

Verbatim Transcript UUA Presidential Candidate Forum
General Assembly, Fort Lauderdale
June 28, 2008

Moderators: Paul Rickter, UUA Secretary, and Rev. John Gibbons, Chair, UUA Election Campaign Practices Committee

The mutually agreed format consisted of opening speeches, followed by a selection of questions that were submitted to the committee ahead of time, and closing statements. A coin toss had determined that Rev. Morales would speak first. The speakers then alternated in answering questions.

Opening speech Rev. Peter Morales

I'm running for UUA president because I believe deeply that we are called to be something that's a great deal more than what we are today.

We are called to be more than a tiny, fringe, relatively elite, and sadly declining part of American religious life.

The need for liberal religion in our country right now is just enormous.

There is need at the personal level where hundreds of thousands of people are coming, are longing for authentic religious community, for depth in their lives, for a place where they can join with others to make a difference in the world, where they can have authentic relationships.

And we live in a society with forces of fear and ignorance and greed that lead to hatred and exploitation, marginalization and terrible destruction of the ability of our planet to sustain life. And yet, this need not be the case. We can change this. I am completely convinced that we can change this.

I want to talk about three major issues, and many of you have gotten platforms and I invite you for much more detail to check the website on that. I just want to hit the high spots on three issues that interrelate to each other and that are absolutely vital to us.

The first one is growing our movement. And I believe we need to reframe 'growing our movement'. It's not a nice thing to do, it's not

about numbers, it's a moral imperative, the moral equivalent of housing the homeless, and feeding the hungry because we're talking about people who are spiritually hungry and religiously homeless.

And every thing that we want to do in the world, everything good that we want to do in the world, depends on our growing our movement to be a stronger force.

The second major area has to do with our tradition of public witness and social service and social justice work. And one of the things that I really want to honor Bill Sinkford for the tremendous work he has done to raise our visibility in the world. That has to be and ought to be a foundation for the next president. And if I'm the next president I'll continue and expand that, I'm a former newspaper editor and publisher, I'm comfortable with speaking out. And we also have to make it a lot easier and partner with our local congregations to help them be effective moral beacons in our community.

The third issue that fits in with this is just enormous: We must create a new ministry for a new America. Let me hit you with a couple of statistics that are just shocking. Americans that are 70 years of age and older: three quarters of them are white. Americans 10 years of age and younger: one quarter are white, 3/4 are not white, are Hispanic, African-American, Asian, Pacific-Island, African, and more.

In the next generation we are going to see a historic demographic sea change in America. On top of that we are going to lose half our ministry during the next presidency. Three out of eight of our ministers are 58 years of age or older. You

throw in our regular normal churn that occurs: half of them are gonna been gone, and disproportionately those serving our mid-size and larger churches.

It's a perfect storm - and a fabulous opportunity if we take it.

We need - and if I'm president I'll immediately put together a task force of key people from seminaries, or ministerial associations, people of color - to develop a strategy for ministry for the next generation. Without it we'll be in a terrible crisis.

The fundamental issue for us in this campaign - but it extends way beyond this campaign! - is whether or not we're gonna continue to drift and slowly decline, and add about one person per congregation per year, which does not keep up with the growth of the population - or whether we will seize an opportunity to make some changes, to make us a vital force in American religious life and in the lives of hundreds of thousands of more people.

We can be, we really can be the religion for our time, and I ask for your support becoming that. Thank you.

(Rev. Morales spoke without notes)

Opening Speech Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman

"To build a church that shall be free!"

We sing it, we celebrate it in our affirmations and covenants: the free church, a home for the free spirit in which we can live and move and have our being.

In Dallas, people often come to our church and weep, because their hearts and minds and spirits have been starved for our liberating message. They tell us they thought they were crazy until they found our church. In towns and cities and homes and store fronts all across our nation we gather, quite simply to be a support to one another, and more deeply to touch the heart and to remind again, be reminded again of what Mary Oliver calls *"our place in the family of things"*.

I stand before you today because I believe that our task remains always new and always eternal: to build the church that shall be free. We sang it at merger, it's what we said we would do together. Assuming we meant it then and aspire to it even today, it will require - and incidentally, this is what we tell new members - it will require that we each find our own center of strength, that would be a regular spiritual practice. That we each are present in church or in our congregational life, that we become part of what goes on in our congregations. That we live in the expectation that we will be changed, because we will be changed if we engage ourselves in our

congregations and in our associational life. That we will embody the spirit of generosity - and that doesn't mean the rich, it means everybody with open heart and open mind and allowing the other space to exist (and maybe it means a little bit about money), that we will find ways to serve others.

This is what we expect of our new members, that they will engage seriously in service, in opportunities that we provide at the church and in the larger community.

I stand before you tonight because I know there is a liberating power, which can be awakened in a 22 year old young adult raised as a fundamentalist Christian.

A power, which in a simple signing of a membership book in a Unitarian Universalist church bound her to truths she had yet to even imagine. A power of heart and mind, which caused her to realize she didn't want to marry a minister, she wanted to be one.

A power, which said, she had a voice when she had never even heard it take form.

A power, which helped her stay steady through all the usual difficulties and blessings of a long ministry.

A power embodied in the people who blessed her life and liberated her from fear of that fundamentalist upbringing.

In this I speak of my own liberation, and also of the power of the free spirit to bind all our hearts to love, our hands to service, and our minds to truth. It is this power that brings me here tonight in this place before you. I will be a president first in the skills and values, which will make our faith vital and effective in the new world before us. I will be a president of deep and abiding faith in that free spirit to liberate even us from the ways we sometimes make our faith too small.

When I am president I will remember that 22 year old woman who was lost until she found our faith with its liberating word, and its call to justice, and hope. I won't forget the young people who come to us now, needing that same liberating word. I will remember the voice on a call-in radio show from a small rural town in Texas, of a man who tentatively asked me if we were really a church where a gay man would be welcome. He said it in total disbelief.

I won't forget those who still need to hear of our bold welcome.

I will remember the African-American woman who always made a habit of reading the entry in the encyclopedia before and after anything that she looked up, and found the entry on Unitarian Universalism that way. As she drove toward our church the next Sunday she became increasingly anxious about our location. She said to herself if these people are who they say they are - in the encyclopedia - it will be all right. She has been an active member of our congregation now for 20 years. I won't forget all the others who haven't found us yet, and I will make sure it's all right when they come.

I bring with me to the presidency of the UUA the lives of the people, the hopes of generations, the hard work of building free congregations along with great hopes and expectations for our future. I ask you to elect me as your president and then commit yourselves as I am committed to reclaim

the tradition which liberated us and blessed our lives and to recommit ourselves to the many people who still need our saving message: the people living lives of quiet desperation in our midst, the children who need our wise teachings as they grow, and the cause of liberation where ever the structures of society bind the mind, the body, and the hearts of people everywhere - they need us, and they need us desperately.

The last stanza of the hymn we sang at merger proclaims:

“Prophetic church, the future waits your liberating ministry, go forward in the power of love, proclaim the truth that makes us free.”

As the senior minister of one of our largest churches, one which has doubled its membership, doubled its religious education programming and raised our budget almost ten times what it was when I began, I bring experience and institutional know-how to help us be agile and responsible and responsive and prudent as an association.

At the same time I bring a lifetime of spiritual work. Some of you are familiar with 'Living by Heart' practice, which I learned from my mentor, Harry Scholefield. Harry used the memorization of poetry and prose as a mantra for his spiritual practice and nourishment for his soul. I know we are a people who seek religious depth and have found this to be a vehicle for that depth, which goes beyond the usual theological categories which sometimes trip us up.

As your president I will wed my expectations of leadership with spiritual depth so that as we live in the world we can live so effectively and also as faithful agents and courageous, transformative agents in the world. The future is in our liberating ministry, I am fully prepared to lead the UUA as we move into that future together.

(Rev. Hallman read her manuscript.)

Question One:

What would be your top priorities as you begin your administration, and looking back in four or eight years, what would constitute a successful presidency?

Rev. Peter Morales: (first speaker)

Everything that we want to do, as I said, depends on our ability to grow our movement, and so that is the one great measure. And sadly, everything that we've tried in the last generation has not been effective. And yet I have seen in my own congregation and dozens of others who have grown very rapidly (we are one of the rapid growing congregations) that real practical stuff can transform a congregation and make it different.

What we need to do as a movement is to partner with our congregations - because we will only grow when hundreds of our congregations grow - what we need to do is to unleash the commitment, the idealism of the people that are already in our congregations.

And as I said the other enormous thing by the time four or 8 years goes by we will have a plan and be implementing that plan to ensure that there are dynamic, thoughtful and diverse religious leaders for the new America that we are living into. [applause].

Rev. Dr Laurel Hallman:

I hope you take this in the seriousness with which I say it: My highest priority is to convince the people of the congregations that they need to focus on the nursery and that they need to focus on their young people the first year out of high school. Now, let me, let me talk about that. I have one grand daughter who at the time she came to visit me - along with her parents - she came to church, I wanted to introduce them in church and so I asked them to come with me into the church with her so that people would realize I hadn't really made them up, and so they did, and I said: "And if she is fussy and you need to take her out just take her over to the nursery. And my daughter in-law looked at me like I'd said "Throw her out on Preston Road!", I mean, she was just stunned. And of course, I introduced them, it was lovely and then in time she became fussy and her mother took her out. And she went to nursery and came back to the service at the end of the service and said: "You have a fabulous nursery". And when she said it she held our silent beeper that we give to parents who leave their babies in the nursery. It was kind of an umbilical cord to the nursery and I think it was this that meant we had that marvelous nursery. If she were not living in another city, if she were an example of a mother bringing their child perhaps for the first time, maybe the first time away from them as she went to the service - this is one way to have them come back. It means we understand the bond and we want to take care of it. The nursery is crucial and of course, now it also means all kinds of things: about safe places, about clean places, about taking care of what we have and cherishing our youngest. So my highest priority - and I'm not being facetious - is the nurseries on our congregations. And then going along with that is the first year out of high school. I know Lyle Schaller who is a consultant to religion, to congregations, says that this is one of the most important factors in the growth of the Mormon church, their young people go out into an act of service for two years that reengages or engages the young people and their parents are paying for it which reengages the parents at a time that they would leave. It brings them back into the church for a new chapter in their lives, and it's crucial. I've got lots of other priorities but that will be for starters.

Question Two:

**What is your strategy for growing Unitarian Universalism, and:
Do you have an elevator speech?**

Rev. Peter Morales:

I've been working on growth issues since I entered seminary and since my good friend Don Southworth and I taught a course at Starr King on Evangelism and the Liberal Faith. I've done workshops all over the country, the first UU University, many of you have seen the DVD, the "Ideas for Growth", that's from my congregation, many of you have also seen the recent thing that came out of Louisville, the "Listening to Experience" DVD that gathered twelve ministers from our fastest growing churches, I was one of those, and I was the one who proposed that meeting. So I have not only served a congregation that has about a little less than doubled in nine years, but have been involved at the national level on practical, low cost, realistic growth initiatives for a decade. And from that and from the studying of congregations that grow I know that growth is really a matter - I use the phrase: - "of repelling fewer visitors". [laughter]

Because the truth is that we get a quarter of a million visitors a year. And too often people come to our congregations looking for the bread of life and are given a stone: something cold, and offish, and aloof. I've done this shtick before: How many of you - you're all active UUs - how many of you have visited other UU churches? Raise your hand if you've visited other churches [audience: all hands go up] - and keep your hands up if you've been ignored at another UU church. [from the web cast video angle: most hands stay up]. The prosecution, your Honor, rests.

[laughter]

People come to us out of a kind of tribal need, not to find out whether they agree with us, they already know, they have web access, they've read sermons, they've been to websites, they've gone to beliefnet. They come to us to find out: Are these my people? Is there a place for me here? And we have not done a very good job of making people feel like this is their home. That's where we need to focus. One congregation at a time, one visitor at a time, one relationship at a time.

My elevator speech is pretty short. I tell people that: **I believe** - and actually if you look at the history of religion: it's true - **that religion is much less about what we think than about what we love. And we are a group of people who loves life, who believes in compassion for one another, who believes in human dignity, who believes in peace and compassion. And if you believe in that, we have the same religion.** [applause]

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman: (first speaker)

We have a new minister on our staff, Xolani Kacela, and the other day we were waiting to go into the service and he said: What's an elevator speech? He's come over from the Methodist Church and he says: "What's an elevator speech? I've got to give an elevator speech to the 7th graders and I don't know what an elevator speech is." Ah, yes, I have one, and I'll start with it because I think it captures several things in a small bit of time:

We're a church that was founded - at least in America - along with the freedoms of our government. We believe that no Pope should tell us what we should believe and no Rabbi or minister of priest should stand between us and our relationship with God. It's unmediated. It's a free church. Now, their definitions of what makes it free have expanded dramatically since those early years but those founders of the democracy of our country and also of our free faith were able to put in place a structure that could contain much more than they could even imagine.

Now, just as a matter of commentary, of ministerial commentary, it helps people connect with our country and with something they know and it aligns us with that in a way that is helpful and they can relate to even though it also expands the definition. So, I found that to be a helpful elevator speech.

And now I shall talk about strategies for growth in the next, what, five seconds... one minute?

I think you can tell from what I said in my opening remarks, and I believe what has created the growth in Dallas, is the fact that we are a religious home, we are a people of faith, we are a people who take very seriously our call to ministry in the world as professional ministers and as lay ministers. We will, we take that all very seriously, we invite people to come back to make sure that we are taking it as seriously as we mean it, that I believe is at the core of our growth.

Question Three:

Tell us your understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of policy governance [audience laughs] and how you understand the relationship between the president and the board of trustees -- in three minutes! [more applause and laughter]

Rev. Peter Morales: (first speaker)

I suspect there are people out here who are not familiar with policy governance, so very briefly.

Policy Governance is a style of governance that tries to, seeks to focus any organization on its ends, on what its mission really is, to be very clear about the difference between what the board's role is - which is to set those ends - and the difference between staff and board, and to insist on clear accountability toward those ends.

While the church I serve doesn't do formal policy governance it's something very close to it; I've called it 'Policy Governance Lite', because I think we've got 90 percent of the benefit with a fraction of the work of writing all of these statements. But I'm comfortable with that, in fact I have worked in organizations outside of churches all my life, where there were very clear goals, very clear roles and accountability, and I'm very comfortable in that.

The job of the president is to - I really don't believe, by the way, that there are significant differences among any of us on our goals. I don't think there are powerful factions within our movement who want to shrink the movement and who want to be irrelevant! [audience laughter]

So the issue isn't the ends, the issue is about being effective, and moving forward, and being clear, and having real accountability in moving toward those ends. I'm very comfortable with that.

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman:

Here are the questions that are asked in Policy Governance: What are we doing - I think they are spiritual questions, they seem like organizational questions but I think they're deep - What are we doing? For whom? To what end? At what cost? What are we doing? For whom? To what end? At what cost?

If we could get clear as we plan our programs, as we do our strategic planning, as we choose among limited resources, they are always limited - if we could get clear about those statements, there would be no stopping us, there would be absolutely no stopping us.

In my first parish I was on the Planned Parenthood board, it was in Bloomington, Indiana and the people, I suppose it came out of the city council department, some organization, had a fund for training people who were on boards in non-profits and so I was on the board of Planned Parenthood and I thought I would go to one of these workshops and I went and it turned out to be John Carver. And John Carver lived in Valparaiso, Indiana and was just starting out with his work on Policy Governance and he wrote pretty much the first book on Policy Governance. And I took that back to the church realizing that he had not yet developed it - I asked him and he said he had not done it at all with any churches, but took it back with me to the church, believing that my life had been transformed, because my role up to then: I had been persuasive, I'd go to the membership committee and I'd kinda hope that they would do what I wanted them to do but if they didn't I think then maybe we'll try next year. And then I'd go over to Finance and I'd say: Let's try this! and we would try it but not too well and effectively and so we'd say, let's do it next year. And there was this sort of role of persuasion that ministers often have and often use ineffectively. And all of a sudden I realized that the board has a very specific role to set policy, to answer these questions, to help in the process of long range planning, to ensure that the institution is accountable to the laws of the land, to the will of the people and to the spirit of our faith. And if the board can do that, then the minister or the minister and his or her staff can implement those policies. So it is one line from the board to the minister or the president. It's very, very clear in my mind, and my ministry, both in Bloomington, Indiana and in Dallas, Texas, has been transformed by this seemingly mundane or cumbersome process. It's been transformed. And the more we've known how we were to be doing our business together, the more effective we've been.

Question 4

**On the topic of anti-racism and anti-oppression:
What experiences have you had that help you deeply understand the mindset and
values of another culture?
Are there practical things you will do to help congregations take authentic
steps of transformation?**

Rev. Peter Morales:

Nací en San Antonio. Hablé español antes de aprender inglés.

I was born in San Antonio and I spoke Spanish before I learned to speak English, and in fact the first sermon I delivered was in Spanish. So I'm still trying to make my way in a foreign culture [laughter] and it's a challenge, sometimes.

My entire life has been lived crossing the boundary of one culture to another, and I think that inevitably gives me a sensitivity to what's involved, especially with people from minority groups because virtually everyone in our congregations, whether they be Latinos, or African American or Asian - especially actually so many of our Anglo white congregants - share that experience of moving out of one culture, being somewhat marginalized in it, moving into another one that is strange. Because we live in an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic world our learning to do this better and better is essential.

There are several things that we need to do. We need to pay attention to the development of ministers of color, to the nurturing of children of different ethnic backgrounds in our congregations the way a high tech company pays attention to research and development. It is absolutely essential to our future. To that end I've been involved in the steering committee of the Latino UU Networking Association.

I was the first minister to serve on the UUMA's executive committee, the first one to hold the anti-racism, anti-oppression, multi-culturalism portfolio, I have worked with the UUSC and have helped lead journeys, *Just Journeys* to Chiapas and to Guatemala, and I'm proud to say that my congregation now has followed up on that, we've had several groups from our congregation [visiting], we are helping to support children of survivors of the horrible massacres that occurred there.

There is no substitute, as we move forward, for the experiential. I think we do perhaps too much highly cognitive abstract training and not enough allowing people to actually experience a different perspective and a different culture and we need to nurture that in our movement. Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman: (first speaker)

I think one of the primary experiences of experiencing another culture is marriage. That aside, I will move on... [laughter]

My work with anti-racism, anti-oppression, multi-cultural work began years ago when the Crossroads Program was first initiated as a program of the UUA and at that point I had other cross cultural experiences. I had traveled, I had been places, but this was to first time to really engage seriously and not be... I don't think I was a tourist when I went to Japan for example and spent time in the Tsubaki Grand Shrine in Rissho Kosei Kai, or to Transylvania to visit our Unitarian brothers and sisters there. I was more than a tourist but it wasn't a long term deep engagement that we have promised one another in our faith.

So I would answer the question to say that my real experience began back when we were beginning to work with Crossroads, continuing 'til today, 'til this day and of course this day forward. What will I do? Well, there are some good initiatives going forward, I believe the initiative to help churches with ministers of color who can be aligned with various churches, to be available to churches and to help them in ministries is very very crucial.

I will just briefly tell you that when I was coming out, very briefly tell you that when I was coming out of theological school the Women In Ministry Project was helping church committees with interviewing women and helping them ask the difficult questions or the puzzling questions before the interview. And I interviewed in three congregations, the one congregation that had had the training was absolutely categorically different in the quality of the interview that it gave me and it was the church that I went to.

So I'm absolutely committed to these kinds of things that intervene at very important places for our ministry, for our lay leadership, for our youth, to help us where we might be afraid, where we might be coming with some fear to the table, where all of us might be coming with fear to the table, or there is a special transition that we need to pay attention to.

Question 5:

President Sinkford and the Board have taken steps to focus the work of the UUA on congregations and there has been a simultaneous reduction in the number of independent affiliates.

What are your thoughts on these changes?

Rev. Peter Morales: (first speaker)

One is tempted to say: Not my table, hon, but I suppose that won't do. [laughter]. Boy, that's a complicated issue.

First of all I want to be very clear that this - as Bill [Sinkford] said a few days ago to the ministers - that is a Board decision and a Board policy. So, obviously, people are feeling very strongly about this, because I had a parade of people coming by our booth in the display area to talk about this.

I think we need to find - and I hope the Board does - some vehicle for channeling the enthusiasm of these groups and giving them legitimacy and participation, while I am also sympathetic - having been on the Board of Trustees - that the board doesn't want to take on what is essentially an administrative function of certifying and recertifying an enormous number of small groups, trying to see if they are in fact still viable. I'm sympathetic to that perspective from the board.

But then, the other piece, it seems, has not been done. It can't just be left in limbo, it has to be assigned somewhere, someone has to take it up. Because we can't have that kind of - no one wins when there is this kind of alienation among groups that are part of us, and we are part of them.

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman:

The motivation, I believe, was many-faceted, one part of it had to do with this General Assembly, or General Assembly is what I mean and that was that there were no workshops available to congregations. If I had a workshop on Spiritual Practice I would have to go to a district or to an affiliated group and beg and borrow their workshop slots, so that I could do something that was representative of a congregation and so it seemed like I think to the board there was an imbalance in an association of free congregations and the resources available to them and the resources available to affiliated groups.

It's the same in our churches: We have at our church affiliated groups that have a connection to the church, but they are not a program of the church. It has some stickiness to it, it really does. So I understand the complexity of the issue.

I would like to say though that each time in my experience that a decision that affects people who are committed and are very much a part of our family, each time a decision that affects people is made it needs to be implemented in ways that take into account the people that are involved with alternative possibilities for the ways that they can do programming, with alternative ways to find other venues for what they're doing.

Now I will say out of fairness that the board has now made new criteria for affiliated groups and has brought in some groups into the back one at a time, and some of the criteria are that they have a lot of lateral relationships across congregations and I believe that that's a good thing to have a redefining of what we are expecting from the groups that are affiliated and that have access to our resources, I think that's a very good thing. It's in the implementation. I know that people felt cast out. Very devoted UUs who were doing very - and continue to do very good work - felt cast out and in some cases that may be just the way it is but in terms of implementing those decisions and other decisions that've come along our way recently that perhaps taking a longer view might help for that to be done with less stress.

Question 6:

**What are your thoughts on youth ministry and young adult ministry?
Are there actions you would take regarding these ministries within the UUA?**

Rev. Peter Morales:

I, too, have had chances to meet with the YRUU steering committee and the young adults and I find it troubling, even disturbing, because they are not happy with our association, and they have not been engaged with in a way, have not perceived that it's a partnership where their judgment is felt to be thoughtful and valid and needs to be taken into account. We need to find ways of engaging our youth that involve them in the planning, in the design, in the vetting of whatever programs we're going to do. We have not done, obviously, a good job of that, of getting them in the boat on that.

There is a larger philosophical and vision element here. All of us, I believe, desire to truly live in a multi-generational community. And it's something that our modern American - and especially, yes, the white part of modern America finds very difficult to do. And we need to thoughtfully and patiently look for ways to engage our youth and one of the key areas is: I don't think we do nearly enough to engage the natural energy and idealism that there is in that time of life in ways that involve them in our congregations, in partnerships, and in service, in real service in the world.

So I dream of and work hard in partnership with our youth to have things that are meaningful to them, to design relationships that are meaningful to them and also not to treat them as consumers, but as participants and engage that wonderful idealism that is part of that period in our lives.

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman: (first speaker)

Every day this week the answer to this question has changed in some ways. I've had the privilege of meeting with the young adults and meeting with a group, the YRUU steering committee. I believe that our ministries to youth and young adults are absolutely crucial. I hope you got that from my opening remarks. That is the time in my life, and I won't ask for a show of hands but I'm sure in many, many of your lives, whether lifelong UUs or whether coming in from some other faith: that is the place where you made your transformation, that is where you either left the church of your birth or you reclaimed the free church that you were raised in.

I think that the UUA has to very carefully examine how we provide resources to our young people and to our young adults. It's not easy and to find an equitable way - it follows right on the heels of the previous question - to find an equitable way to use the resources of the UUA which I hasten to remind you is us! - to use the resources of the UUA to help programming in congregations and at the same time provide lateral experiences so that UU youth can come together, especially if they are in remote places.

We need to find a balance of the resources and to do it in a very clear way with plans for the next step and the next step and the next step so that we don't again have people feeling cast out.

Question 7:

What is the value of international work in the future of Unitarian Universalism?

Rev. Peter Morales: (first speaker)

There is a tension in this in that on one level there is broad agreement that it's artificial for a faith like ours that is accepting of different traditions, that is open, that looks to the inherent dignity and worth of all people, that it's very artificial for that to stop at the Canadian border. I mean our association has relationships, it doesn't quite but it almost stops does there, and stop below, and then internationally. Because ours is a faith that ought to be among the most international - and it isn't.

And there is another side in that while we have to continue participating in that it is also true that we need to get our own act together before we pretend to lead someone in another countries.

So my focus would be more on our own vitality and then let that spill out.

That said, there are a lot of places, there are things in the Philippines, in India: we ought to maintain and nurture those relationships because it's too important. And I know there is tremendous potential, I know, in Latin America and in Europe for our faith.

What we need to find is a way to be an effective and thoughtful partner rather than sort of the Big Association that is kind of a bully in the world.

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman:

We have a global economy and we'll soon have a global faith, there is no question. I receive emails from people who hear my sermons that are streamed on my website in Dallas from all over the world. We can't stop it. We can't. This free faith is unstoppable, that we think we can manage it is our own, our own misunderstanding.

I am always fascinated by the stories of people who have in some bookstore, in some country, somewhere that we haven't even imagined, find the works of William Ellery Channing and are transformed. Or find someone incidentally in some city that talks about being a Unitarian, and they realize that they've always been one, just like we've said. There are people in Europe now taking courses at the university in American Studies and they are reading Emerson and Thoreau and Whitman and they are, I think, in the next few years we'll be saying that they always were a Unitarian and they didn't realize it because they had read so many writers from our early tradition. I am very interested in how this plays out. It's gonna be different than we have expected with traditional kinds of trips and negotiations and work but it's going to happen.

The *International Symposium of UU Women*, which will take place in Houston in February, is going to bring mostly Unitarian women from all over the world. I'm thrilled that it's in my district and that I can be part of that wonderful gathering of women. It's the first one, it won't be the last one for sure but the kinds of exchanges we're having now will continue, need to continue so that we don't become too bound up in our own historical experience and forget the power of the faith that actually came to us from another country. It wasn't ours at first, and had that have been left in Europe we would perhaps not have the free church we have today.

Question 8:

Tell us what is at the center of your personal faith.

Rev. Peter Morales:

I'd like to begin by talking a bit about the practices that I find reconnect me, but then also generally about the nature of spiritual practice, what it does and where I believe it ought to lead if it's an authentic practice. As someone who works with words an awful lot my practices actually are wordless. They involve walking - I have several favorite places that I go - and they involve music without words. But that's what I need given what my life is.

If we look at all the great traditions that we admire and from which we learn: they all teach in slightly different ways that spirituality is ultimately about connection, about connection with ourselves, about connection with life, with one another and to whatever name we give this totality of mystery and wonder in which we live. And if we truly allow ourselves to connect to that some things follow naturally, organically, and those things are a sense of gratitude, a sense of awe, a sense of humility, and when we truly feel connected with one another a compassion and a sense of urgency around matters of justice and oppression. When we truly appreciate the interconnectedness of life we cannot sit by and watch what is happening to the capacity of our earth to sustain it.

I'm very taken by the phrase, the wonderful Quaker phrase: "Let your life speak!" I believe that ultimately the measure of my spirituality - and the measure of yours - is our lives. It's what we do from those experiences of depth. Those are incomplete unless we take them into the world and engage the world. That's the teaching of Christianity, that's the teaching of Thich Nhat Hahn and Engaged Buddhism, that's the teaching of the Muslim tradition - that if we truly have a practice that is worth the name, that practice flowers in lives, in the relationships we have, in the relationships we form and in the work we do in our lives.

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman: (first speaker)

The free spirit. And my practice is the practice I learned from Harry Scholefield which is to sit outside every day and wait. It's galling, actually, to have to sit and wait, but the word that comes, the experience that comes, the experience deep in the heart and not up here in the mind where I usually live that comes is always a vital word for me. There are many things that I've learned in that silence and in reading and memorizing poetry and taking it to my heart, to my soul, where it feeds me when I need it. This is my central practice.

My second most central practice is worship within the gathered congregation. I'm always a little amused when I ask people whether they have a spiritual practice and they say: No, and they are there in the pew every single Sunday morning, and they don't count that, but it is, it's a deep spiritual practice of the common, the community, the congregation which nourishes our hearts and our souls and our voices as we sing. And that is very, very important to me. I can't, I really can't live outside that communal spiritual practice that we do together in our very congregations.

I look for the ways that life nourishes me and when I'm most grateful, when I'm paying attention to my own sense of gratitude, I find that life blesses in a way that is surprising, probably because I'm more awake and more aware and more present. It comes out of a deep sense, a depth that I believe our faith can give to us if we but listen and pay attention.

Question 9:

**Tell us about an innovative, high performing team that you have built or were part of.
How would you create an environment for innovation within your leadership team?**

Rev. Peter Morales: (first speaker)

That's a really good question. In the last nine years Jefferson Unitarian church has been one of the half dozen or so fastest growing congregations in our movement. And I get asked a lot - and partly because we've done these workshops, UU University, and I've been asked to speak on growth issues - I often get asked what I did to make that happen, and I honestly reply: "I got out of the way." And that's the honest truth.

One of the things that any leader can do is when you are so involved, that when there is a group of people who have the skill, have the motivation, know what they're doing, when you have that: Let it go!

Our job as leaders is to cast a vision and actually, ideally, to reflect the vision, the collective vision of the people. Because then it becomes *our* vision, not *my* vision. And then, particularly in our congregations, which are overflowing with bright, energetic people: equip them, empower them and get out of their way at the congregational level.

And that also has to be true as president of the UUA, to have very high expectations, have very clear goals, measure whether they're getting it done, and then let's really select really terrific people and then let them go for it.

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman:

In 2003 at First Unitarian Church in Dallas we began a strategic plan process called 'Holy Conversations' and we had people from Alban Institute come in and help us begin to have small group meetings, focus group meetings and talk about the church that we wanted to be in 2010, that was our goal. We worked backwards from that date. It was a lot of work and a lot of collating and a lot of trying to get the essence of what people were saying when we went through that process but we came out with what we call 'Chart and Compass 2010'. And I can't tell you how many hundreds of people actually had input into that Chart and Compass document. And then we moved from that strategic planning project into implementation and there was a kind of turnover of leadership. I've come to believe now in 2008 that it's actually a marathon relay because a person will say: I've had a change of job or something has happened and so I can't do this particular responsibility any more, but I'll pass it forward, and there has been a constant passing forward. I remember the time that the board was out on retreat and the president said why don't we list the things that we have in our Chart and Compass plan and then just put some numbers to them, just general numbers. And we listed them down - and I say: we; I watched - they listed them down and put, you know, 2000, 5000, 4000, 10,000 for initiatives both in terms of space in the church building project and also in terms of computer upgrading, training for the people in the church, adding additional staff, many many parts of the church that would help us be the church we wanted to be in 2010. And they added up the numbers and it came to 10 million dollars. [laughter] And you could feel the, you know, the gasp of everyone in the room. And some of the people who were in that room are here tonight. So we said, let's all go to bed and we'll sleep on it and we'll look at the numbers in the morning and decide if it's what we want to do. And the next morning they said, let's go for it! So, at this point we have a \$9 million capital drive, \$7 million for our building - we've had our bumps, we've had our revisions, we've had our disappointments, we've had our postponements - by now we thought the project, the building project would be well under way; we'll probably start in January. But I wish I could tell you how many people were involved in that project and how sustained everyone that has worked on it has felt by all the others. It has been huge and it allows me to now leave the church which I am part of this plan, leave the church with a sense that it's strong, it's vital, it's going forward, the church is just going to be fine - without me.

Question 10:

**It is evident that the presidency of the UUA is a very stressful position.
Do you have the courage to be lonely? [laughter]**

Rev. Peter Morales:

There is rich irony here because I've been joking with people that if you ever suffer from loneliness: run for president of the UUA! I haven't had a moment for myself for some time, so loneliness looks better all the time right now! [laughter] At least a day or two of it.

And certainly: any position of responsibility has those times, and they can be difficult. Ministry has them, and certainly serving a larger church is actually a lonelier kind of job than a smaller one.

But there is another side to that that I have experienced over and over in my working life, having worked in positions of leadership, in responsibility, in journalism, and in government, that there is something about working with a team of dedicated people and seeing the results of your labor which is just energizing. It is one of the most wonderful experiences anyone can have. It's thrilling.

The charge out of seeing the results of your labor, out of seeing an organization function at a level - and I don't mean organization, I mean: people! - functioning, a church being happier, being more engaged, doing more social justice work, feeling better about itself, and as I imagine doing that at the national level - it is thrilling: I can't wait!

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman: (first speaker)

I don't think Gene Pickett will mind me saying this: I made a discipline of going around and visiting former presidents, I haven't visited them all but I'm getting there and I said: How was it for you, Gene? and he said: I had a great time. Now, you got to know Gene Pickett to really appreciate that statement but I think he did, I think he did.

I guess I would reframe that a little bit. I know about the loneliness of ministry, I know about the separation from my own feelings when I'm doing a memorial service for someone that I've loved deeply but can't express in that moment because I'm the bearer of the grief for the people that are in the congregation and so I can in my mind assume that that also is true for the president, that the president carries the hopes, the aspirations, the love and also the crankiness and some of the other thing that we have in our shadow side, carries that along as they do the job.

I have, I have confidence that it will - not that I'm saying it will be easy - but I have confidence that it will be joyous. In part because in this little six months time since we've announced I have been just blessed by people that I had come in contact with years ago and I had lost track of now that I have a higher profile they are sending me emails and we are reminiscing and I feel so buoyed up by those people that have been shared in sharing ministry with me over the years. I'm not, I'm not naive, and I'm sure I'll have my days. And, I think it can be joyous, I think it can.

Closing statements

Rev. Peter Morales

I would have us consider, as we look at our association and at this election, at the times in which we live. This is a time where there are hundreds of thousands of people who long for and who need a religious community. We must be the people who feed the spiritually hungry and house the religiously homeless. This is a moral imperative for us: we have to grow our faith.

It is a time, alas, when there are forces of greed and fear and ignorance and hatred all around that lead to violence, exploit people, demonize people, oppress them and destroy the earth. In such a time we need to be a relentless, powerful, prophetic voice. And our congregations need to be brilliant moral beacons in their community.

We live at a time when a new America is coming into being, an America that is multi-racial and multi-cultural in a way we have never experienced. We need to be intentional about creating a ministry for this new America.

Such a time cries out for leadership. It does not cry out for management. Ironically, if you elect me you'll elect a president who would bring more breadth and depth of management experience to the office of president than anyone who has ever served. And this is not, my friends, about management. Good management, incremental change, solid management right now for our movement is - and please hear this! - a prescription for disaster. Because we are a declining part of American religious life.

This is a time that calls for vision, passion, boldness, but a boldness that is practical and tested. I believe I offer such leadership. And I ask you to join with me in transforming our movement. For we can be, we really can be, the religion for our time.
Thank you.

The UUA posted the video here: <http://uua.org/events/generalassembly/2008/112314.shtml>

Candidate websites:

www.MoralesforUUAPresident.org

www.HallmanforUUAPresident.com

Transcription by Martin Voelker. My blog tracking both UUA candidates with opportunity for reader comments is here: <http://uuapresidentialdebate2009.wordpress.com> Please link to it or refer to it where appropriate.

This is a verbatim transcript from the raw audio recording of the event, however I did a handful of very minor edits such as dropping false starts, but did not change the sentence structure. Please send any corrections to mv@martinvoelker.com

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman (first speaker)

I am thrilled tonight at how many people are here, and we're a year out, there will be long stretch where we'll be visiting districts and you'll be hearing from us on the web and there will be more information all the time 'til we expect all of you back at GA next year and where we can vie for your votes one more time.

Some friends of mine made up a list, called: *When Laurel leads*. I have carried it around with me as a kind of talisman, as a place for me to remember myself and what I do and I'm going to close by just reading some of the things that happen - at least according to some of the people I know - when I lead. And some of them are out of the congregational experience, and some are not:

We are transformed in our worship together. We claim the strength and possibility in our tradition. We claim our power. We honor the power that is not ours, in awe, in wonder and in all the ways that we discover that we are not in charge. We create the beloved community, diverse and enriching. We give and ask others to give joyfully. We respect each other. We are tenacious in our pursuit of justice, we change our communities, we make good choices. We pay attention. We listen to the voice of wisdom within. We take care of what we have. (Big, big thing!) We practice discernment. (Those are choices of depth and faith.) We trust our leaders and we trust ourselves to make good decisions. We plan for the future. We give our children wise teachings. We are loving human beings. We live from a center of strength. We honor our varied experiences of the Holy. We sing. And we say thank you to each other and to life.

Thank you for being here tonight.