and prescription medicines. They restate the message as something that is clearly good (which we want) or bad (“we don’t want that!”).

Politicians rename the “Inheritance Tax” as the “Death Tax”. TV dinners have become “Lean Cuisine” and Pentecostals have reframed the concept of “Misbehave in this life – go to Hell” to “Miss the Rapture”. (Going to Hell has no power, as to many people, This world already feels like Hell – They make their life decisions in response to their fears – what is one more fear? But Miss Rapture? Be left behind?

Our challenge is How do we frame the UU message so that people are captured by its possibility for their lives?

Many conservatives have memorized speeches to make church invitations.

We, on the other hand, have no rehearsed message, or messages which don’t represent us well, or messages which are just plain wrong.

And so, we fall into simplistic statements like Unitarians don’t have to believe anything”, because we ourselves are unsure of what we believe or aren’t sure how our beliefs represent the woman or man sitting in the row in front of us.

If you take it seriously, Unitarian Universalism is not an easy path to follow. And that is part of our challenge.

We don't have answers for the biggie questions like:

“Why am I here?”

“What is the meaning of life?”

“Is there life after death?”

But because we don't have ONE ANSWER, doesn't mean you can't have discussions around these biggies. We each have the task of writing our own Credo (This I believe.).

An evangelical UU is challenged to take seriously what it means to be responsible for one's own spiritual journey.

Bill Sinkford, our national president of the Unitarian Universalist Association has challenged every one of us to have our own personal statement of how our faith speaks to us – a ninety second “elevator speech.”

An evangelical UU will continually update his/her elevator speech

I'm going to finish tonight by sharing my most recent evolution of mine. Not as something for you to say, but as one possibility. Mine assumes I only get 4 floors.

Floor one: I was first attracted to the church when I learned that a number of my personal heroes were Unitarians or Universalists – people like Adlai Stevenson, Susan B. Anthony, Henry David Thoreau, Pete Seeger, Linus Pauling, Malvina Reynolds, and Buckminster Fuller.

Floor two: You may not have heard of us, but we trace our direct path to the 1500's – to those who advocated for religious freedom. We take that freedom seriously – we are responsible for our own religious journey. We encourage spiritual and intellectual questioning & exploration and acknowledge many paths to a sacred experience.

Floor three: Our church has a rich worship and study life. We believe that love is more likely to produce a better world than fear. We have no creed, but as a community, we covenant to follow 7 principles of ethical behavior toward others and toward this planet.

Floor Four: Throughout our history, Unitarians, and Universalists have been there actively working for justice for all God's children – we were there in the civil rights movement and for women's suffrage, Today we're taking stands for prison and drug policy reform, seeking equal justice for gay, lesbian and transgendered people, and working for solutions for homelessness.

It's time for UU Churches to **Come out of the closet**"; "Go public";
"Become a beacon of loving, learning and serving?"

There are **folks you know** who want a spiritual community where they can have the freedom to search for meaning and truth without being told that there is only one truth.

There are others you know who are seeking meaningful worship where they come away with inspiration and insight, not guilt and mandates.

There are folks you know who are seeking a place to join with others in challenging the injustices going on in your community and who desire to work together to bring needed change.

There are those you know who need a religion that encourages hearts to love, minds and spirits to grow, and hands to serve...

We have a religion like that -- it's called Unitarian Universalism.

Lets not hide it.

The Sikh wear their Turban every day as a proud witness to their faith.
What if we were to wear our chalice daily.

Let's make the world a better place to live.

What can your church point to?

Let us be ready to say what we stand for, what we believe.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of working on the Woodinville High School Interfaith Baccalaureate service. The Mormon congregation next door to us was also one of the sponsors and I got to work with the Mormons on the committee. At the social hour after the service, I asked one of the women, "On average, how many people does a team of young people convert in their 2 years on Mission?" She smiled and said "Two,

themselves.” After presenting their faith statements every day for two years, they know what they believe.

By writing our Credo and our elevator speech, we will be clearer as to what we believe.

Let us provide these opportunities to grow inward and reach outward. Include opportunities for meaningful loving, learning and serving at all levels of congregational life.

Closing Words:

I invite you to become **an evangelical UU**. Our task is to demonstrate our faith by what we do, and how we do it, and to share our beliefs with others. Our faith becomes vitalized and expanded when we live our callings.

May ours truly be a living faith, a vibrant faith, a loving, learning and serving faith – meeting the real and deep needs of people and the planet. May we become lighthouses through our lives and our witnesses flashing in the darkness, offering a beacon to all who would join with us.

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