

Visioning a Universalist Future
Greenfield Convocation
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My ministerial intern observed that our office volunteers were answering the phone “Unitarian Fellowship.” She asked me if they should be saying “Unitarian **Universalist** Fellowship.” I heartily agreed and directed our administrator that, even though it was cumbersome, phone answerers should say both “Unitarian” and “Universalist.” That illustrates how deeply I’ve taken to heart that ours is a merged movement of both Unitarians and Universalists. So the task of “visioning a *Universalist* future” doesn’t fit my identification with this UU movement. I cannot easily separate out the “Universalist” from my UU identity.

Old distinctions no longer hold in my ministerial experience. For example, some say that Unitarians operate primarily in the rational, whereas the Universalists live from their hearts. The UUs I know live in both. Of course, they form a continuum from relatively “heady” to “heartly.” But most worship with both. Neither do socio-economic class distinctions hold any more in a congregation formed after World War II.

Consequently, I must adapt this question to “Visioning a UU Future.”

In my preaching I will often toss in the line “this teaching reflects our Universalist roots” when I’m speaking about our first principle. I love the African American song, “We’re gonna’ sit at the welcome table.” I, riffing from the lines of the song, say things like, “it doesn’t matter whether you’re intelligent or not; beautiful (in a conventional sense) or not; successful/influential or not; able-bodied or not, etc., - everyone’s gonna’ sit at the welcome table, for absolutely everyone has inherent worth and dignity – even neo-Cons and radical Islamists.” The future of our movement is to actually live this! It’s to notice when we think, and/or say, that some humans are worth more than others. This applies whether inter-personally or internationally. For the future, as I can see it, we will be challenged enough to live our aspiration that we affirm and promote the “inherent worth and dignity of each individual.”

Moreover, I would suggest that actually living our seventh principle represents a sufficient challenge to carry us well into the future. I love the phrases from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., expressed in responsive reading number 584: “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” Especially in a U.S. culture that worships individual achievement and private ownership, our challenge is to live with the consciousness that persons are not separate, autonomous entities, but so intimately inter-related and inter-connected that no one of us could survive alone. Each of us is supported (and supports) the great web of existence.

I suppose I could say that this, too, expressed our Universalist heritage. Only I would add this twist: We will be saved together, or we will sink together. The “Universalist” piece is the awareness that we are so interdependent that we are one – “caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.”

I regret that I have nothing more original to articulate. Nevertheless I believe that living our principles is sufficient for the future. For certain, the world needs our faith as much as ever.

