

I chose the Carl Sagan reading because it imagines us in the future looking back on ourselves today. Looking back on ourselves with awe and wonder and how we struggled to achieve greatness.

History for Unitarian Universalists seems often seems like a struggle and for many reasons. First and foremost, is the challenge that in some ways our religion is very young. Although Unitarianism formally dates back to the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, and Universalism a bit later, We consolidated the two religions into one fifty years ago. So in some respects our history is only fifty years old. And although we can point to many similarities, each of the original religions had its own uniqueness and its own history different from the other. Today, only a small % of members, were ever a member of either religion prior to the consolidation. So it makes it a bit more confusing, as we now have three distinct histories to examine, Unitarians, Universalists and Unitarian Universalists.

Having grown up in the Jewish Religion, I can say, heritage was almost an exclusive focus of my religious upbringing. Judaism's rich history will always be a part of my personal and family history and it helped create who I am today as a Unitarian Universalist. My evolution of religious understanding tells me that although history cannot be exclusive it is an inclusive part of what religion is. The stories, myths, culture, and scriptures of Judaism are still with me as part of my UU religion.

My Jewish upbringing informs me, but it doesn't uniquely define me or my current religious practice and theology today. Similarly, our history of Unitarian Universalism doesn't define us, but it will always be a part of us, it helped create who we are today, and can still inform us. One cannot gain religious depth just because of history, but our history can be a guide and a foundation to grow on. What is it that makes us uniquely who we are? What is a UU culture? In Judaism, it was always, because of our past, this is why you must act in this way. In Christianity, it is because of our past, this is why you must believe this way. For Unitarian Universalism, our history says to me, because of our past, this is why we think this way; this is what led us to this point.

We are a progressive religion, and by that I mean we use new information as it becomes available to inform how we live in the world. We believe in exploring the unknown. Such exploration leads different people up different paths on the mountain to describe what holiness means. These different paths create a theological pluralistic community. In order to create such a community, we have become a covenantal community. How do we agree to walk together on this religious journey. Our tradition of religious covenanting harkens back in this country to the Puritans, which was formalized in the Cambridge Platform in 1648 some 363 years ago.

It was a document that talked about how members of congregations agreed to act with each other and how groups of congregations agreed to act with each other. This document was the basis for the democratic polity within our congregations and I would argue the basis for our own country's democratic structure. Now the items we covenant about today are different than they were 363 years ago. However the tradition of covenanting I think is important and something we hold to today.

And it is ironic that for such a historic religion many members, myself included come from different or no religious backgrounds, and that background often was not completely satisfactory or we wouldn't have left and become Unitarian Universalists.

So often members are looking forward for something new, not something old.

But we are **not just** a conglomeration of like minded people from other religions or no religions who have come together to share time on Sunday Mornings to hear a nice sermon. WE ARE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS. We should be proud of that, not dogmatic, but proud. It means something to be a UU versus being part of another religion.

I think there is much to be gained by looking at our tradition. I think this history allows our community to connect to and realize that they are part of something that is bigger and more longstanding than just ourselves and our personal religious experience, And by doing so, by looking back, by remembering our history, it allows us to live in the present and look to the future of our religion in ways

that affect something other than just ourselves and our current concerns in this moment of time. I believe that realization that we are part of something larger than ourselves leads us to transformative growth.

Our history informs us of who we were and how we got here. And we examine our history with critique, It is important to remember our history in context. Our history connects us to a long tradition of religious freedom, and hope and exploration. It also connects us to a long history and tradition of transformation of self and society.

Many of our UU ancestors were leaders in public education and public health, including mental health, and we have a long history of working for social justice for those who are disempowered in our society. But our history also connects us to challenges of a diverse changing society and how quickly we can become extraneous to it if we do not adapt.

We need to let History inform us how we move forward. What has worked in the past, and what has not? When and how have we reached towards our highest ideals and what has led us to abandon them. One of the chapters in Charles Howe book on Universalism The Larger Faith is entitled “We do not Stand, We Move” I agree, we should not be trapped by our history for better or worse. We move forward with the full realization that we move in uncertainty, with wonderful intentions that often have ambiguous outcomes. Knowing this, let us move forward with wisdom gained from knowledge of the past to give us the best chance to create the beloved community in the present and in the future.

I have learned much on my religious journey.....I have learned that we can do exponentially more together as a community compared to what we can each do alone. I have learned that we can work together with other religions to achieve common goals. I have learned that there are some people in the larger community who will not work with us and do not have our same values and we need to be able to name that and speak our truth. have learned that there are many people who have never heard of us and desperately want and need our message and community. I have learned that there are many people who have heard of us and respect what we stand for and who we stand with.

My hope for the future of Unitarian Universalism. That we could build a religion that our name speaks to. That we could be united as a people, although of different opinions on details, we could be united in our actions towards the creation of our vision of a just and compassionate world. A Universal vision that does not separate based on divisions. A vision for all humanity and the earth itself. I would encourage you share our message, to see yourselves as part of something greater than just yourselves and just this community.

Take every opportunity you can to make yourself and the larger community, including the larger Unitarian Universalist community, reach its full potential by working together to create the world we dream about. This is not something that just happens overnight. But with right intention and right action with all working together, we can change ourselves and those around us in the present and in the future. You will need to constantly nurture and improve yourselves, nurture and improve each other, nurture and improve the community, nurture and improve your ideas, and nurture and improve this religion.

When our descendants look back on us what will they find. They will find a religion that was the foundation of our democratic country, they will find a religion that supported religious freedom and the pursuit of a just society in our own lifetime. But what after that? Will our history since our prodigious early stages be a prologue of what is still yet to follow. The future is not written. It will be what we make it.

So I would like to offer to you for consideration just a few ideas from my experience of ways that I have found to be helpful to move forward in creating community.

Push yourself to go deep. Many of you lead busy lives, You are all tired. It is easier when we go home to just sit on the couch and watch tv or read the paper. Our congregational mission calls us to embrace individual searches for meaning and one of our Unitarian Universalist Principles is to encourage spiritual growth in our congregations. So I encourage you to be intentional about taking up a spiritual

practice. If you have a family I would encourage all in the family to participate together. If you don't have a family, remember this congregation is your family, and look for opportunities to share in some of the many spiritual practices that happen here. But you have to be intentional about it.

Continue to educate yourself and be open to new and different ways of being and thinking. Our UU identity is shaped by our willingness to be open to and be challenged by new ideas, new teachings, and then to be self reflective and when necessary to become self corrective. Keep that educational vision in front of you at all times.

Life is an adventure. Don't be afraid to try something different. Take a chance. Volunteer to do different things. It will lead to different experiences. These different experiences will lead you to meet different people, which will lead you to different perspectives that will lead you to different conclusions about life and the world.

Often, when I lived in Florida and I was mired in traffic driving, (Yet just one more thing I love about the Quad Cities)...my children dread the next 5 words that always come out of my mouth "Lets go on an adventure" and we get off the highway and try to find a different way to our destination. I like that metaphor for life. Don't get stuck in traffic just following the car in front of you. See if there are others ways to go on with your journey until you reach your destination, see if there are other paths up the mountain. On this UU Path, you will have good companions for the journey

Worship together and I encourage you to be open to different types of worship experiences, be open to really listening and discerning, and immersing yourself in the experience. Just the act of being together week in and week out singing and sharing, creates community.

Be intentional about being a welcoming community. Our message is a message of transformation and hope. It is a message our world desperately needs. It is a message that guests walking in are looking for. But the first thing that attracted me to my first UU congregation was just the overall friendliness of the first group of members I encountered when I walked through the door for the first time. I will call that a theology of friendliness.

What I also remember was when my son who grew up a UU came back as an older teenager, with spiked blue hair, an older member of the congregation walked up to him, hugged him and said how much she missed seeing him. The hair thing didn't seem to bother her, and my son noticed that as well although I think he really wanted it to bother her...but he knew then, that no matter what he would be accepted. On this UU path all are welcome Saints and Sinners, Poor and Rich, White and People of Color, Gay and Straight, spiked hari, straight hair, curly hair, no hair, all are welcome here.

Live our UU principles. These are not creeds, but covenants about how we agree to act together. Think deeply about in what ways you do live the principles and do not, and why. Try to make them congruent with your actions. Despite the ambiguities of life, maintain hope for a better future for yourself and for the world, the world of today and the world of our descendants. Maintain hope and find meaning in each and every day.

Ours is a transformational religion, that believes that due to our existence on this world, we can, and have a responsibility to transform ourselves, our communities, and the world itself. **WE ARE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS.**

It means something to be a UU versus being part of another religion, and I am proud to spread the message of our principles and the transformative effect of our community to the larger world and I encourage you to do so as well so that 363 years from now people will harken back to this time as part of an even longer tradition of religious freedom in beloved community that transformed the world. 363 years from now

They will marvel at us
How vulnerable the repository of all our potential once was
How perilous our infancy
How humble our beginnings

How many rivers we had to cross before we found our way
Now let us go out and create some history. May it be so.