

Florida District Assembly Worship Service

17 April 2015

Rev Schmitz

In Ways that are Yet to be Known

We can't tell children what to do in any particular circumstance because we can't possibly know the circumstances or what facts will be offered to them or what compassion will be required of them. Our forbearers knew this when they covenanted to walk together as well as they could and learn in the days to come. They could not know all that would be offered to our consideration, but they had faith in a future of liberal religion, a perspective that teaches us to turn our hearts to the needs of our day. They knew there was something so strong that it would continue to grow in us as the world changes in ways yet to be known.

We are looking at a possible change this weekend. Trying to set up those who come after us, not to answer all questions. Inside each of us is a seed of strength, love, freedom that is ours to nurture so we can nurture possibilities of a peaceful and just future of all life on Earth.

Rev Peter Morales

Will start by telling you about some things happening in the Association.

I sometimes describe myself as recovering social scientist. A lot of change in how people see religious affiliation. When I went to college, vast majority claimed a religious affiliation, 1/20 say "none." Then went to 12%, now 35%. Largest single religion is "none." We are witnessing a mass migration out of traditional religious organizations. Culture moving towards acceptance, celebration of diversity, rejecting claims of unique access to truth. A lot of people who value things valued by UUs, but when they think of religion, they think of something very different.

As an association, need to become excellent at congregational life. Will continue to be a vital place for congregations as we know them, need to also provide new ways for people to engage with us. We can't just be a refugee center from orthodox religion. We have a number of headwinds not before seen by UUs, but we also have opportunities never before seen. We're trying to balance these imperatives. We have to improve and be excellent at doing congregational life, and simultaneously create more ways to engage.

As part of improving/creating, entrepreneurial ministry, noticed people with a talent for innovation coming from business schools. Right now, we have 26 ministers learning about innovation and how to be successful in that. Seminaries don't currently train new ministers in that. We are trying to spread this mindset out throughout the rest of the country. This is something that has tremendous potential. Organizations succeed to the extent they use energy, creativity, passion of people. Need to channel energy and creativity. When we do it well, we thrive.

You are involved in a lot of interfaith stuff. We tend to gather around public policy and social issues and cooperate on those issues. Any religious tradition has a spectrum between most liberal and most conservative members. Most liberal members are closer to each other than to reactionary members of own tradition. What we have never done is reach out spiritually, religiously to each other. How do we come together around these shared values and attitudes? We're open to the teaching of science, emphasis on this life. How do we engage with these other people? Not sure what the future holds, needs to emerge through dialog.

A few things that have happened in ministry: Headline with respect to recruitment is that we rely on miracles rather than identifying and nurturing and recruiting most promising individuals. Expect the miracle of a call to happen all by itself. These happen, but need to be nurtured. This year, summer seminary for high school students who have been identified. Students very engaged with our faith. In June, coming together with respect to sustainability around ministry. Looking at new models of ministry.

At Selma, a fascinating, watershed event in UU history. An engagement that began a different level of commitment. Observed a re-dedication among people who came to anniversary event at Selma. We have seen a lot of instances of brutality and repression with respect to race.

All of this only happens because people support our association. Can only do so thanks to generosity of our congregations.

Question:

Jeremy R from BBUUC: Millennials not coming back to church after they leave home. Not a lot of resources for congregations seeing youth off to college, and that is where we lose them. Not a lot of resources for congregations to take ownership of that. Don't have staff in YAYA to build young adult inclusion.

PM: This is an area where we need to re-think what we do. Previously thought about campus ministry. But how many colleges are there in the US? Would take more people than we have in ministry. Not practical. Need to explore (with young people) through an iterative process to try different things, and adjust based on the results. Technology makes it possible for people to communicate in ways that were not possible before. Faith fed by face-to-face plus other things. Will never see the resources to put out dozens and dozens of ministers to campus ministry. Instead need to ask what people are doing that is working, and how do we support that. Need to involve young people in development and testing of this, since I do not know how to do this. 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.

Scott C from BBUUC: Where is the right balance between congregation-> UUA and UUA->congregation communication?

PM: Hard to describe, no checklist. I can't send an email to our full membership. Drives me crazy that I can't send an email to our membership to tell people about the wonderful things that are happening.

One of the things that we are doing around regionalization, are trying to align our organization, focus on things that really matter. Trying to break down arbitrary differences between field staff and hq staff. Need to work at mechanisms to get feedback. Linkage work. Need more than a few ways to do this; great believer in seeking out a lot of mechanisms.

I read something that upset me on the web. Someone complaining about New England bias by “HQ people.” I thought of Colorado as going “back east.” One of the places most represented is Texas. This is a vision of the UUA that has not existed for a long time. We’re not a bunch of Boston Brahmins. These images have a half-life of 150 years.

We need to hear from you when things are out of balance.

Q: (Church in the Pines) Compliment, case study of iterative work. Involved with Commit2Respond. Very impressed with ability of UUA and other organizations to help define a denominational-wide campaign via an iterative process. We’re not real sure what the next phase of the campaign will be, but climate justice issues not going away.

PM: One of several things that are happening. If you look at the things we are doing that work well, they involve partnerships that were not previously there. Hope my term will be remembered for creating partnerships. Now there is a level of cooperation/collaboration that did not exist previously. Looking to build relationships with faith groups to reach religiously homeless. If UUs use idealism and compassion.

This is about building real relationships through collaboration. I came into ministry in 1999. One of the people there had connection to Columbine. There was a mass rally about guns. Met at church parking lot to carpool. Our congregation had its banner, ran into other UU organizations at rally. We could have been a real presence if we had collaborated. Yellow shirts give us more visibility. Congregations need to learn to ask the question about what is possible for us to do together that we can’t do alone? If we start to ask that question, we’ll start to see possibilities. When we cut ourselves off, we limit our potential impact. No possibility of an all powerful HQ. Not enough resources, and nobody would listen. But we can help empower.

Q North Volusia: We got a notice about the elder program, were trying to figure out what it meant for us and the larger community.

PM: Not familiar.

Q (Ft Myers): What is UUA doing to lobby legislatures?

PM: We’ve had an office in Washington, coordinate lobbying effort with other religious organizations. We’re finding we’re more effective at state/local than national level. Seeing states bucking national trend with marriage equality.

Where is the opportunity? Often at state/local level. We coordinate with state organizations.

Q: (Venice): President of board of UU Justice Florida. When Washington office diminished, gave us at state level a chance to work on national issues as well. Compliment to Kenn Hurto for starting legislative ministry. Now we are independent organization. He has vision of similar ministry in each other state in region. Hope you will encourage that in other states. Feel this is one of the best ways to energize young people and other UUs. Can envision online meetings to spread impact. Come to workshop tomorrow.

PM: One of the challenges we've had is that districts and state boundaries do not always line up. I've spoken at fundraisers for different legislative ministries.