

## Q&A With Rev Peter Morales

Rev Peter Morales

*18 April 2015*

### **Margie Manning:**

Welcome. During Orlando meeting 5 years ago, districts discovered common interests. Rev Morales discussed creating new relationships, stronger connections with each other. Glad Rev Morales able to join us today.

### **Rev Peter Morales:**

#### **(Scott's Notes)**

Welcome to people in other locations. I don't like regionalization. I love what you're doing. I recognize that regionalization sounds cold, technical, government like. Doesn't capture what is happening, which is a rethinking of what is happening. Do the structures that served us for a long time still make sense? What UUs are proud of is not clinging to past, but asking "is there a better way?"

For me, this is about connections, re-imagining what is possible together. I want to praise the people in this region for being the pioneers. This is overtaking the country. You are leaders. This region growing more than other regions. You are rethinking what our covenant really means, how we support each other together and share resources to build the larger movement.

WRT annual program fund, GIFT program here in the south. Thank you for being pioneers and recognizing that while the program was done in careful conversation with other leaders, we have been surprised by the results.

Going back a few weeks, we were discussing this. I had assumed certain things that I should have asked. If we had prototyped this, maybe we should have looked in more depth, made transition smoother. Affects how the annual program fund will be restructured across association going forward. We wanted something that was fair and simple. Hard to do both at once. Sometimes fair is complicated. Real simple tends not to be fair. Having to look at balancing these two values; we thought it would be a little easier than it has been.

Q: Peter C from Bluffton, SC: What is the importance of the Orlando Platform?

PM: Important as a religious statement of how core values play out. My first involvement at staff level was with Director of District Services. If a consultant had looked at existing structure, would have recognized it as cumbersome. It is time to change, good that we're thinking past that arrangement.

Another piece we should lift up is how much effort by dedicated UUs required to maintain mechanics of governance, budgeting at district level, back and forth with UUA. Not a good use of time or energy. They

would have found it more rewarding to be involved in other types of leadership and ministry. Asking people to do things that are not rewarding, fulfilling, effective.

Q: Lisa Cromar (BBUUC): How are the changes around what we're doing consistent with congregational polity and democratic process?

PM: Completely consistent. No difference from perspective of someone who has been a parish minister. Does not impact independence. Affects relationship side that has been ignored, that has held us back as a movement. We can grow together in a way that we could not individually. No problem/conflict with congregational polity.

WRT democratic process: Let's say there is a significant issue, Board studies, deliberates on issue, comes up with what they think is the best issue, vs having a meeting discuss for 15 minutes and vote on it. The former is more democratic. Democracy more than just debate and vote. The latter example is more the form of democracy than the realization of it.

Important that everyone has a voice in the process.

Q: In 2017, our GA will be in New Orleans. What is your vision for GA 2017?

PM: More than 2 years away. Thinking is that it is a natural venue for discussing justice. Including Global Warming, race, social justice. Earliest discussions involve focusing on those issues. Enough things on the ground there to make it real, not abstract. But things happen that we don't anticipate.

Q: Anita Lee from Richmond VA: Need to support congregations that are becoming anti-racist. Will UUA bring back Jubilee 2.

PM: A lot of available programs. That is good, because different congregations in different places developmentally. There is a UU pattern of thinking that a workshop is always the best response to an issue. While they have their place. Around issues of justice, there is a lot to be said for things that are experiential rather than cognitive. Happy to see things like the College of Social Justice. Important for ministers in training to have those sorts of experiences, because they will affect them for the rest of their lives.

I have been guilty of seeing glass half full, but important to reflect on successes we have had. When we started program to train people of color, not much involvement. Now 70-80 people, had to change the way we structured our meetings to accommodate the larger group.

Now seeing people of color being settled in prominent congregations. This is a huge step forward. A decade ago, hardly any ministers of color serving mid/large congregations.

A while ago, was pulled into a conversation with people from a congregation worried that someone would steal away their great minister, who is a person of color.

Q: In keeping with idea of expanding clusters to those of common interests, what are the best ways to build trust and good relationships among people who may never meet in person?

PM: What I have found in spending a lot of hours per week in talking with people over computer is that this is a changing world. Our habits and technology are changing. Resolution and sound improved, makes conversation more real, easier to maintain relationships than to build them from the beginning. It takes time to build trust in a relationship. Younger generations use technology differently than older ones. Younger people consider it normal in a way I don't for myself. Need to see what is working, make adjustments.

Q: (Scott Cromar, BBUUC) Example of linkage on Region's web site consists of a survey. Assure us that linkage will consist of more than occasional surveys.

PM: Linkage can't replace more in-depth conversations around issues. I'm someone who is very skeptical of surveys. I know enough about surveys to know they are often a superficial way of gathering peoples' response.

Nobody believes that surveys can replace a more in-depth dialog.

Margie: Congregations need to ensure that GA delegates are well-informed, communicate information back to congregation.

PM: As president of UUA, hard to know what UUs think. Social media an indicator, but only one.

Q: What exciting things in store for this year's GA in Portland.

PM: Cornel West an excellent lecturer, great advocate. Dealing with issue of race, marginalization. He is a Beacon Press author, student of work of MLK.

Jim Key, the moderator, has worked hard to shape what the plenary sessions are, make them more relational. One of the things that has frustrated me is seeing the race of people to the pros and cons microphones, everyone says the same things, was that the best use of time? Kudos to Jim Key to try to change the nature of the time at GA.

Q: As a denomination, are we growing, shrinking, standing still? How might we do better?

PM: Number of people affiliated with no religious identity has exploded. Mass migration away from organized religion. True across many denominations. We have stayed about the same over the last decade. Most religious denominations would love those numbers, but I don't. I feel we have an upside potential. Aggregated numbers both true and misleading. We have congregations that are healthy and growing, we have some that are steady, we have some congregations that are in decline. They about offset each other. Average doesn't tell you anything useful. Need to make our congregations more engaging and fulfilling. Need to find better ways to engage with people. They may not be looking for a church, but may be looking for depth in their lives, may be looking at a way to make the world better. These are our people, how do we invite them in? How do we reach out effectively? This is a fabulous opportunity. Much that we could do better. I'm seeing a lot of new opportunities bubbling up.

Q: Anna Bethea, Tallahassee. Many administrative changes needed in a growing congregation, how do we take care of ourselves and our organization as we move towards the future?

PM: Served a congregation that grew rapidly not because of technical changes but because we changed, became a more welcoming congregation. That is a neat thing, we met a lot of great people in the process. Growing a congregation not a traumatic thing, it is a lot of fun. If you focus on people, the growth comes. Focusing on growth doesn't get you there. Growth is a measurement, not a goal.

Q: Mary Alb (Ashville, NC): What is your hope for our association?

PM: I have been privileged to see what UU-ism can become and do. My hope is that more and more of our congregations recognize and grow into that. What we need to do is 1) Get religion, 2) Grow leaders, allow leaders to lead 3) cross borders of class, race, culture. Pay attention to core values.

### (Dani's Notes)

Young people: 20 years ago 1 out of 20, 2000: 1 out of 8 stay no affiliation 12% Today 35%

We have to improve and be excellent at doing congregational life, and simultaneously create more ways to engage.

In order to innovate (they tend to be in business school) they've created innovative scho for 26 ministers and doing webinars

A organization exists as long as it uses the creativity and passion of it's people - we haven't been good at that, we need to be collaborative

Progressives of other religions are more like each other than the conservatives of their own faith-interfaith conversation about spirituality

We're a group of people that don't believe in miracles, we rely on them.

Sustainability of ministry meeting in June

Selma was a watershed moment in UU history-a higher level of commitment to justice because we've seen enough oppression and brutality .

Congregations take are values into the world, and it's a shame that they go invisible

Young Adults: Rethink what we do-explore WITH young people, (not what we think they would like), start with small programs, try a bunch and learn from them.

Balance of speaking down to congregations and up to organization. Peter can't write you an e-mail, but the UUA- what we're trying to do is align our organization to the best practices.

Leadership of UUA are parish experience, but the old age of Boston is no longer factual.

Peter: If I'm remembered for anything I want to be remembered for sustainable partnership

We [congregations] need to ask the question of what can we be together. WHAT can we do together that we cannot do alone. When we do it right, we're a force to be reckoned with.

Lobbying office in Washington has less emphasis - UU office is more effective at the state level. Ask ourselves where is our opportunity

## **Rev Jean Pupke**

(1<sup>st</sup> UU of Richmond)

### **(Scott's Notes)**

I've not been told what to say or how to say it. When I have something to say, I say what I think. You ordained me, now I can say what I think. Such freedom has its advantages. I am rooted in, committed to this faith. Necessary to be truly free to follow our religion. We live in a supportive community where important, essential things are always able to be freely discussed and considered. We believe deeply that we are accountable, responsible to believe that what we do with life makes things better. This is the need for human religious community.

I grew up in religious faith (Catholicism) with long history. Did good work, but there was a lack of freedom. When you show a doubt, you discover there is an inside and an outside. Outside for everyone who ever had a question.

The decision whether or not to work differently in our governance structures was made in Orlando when we concluded in 2010 to work differently. Ship already sailed.

At that first meeting, I had a great seat, was only there to help with worship. What I saw was an amazing thing. We went deep because leadership experience brought everyone to a deeper understanding of faith. Our leaders were going to GA, hearing about powerful examples of lay leaders in association. Our questions were less technical, legal than spiritual, religious.

In respective meetings, thought about whether we should be co-employers of UUA staff. Two bosses not a good recipe for success or satisfaction. Having to do the work with volunteers difficult. We didn't know what people in the field were facing. When was the last time a district met to discuss staff development, Discussions about firing staff don't count.

In larger UUA context, staff has goals, accountability.

Let's assume truest measure of a religion is whether it offers meaning. People find their lives positively impacted by faith, community, relationships.

Every day, the IRS awards tax exempt status to a new religion. We have 3650 new religions to choose from. This has not resulted in a deeper, more grounded sense of belonging for young adults, youth.

We've been good at welcoming seekers for generations now. To that we need to add a strong stream of UUs who never left faith. Grew up recognizing that we didn't need to think alike to serve alike. As seekers, cradle Unitarians grow together, learn something about their faith.

Here, I am speaking to true believers. You are the people who help get the work done. I know you even if we haven't met. You, the dedicated, are gathered, and you know it is not the UU church from any of the other regions. This is the South, where people ask where you go to church. Not a question you get asked elsewhere. Not about judgment until you answer the question.

We have a faith in a place where people take practice of faith seriously.

Four boards in our capabilities. We could do 8 if we needed to. We are good at reports and charts, but is that what we need? Is that what our faith is asking from us?

Every time I've led a class for newcomers, nobody has ever asked for our strategic plan. Nobody asks about our middle management capacity.

World doesn't need another judging faith. People looking for a place where they can raise the questions they have carried for a long time. Looking for a place to explore Pagan ideas and Hindu scripture. Looking for a place to build children where they can hear things that make sense.

People ask themselves if we are living in kind relationships with each other, are they doing good in the world, am I welcome here?

We work together to move our hearts and minds to a new place. We have our moments.

Need to look at taking back our country. We march for immigrant, racial, lgbtq rights. The gold shirts allow us to seek each other out, work together. That is what we need to be doing. When we don't do it, we neglect the deepest strains of our faith. Neglect liberal religion we've been entrusted with. We need to get passionate about this. Passion tells a story.

We need to think about lost children. Seek out missing people we bridged to college and never wrote to again. Need to ask if we have enough offerings in urban gathering places to gather up the lost.

There is not sharing of information across congregations. When Peter sends a survey, the best list he has is the UU World mailing list, which has one name per household, if that. Need to remind people who are looking for a community that we exist.

Start working on secrecy so that the UUA President in the future can get a representative survey.

We have not always done what makes the most sense. We have sent people to towns further away so that we can have conversations about what congregations should do. Were districts ever the right size to do this work? Should work with other nearby congregations. Clusters part of who we are.

Minister in Norfolk committed suicide, other ministers from cluster stepped in to help, to fill pulpit, to be present. Connections made. Must take cluster work seriously.

In Cambridge Platform, specifies that we should share resources.

In the South, we can share stories better. If people could see the celebration we had on Sunday when new African-American minister fellowshipped, would understand what we have.

In our situation, need to welcome young people back, work in clusters, put emphasis on fact that we cannot go forward unless we become a diverse faith. Should not be an elite faith. Need to get past separation, start living in a different way. Won't happen unless we as dominant culture give it up. Give up ability to run things according to our ease, convenience, comfort.

We have some things going for us. In the South, we know races will always be together. Need more sermons on race. We can make of our faith what it always should be, a place of radical inclusion, in which all people have dignity and worth.

### **(Dani's Notes)**

Deeply committed to faith, all in, so we must be free. Free to believe what we must believe-even if it's different ten years from now

When the doing is done, we want to believe that what we did made a difference, and that is the need for religious institutions.

The decision to change our governance structure has already been made, the ship sailed with the boards decided to govern differently. Because everyone was getting a deeper understanding of our faith.

The truest measure of a faith is that it has something meaningful to offer people. That it (religion) makes them better, that they are different people because they come there.

We've gone wider, but we need to go deeper, and really think about what life is calling us to do.

We need not believe alike to serve alike.

They [New comers] want to come to a place where their children can hear some things that make sense, and have some adult friends.

Is this a place where I am welcome or is this another desert?

Passion tells a story

4 necessities:

First: we need to seek out our lost children, 600thousand people who say they are UU's and 150thousand in seats

Evangelism is not an out proselytizing, but rather sharing who we are, and reminding the people we raised that we are still there and they are still loved.

2nd clusters are the people you can get to in a drive or conference call. We've got to get serious about sharing.

Third-we have to tell our stories, we need to know one another better

Fourth:We must accept that we can not go further unless we can become more diverse .We must give up the right to go forward to just be comfortable.

Our forebearers say: You can take our faith forward to a place of Radical inclusion, to a place of hope and inclusion, where all people are welcome.

## **Board Panel Discussion**

Opportunity to hear from Board about last 5 years.

Al Tweedy (Treasurer): (Only Board member on Board when Orlando Platform written.) Input into writing Orlando Platform one of the highlights of my life. After UU merger, they probably thought that someone would straighten out the organizational issues. Southern Region the first one that really understood where we needed to go. Looking back to Cambridge Platform. At the time, knew we could get started with a few things, then fine-tune. At that conference, made the decision to move towards dissolving the districts themselves.

Kathy (Congregational Life): We talk about relationships, covenants, how we will be together. Throwing out question of relationships, how your thinking has evolved.

Harvey (VP): The more congregations reach out to each other, the more they are able to get issues addressed. As Ft Myers congregation, we have had a supportive relationship with Naples congregation. Several years ago, we had a speaker series we held together, first one place then the other, cut down expense of bringing speaker to the area, beneficial to both congregations. Also joint publicity. Could partner with other congregations in the area. In my experience, we have grown through these interrelationships. Cambridge Platform not specific enough about these relationships. This is how we grow the faith going forward.

Kathy: How are we better together.

Margie (Pres): In my experience, best experiences have come from congregations joining together to make a difference in the world, help people see where we're coming from. Group of congregations marching together for LGBTQ rights makes a powerful impact, makes a difference in St Petersburg. We've mattered because we have shown up in numbers.

Kathy: Being president took faith to a new level.

Margie: I've been blessed for opportunity to work with dedicated UUs from elsewhere. We are more than people who sit in pews together. We may have different ideas about theology and faith. Ability to work together matters. Principles matter.



Kathy: You've crossed borders not just within district, but to other districts as well. Sarah, what has being on board meant to you.

Sarah (acting Secretary): Excited that through elder program, expanding clusters, other people will have same opportunities I've had. Most important reason for regionalization is to look at our relationship with UUA and strengthen that relationship.

Kathy: If we were to vote for governance to go away, you are out of a job. How do you feel about that?

Al: When I came on the Board, we wrote down the ends of the District. They were virtually verbatim the ends of the UUA. Why are we spending money/time to do work already being done by UUA Board. Happy to see that go away.

Margie: Hoping to move into more important opportunity to build connections as Elder. Spiritual rewards to me, and to other people as the work together are exciting.

Harvey: Not about being out of a job, but looking at what is beneficial for UU faith. Want to see faith become more meaningful to broader community.

Kathy: Before business meeting, will take time to hear from Board on whatever else they need to say.

Sarah: Finally time for us to move on, get hands dirty, connect hearts, fix our house so we can go out into world.

Harvey: Agree with what Sarah said. Also, we had a retreat in September 2013. Never believed all the UUs at that gathering could come to an agreement, yet we had four different districts come to same conclusion. Miracle. UUs don't usually agree, usually have individual opinions.

Margie: Finally able to take away structures that keep us from being as effective as we could be.

Al: Let us go forward together.

Kathy: It has been an honor to serve in shared ministry.

### **(Dani's Notes)**

Al Tweedy: writing the Orlando Platform was one of the highlights of my life.

Harvey- the more congregations reach out to one another, more issues are addressed.

We're better together

### **Business Meeting**

Margie Manning: Call meeting to order. Harvey (Board VP) to light chalice.

Sarah: We have 59 delegates, so we have a quorum.

Margie: Call attention to covenant of business rules in handout. When you speak, state your name and congregation so they can be recorded accurately. Please speak up.

Margie: Acceptance of 2014 minutes. Moved, seconded. Corrections? Approved.

Leadership reports: Similar to published, what was discussed in panel discussion.

Story began in Orlando in 2010, Orlando Platform. I became involved in 2012 when elected to Board. I see committed people in other Board members. We become stronger as we build relationships.

Maggie: Not going over whole report, but will call out some specific items. Report introduces congregational life staff. At President's Convocation, inviting presidents elect, presidents and past presidents, 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend in July. Details on web site.

Leadership experience workshops our deep leadership training. Five-day experience in Texas or the Mountain. Intentional, covenanted community leadership training. Long day. Nominating process open. Presidents and ministers will get that information. Need at least two people to come as a team. This is a repetitive process, bring more people in. Want people who have been to gather together, find out what we are doing with the information. The more leaders we send, the more excitement gets built.

A lot going on in Southern Region, try to make sure we have events that are accessible by driving, not just flying.

Rev Kenn Hurto had statement in report. We are a bold people. We have, can and will continue to stand on the side of love.

Margie: Why are we voting on district board members if we are voting on dissolving board? Existing Board dissolves tomorrow morning. Still need Board members to carry out steps to dissolve.

Moving into action items.

Al Tweedy: Budget for coming year. Sent in electronic copy. A few items to call out. This year the first time we have melded different budgets together. Seems to be working well. Almost half of the budget is still individual district money. Reason is that donated money does not disappear, eg Chalice Lighter funds. Passed funds to most appropriate fund going forward, trying to match intent to expenditure. No person in the background printing money to run the Region. If there is a shortfall, it is because it was based on GIFT giving. If fair amount not given, the budget will be short by that amount. Next year, unless the program meets expectation, may expect to see some curtailing of expenses.

Question period:

Sue Boone from Clearwater: Why are technical services being reduced when discussed as being necessary?

Margie: Able to find cost savings as a result of consolidation. Instead of doing some of these services locally, able to access UUA resources.

Charlie West from St Augustine: What percentage used for GIFT? 7% or less?

Margie: Congregations asked to give 7% of operating budget as GIFT. In previous years, congregations could give 5, 6 or 7%. This year, can give 6%, 7% required to be honor congregation.

Charlie: If all congregations do not give at 7%, will services be cut.

Margie: We know some congregations moving toward 7%.

Charlie: So cutback inevitable.

Margie: As with personal budgets, we can't spend more than we take in.

Al: We have to pick a number, and that is what we use to set the budget.

Dom Roberts (West Melbourne): How do you explain a zero budget for insurance.

Margie: As part of covenant of understanding with UUA. One of the efficiencies we get.

(All Faiths): We work on different fiscal year, had trouble figuring out contribution. Which months covered?

Al: Give for relevant months.

Margie: Get in touch with Congregational Life resources. Any additional questions? Budget passes. Two abstentions.

Margie: Under Elder system devised by system, will have an initial Council of Elders. Harvey to make nominations.

Harvey: Nominate Margie Manning and Sarah Ritzmann as nominees to Elder Council.

Margie: Open to questions, comments. Passes, two abstentions.

Jeremy: On behalf of Leadership Council, nominating Board. Opening floor for discussion. No discussion. Passes.

Jeremy: Bylaw waiver request. If regionalization fails, Board ability to fill necessary positions on Leadership Development Committee. Proposed for vote, one opposed, one abstention.

Margie: Appreciate Jeremy's efforts on Leadership Development Committee.

Al: Move for dissolution of District (read from report)

Harvey: Perfecting motion to change "District or merge" to "District and merge"

Margie: Open microphone for comments.

Dani: Clarification: In the information in the report to resolve, refers to the fact that the Florida Board will take as long as it takes. How long is it anticipated to take?

Margie: Expect done by June 30.

John (UUSDA): Why is covenant of understanding not in the motion.

Margie: Has been signed by District Presidents and key people from UUA. Encourage you to look at the web site.

Sharon (All Faiths): "Related entities?"

Margie: As our Boards move forward with our paperwork, trying to keep options open, spelling out our intent and asking delegates to trust us to live up to intent.

Don: Reference to changing governance? Can we still reference Florida District in a religious sense, not just governance?

Margie: Ability to gather together not going away, may become more frequent.

Motion to vote. 55 aye. 3 abstentions. Vote to dissolve has passed.

Sarah (District awards): Linda Crawford: Best Sermon: "UU's in the Bible Belt, What do we Do with our anger?"

Margie: Want to recognize service, will call names of everyone who has served on Board during that time span.

Installation of Board Members.