

Getting to Yes (service / sermon)

delivered by Dan Secrest at [UU Detroit](#), April 7, 2019

Announcement: Good morning. My name is Dan Secrest and I am chairing the Canvass this year, working with Kathe Stevens. Today is the kickoff of our annual pledge drive. Kathe and I will have pledge brochures and forms available in Coffee Hour. Please see us there to pick up a form, and consider making a generous pledge for the coming year. In addition to a monetary pledge, please feel free to provide any other feedback you may have regarding our church. This is an opportunity to show support for the church community, and to reflect upon the value of the church in your own life. You can submit your completed pledge form to Kathe or myself, or to Nancy Shattuck in the church office. You can also make your pledge by email, CanvassChair@1stuu.org. We ask that you submit your pledge by April 21 (two weeks from today). Thank you very much.

Meditation: For our meditation this morning, we have words from [Emmy Lou Belcher](#) who was the Religious Education Director at this church in the 1980s. She subsequently became a UU minister with a longtime ministry in Traverse City, Michigan (<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/5496.shtml>)

Let us take a moment to settle into the silence.

Hear and feel your quiet breathing.
Hear and feel the quiet of this room
and this community of quiet people.

As we sit in the quiet, feel the life that stretches between us,
that fills this room.
Feel the opening of all the windows of our beings,
and the full out-stretching of our spirits,
As we reach outward to the life around us,
beyond this room,
throughout all creation.

Our moment of silence begins now...

<silence>

For this life—
for the freedom we have to shape and pursue our lives—
we are grateful and rejoice.

Amen.

Reading: (Robert Wright in *Nonzero & The Evolution of God*)

The original meaning of the word "evolution" was "unfolding" or "unrolling"—as in, the unrolling of an ancient scroll to get to the end of the story...

Even religions that emphasize personal salvation are ultimately concerned with social salvation. For Muslims and Christians the path to personal salvation involves adherence to a moral code that keeps their social systems robust. As we've seen, successful religions have always tended to salvation at the social level, encouraging behaviors that bring order.

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Please join in singing hymn #123 in the gray hymnal, *Spirit of Life*. You may remain seated.

Sermon:

We are gathered here this morning as a religious community. For me and perhaps for you, this is a test of my deepest beliefs and highest ideals. As Abraham Lincoln might have said, can a religious institution, conceived in liberty and maintained by democracy, long endure?

Today's sermon is about the prospects for **success** for our church. What does success mean? How is that measured? How will the success, or lack thereof, of this church impact our success as individuals?

Here are some ways of measuring church success:

- Number of members
- Depth of commitment
- Members who are influential in community
- Impact on culture

I'll start with **impact on culture**. How effective are we in getting society to adopt our principles? To answer this, let's review **our principles**.

I have developed my own elevator speech explaining Unitarian Universalism:

1. There is one human society. (Unitarian)
2. All are included. (Universalist)

Basically, we are humanists. Consider the extent to which humans are almost the sole focus of our 7 principles:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The 7th principle acknowledges that we are part of something greater than humanity, and that is something we share with all of the world's prominent religions. We are humanists plus respect for the interdependent web of all existence. I will use the term "Uist" to refer to these "humanist plus" principles.

Uist values are independent of any specific human culture. There is no mention of nationality, ethnicity, or culturally specific history. Compare this to the attitude today of society at large.

I recently read a book by Amy Chua entitled [Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations](#). You may remember Ms Chua as the author of the parenting memoir, [Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother](#). She also wrote a book in 2003 entitled [World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability](#). In my opinion, she provides objective and intelligent insight into the state of our culture. She writes:

"Today, no group in America feels comfortably dominant. Every group feels attacked, pitted against other groups not just for jobs and spoils but for the right to define the nation's identity. In these conditions, democracy devolves into zero-sum group competition – pure political tribalism."

I see things in a similar vein. Both within our country and in the world as a whole, democratic humanist ideals are under attack, and the voices of humanism lack coherency. Britain is struggling with Brexit, populist disenchantment has been rising elsewhere within the European Union, Ukraine and Russia are enemies. The Middle East is bogged down in ethnic conflict, South Asia is torn between Hindus and Muslims, and the Far East is tense, stretched between the spheres of influence of China and the U.S. Venezuela is a hotspot in a renewed Cold War, Brazil has a new far right wing government, and Trump is president of the United States. As still the world's predominant superpower, the U.S. has stumbled, and the world is becoming increasingly chaotic.

How can we UUs increase our impact on culture, so that democratic humanist ideals become a coherent alternative to political tribalism? What can we as a church do to be more successful in this regard?

Members Who Are Influential in the Community

Who are the most prominent and influential Unitarian Universalists? How do we compare with other religious groups in this regard?

The most obvious benchmark is the professed religion of presidents of the USA. Turning to my personal Bible, Wikipedia, we see an article entitled [Religious affiliations of Presidents of the United States](#) with the following information:

Four presidents are affiliated with Unitarian churches, and a fifth (Jefferson) was an exponent of ideas now commonly associated with Unitarianism. Unitarians fall outside of [Trinitarian](#) Christianity, and the question arises as to the degree to which the presidents themselves held Christian precepts...

The most recent Unitarian president was William Howard Taft from 1909-1913 who said:

"I am interested in the spread of [Christian civilization](#), but to go into a dogmatic discussion of creed I will not do"

There has never been a Universalist or UU president, although [historians argue](#) that Lincoln was something of a Universalist in practice.

Thus, all Unitarian and/or Universalist presidents were in the time period before we became more humanist than Christian. But some of America's most widely acclaimed presidents such as Jefferson and Lincoln were liberal Protestants tending towards religious humanism.

There are no UUs currently in the US Senate. By comparison, there are 60 Protestants, 22 Catholics, 8 Jews, 4 Mormons, and 1 Buddhist, and 5 without religious affiliation.

UU's are among the most well educated religious groups, but are [farther down the scale in terms of income](#). Religious groups doing better in terms of income include Jews, Hindus, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and atheists.

In scanning through a list of famous UUs, I don't see very many who are currently alive. So what can we as a church do be more successful in this regard?

Depth of Commitment

UUs are at an inherent disadvantage. Show of hands please: How many here grew up as UU?

<comment on number of hands>

In most religions, your religion provides a cultural identity in addition to a religious identity. Family values often include a commitment to your cultural group. Religious practice means staying in touch with family and friends. When your religious culture is human as opposed to something more ethnic, it easier to come and go.

Our identity is based upon loose high level humanist concepts, as opposed to the more structured and detailed rules and guidelines which have traditionally proven effective for religious organizations. As long as we are humanist, as opposed to chauvinist, we are free to do or not do as we please. We don't have to attend church regularly. We don't have to perform various religious rites. We don't have to fast or pray or accept the authority of our religious leaders. We don't have to give 10% of our income to the church. We can come and go as we see fit.

Impact on Culture Revisited

We may not be the richest or most politically prominent denomination. We may not have the most hard core members. But we are in sync with the times with regard to our humanist, as opposed to supernatural or sectarian, beliefs.

Peter Beinart made the point that Americans are becoming more secular, that is less sectarian, in an article entitled [The End of American Exceptionalism](#), which appeared in *The Atlantic* magazine in 2014, Quoting from this article:

The share of Americans who refuse any religious affiliation has risen from 5% in 1972 to 20% today. Among Americans under 30, it's 33%. According to the Pew Research Center, millennials—Americans born after 1980—are [more than 30](#) percentage points less likely than seniors to say that "religious faith and values are very important to America's success." And young Americans don't merely attend church [far less frequently](#) than their elders. They also attend far less than young people did in the past. ...

In their book, [American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us](#), Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell cite a study suggesting that many "young Americans came to view religion ... as judgmental,

homophobic, hypocritical, and too political." Today, [according to Pew](#), the religiously unaffiliated are disproportionately liberal, pro-gay-marriage, and critical of churches for meddling too much in politics. Not coincidentally, so are America's young.

Thus, Uism is in tune with the changing culture in terms of our more liberal and democratic values.

In sum, Donald Trump is president and democratic ideals are on the defensive around the world. Humanists such as ourselves are growing in numbers, but are not particularly effective in leading society.

I believe that we need to change as an institution to reclaim more specific guidelines for living. Generic humanism is good, but not successful as currently established. In my opinion, we need greater respect for elders, greater commitment to families, and a more focused approach to material success. We have lost much of the value of traditional religions as a side-effect of our successful efforts to eliminate injustices. We can and must do better in transmitting our values to future generations.

We pride ourselves in being rebels. Many of us believe that society is messed up and that we can be better persons as part of a counterculture. I came of age as a hippy, convinced that our society was on the road to ruin. I desperately tried to find a way to make a living without becoming a part of the evil empire. As David Graeber wrote in his book [Bullshit Jobs](#), that continues to be a problem for those in the job market today.

Graeber contends that over half of societal work is pointless, and that this becomes psychologically destructive when paired with an ethic that associates work with self-worth. For me, this perfectly sums up our challenge -- How can we be successful in a corrupt society? We have to walk a fine line, but learning how to walk that line is the most important factor in transmitting our values to future generations. It's not sufficient to teach kids about society's problems. We have to teach them how to be financially successful as individuals.

I'm talking about a Uist prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel is a religious [belief](#) among some Christians, who hold that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of [God](#) for them, and that [faith](#), positive speech, and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth.

I certainly don't believe in judging people based upon their wealth. But I do believe in striving for prosperity -- as a church and as individuals. Where does God fit in? God to me is my deepest beliefs and highest aspirations condensed to a single thought. The will of God is my own will, as part of something larger than myself. It's my identity, and this church is a huge part of that.

I want us to be successful -- not in a selfish way, but in a practical way.

We can be successful by following the principles of [Getting to Yes](#). I was introduced to the book of that name back in the late '80s by Dick Hasty, our UU Detroit minister at the time. I was in a small church-affiliated men's group, and Reverend Hasty was a member of the group. After hearing me complain about my boss, over the course of several meetings, he suggested I make an appointment with him for counseling. I made the appointment and went to his office in the 2nd story of the old church house where he gave me the book, *Getting to Yes, Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. Think of this book as the Uist alternative to Donald Trump's book, *The Art of the Deal*.

Getting to Yes is a slim volume, and I have further condensed it into a one page summary which I have posted in the Communications section of the church website. I further condensed the message into 5 bullet points which are listed in the order of service today. The key to success for our church is the same as it is for us as individuals, and the same as it is for other organizations and even entire nations. We have to work together peacefully and in win-win relationships in order to be successful. That is not easy, and I would guess that even some of us in this

sanctuary do not have high confidence that the world will be able to solve its problems peacefully and democratically.

Please follow along in the order of service while I go over points from *Getting to Yes*, adding a few details which are not printed there:

<open order of service>

1. Prior to entering into negotiations, develop your best alternative to a negotiated agreement.
2. Separate the people from the problem:
 - a. Deal independently with people problems which often occur because of issues involving perception, emotion, and communication.
 - b. Try to build good working relationships.
 - c. Face the problem, not the people.
3. Focus on interests, not positions.
4. Invent options for mutual gain.
5. Insist on using objective criteria in making decisions.

Being involved in a democratic organization such as this church gives us a chance to practice using these tools, to burnish our resumes, increase our circle of friends and network of professional associates, enrichen our family life, and feel proud of who we are and what we are doing in life.

Today we are kicking off our annual pledge campaign. Please consider making a generous pledge to this church, so that we can continue evolving as a successful community and influence on society. We are fortunate, in my opinion, to have a creative and dedicated staff including Reverend Stephen and Music Director Todd. Our Finance Committee does a fantastic job of managing our money, and I've been privileged to sit on a competent and devoted Board of Trustees. The Worship Committee excels in bringing us together each week in meaningful discussion and contemplation of what we value. The Greeter team welcomes you into our church, and the Membership team helps with the transition from our weekly worship gatherings into broader realms of church activity and relationship. Social Justice reaches out to interact with the wider world. Building and Grounds, Caring, Young Adults, Children's Program, and Communications are some of the other active groups in our church. We get quite a big bang for our buck.

So please pick up a pledge form in Coffee Hour and submit this today or within the next two weeks at the church office or via email. Make a commitment to democracy. If we can make it work here, we can make it work anywhere.

Please join in the responsive reading which is in your order of service:

I'll read the lines in *italics*; please respond by reading together the lines in **bold**)

The universe is vast, and dark, and cold.

But we are not.

The stars are silent, and ancient, and impossibly far away.

But we are not.

The laws of physics are indifferent to hope, or desperation, or love.

But we are not!

Does anything in the universe care?

Yes! We care! There is light in the world, and it is us!

When you look beneath the roiled surface of human events, you see an arrow beginning tens of thousands of years ago and continuing to the present.

And, looking ahead, you see where it is pointing.

Religion consists of the belief that there is an unseen order,

Our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.

Our entire notion of good and bad, our whole landscape of feelings;

Are products of the particular evolutionary history of our species.

Human culture evolves in much the way biological species evolve;

New cultural traits arise and may flourish or perish, and as a result whole institutions and belief systems form and change

We are changing the world for the better;

By living according to our principles in cooperation with others.

Benediction:

For our benediction, I offer the words of M.C. Yogi:

Let's all join together ev'ry woman and man and, lend a hand all across the land,
join in, let's begin, start righta-way, together moving forward to a brighter day.

This invitation is to the nation, it's time to work together for the future generations.

Now is the moment, we're the one we've been waiting for

This is the chance to open up the door to your heart and start to play your part,
shining bright like a light inside the dark,

as we embark and endeavor to make the world better

Let's always remember we're in it together.

Whatever gender, religion, or persuasion, Let's come together and rise to the occasion

Pitchin in all across the land Rollin' up our sleeves and lending a hand,

We can do it!

AMEN

Dears Members and Friends of [UU Detroit](#),

My name is Dan Secrest and I am the chairing the annual pledge drive this year, working with Kathe Stevens. We kicked off the annual pledge drive yesterday, Sunday April 7, at church. Thanks to all of you who submitted your pledge forms already! You can ignore the rest of this message. For those of you who haven't yet submitted a pledge and would consider making one, please read on.

First of all, if you know what you want to do this year, we have a quick and easy [Electronic Pledge Form](#).

If you'd like to know more about the church, including financial details and church priorities, here are some resources:

- [Pledge Brochure and Longer Form \(pdf\)](#)
- Readings and sermon from April 7 pledge drive kickoff: [Getting to Ye\\$ text](#), [Getting to Ye\\$ service audio](#)

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Looking forward to seeing you in church,