

I've never done a sermon series before, but in case you didn't know, we're kind of in the middle of one. You may have noticed that outside of some services focusing on Pride March (which is today!) and immigration justice, the arc of my most recent sermons here have focused on reflecting what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist; what it means to belong, to be a member of this congregation; what it means to have a vision for the future, why it is necessary for us, as Unitarian Universalists, to do faith formation.

If you love Unitarian Universalism and UUMAN, if, at night you dream about it and all its nuts and bolts, you've likely enjoyed this sermon series. But I must acknowledge, there can be drawbacks to this approach. If you came here hurting, desperately looking for a balm in Gilead, you may not have found it in this sermon series. Although I, the worship team, our music director, our choir and our band try our best to make each and every service meaningful, sometimes ferreting through the nuts and bolts, something that needs to be done from time to time, doesn't provide the needed balm. The good news is that there are other ministries here at UUMAN, outside of a Sunday service and sermon, where you will find the healing balm needed.

As a side note, I'll soon be planning at least a rough outline of the spring services in the next month or so...so if you have any suggestions, my door is open. Also, if you're interested in me delving into a particular topic of interest to you, with you, I will again be offering a sermon on the topic of your choice at this year's upcoming Harvest Moon Service Auction.

As part of the series, last week we did a service on "Belonging." What does it mean to be a member, what does it mean to belong to this congregation? We said that membership means, "Taking off the bib. Putting on the apron." Membership means joining us in commitment to our mission and ministry. "Membership is...a covenant among individuals to become something new" (Renee-Noelle Felice, *Belonging*, Commission on Appraisal, 65)."

We did a service about faith formation "Faith Formation – 2020" that emphasized that as Unitarian Universalists, we are completely responsible for growing our faith. Unitarian Universalism doesn't sell a system of beliefs. We create an

environment for you plant and nurture the seeds of faith. “We don’t sell fruits here, only seeds.”

We did a service where we related that despite this congregation facing a new culture and society that is no longer pre-disposed to churchgoing, all of you chose to spend your Sunday morning here at UUMAN (“I So Appreciate”). And I so appreciate the many of you who continue to give your time, talent and treasure to this place that feeds you in ways that no other place can.

In another service we did a Twilight Zone skit as a way to playfully paint our vision for the future (“Engaging in UUMAN’s Vision”) and that the “method is the message;” that participating in the process in vision creation is the transformative part. Some of the visions that were suggested included:

- We envision that UUMAN will be a place of prayer, love and voting.
- We envision that UUMAN will live sustainably off the grid.
- We envision that we will encourage our kids to speak the truth.
- We envision that we will empower kids with a knowledge of sexuality.
- We envision that we will be attuned to the homeless and others in need.
- We envision a congregation that plays in worship

We will have one final sermon in the series on November 11. In the meantime, there is today’s topic – “UUMAN – In Six Words.” In the very near future, we will be engaging one another in congregational visioning in an effort to formally articulate the future we wish to create. Who knows, we might end up tweaking or even re-writing our mission statement. It will depend upon you...and us. I’ve been told that our mission statement is about ten years old. Changing it though will depend on the discussions we have and the visions we wish for.

The website [topnonprofits.com](http://topnonprofits.com) says that a mission statement should be a “one-sentence statement describing the reason your organization or program exists.” Why do we need to exist? The mission statement should be clear – meaning using simple language. “Our anthropocentric epistemology inspires us to have an eschatology...blah, blah, blah.” No, don’t do that. The mission should be concise – 5 to 14 words; max 20. It should also be useful – inform, guide, focus.

[Topnonprofits.com](http://Topnonprofits.com) assembled 50 mission statements from among their ranking of top non -profits. They found the following characteristics:

- Avg length for the full 50 organizations is only 15.3 words (excluding brand references)
- The shortest contains only two words (TED: Spreading ideas.)

- The longest contained 235 words (UNHCR)
- UUMAN's mission statement is 29 words long. It's in the ballpark.

Here are some sample mission statements:

- American Heart Association: To build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke. (10)
- Public Broadcasting System (PBS): To create content that educates, informs and inspires. (8)
- Leukemia & Lymphoma Society: Cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and myeloma, and improve the quality of life of patients and their families. (18)
- American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors (21)
- AARP: To enhance quality of life for all as we age. We lead positive social change and deliver value to members through information, advocacy and service. (25)
- The Unitarian Universalist Association shall devote its resources to and exercise its corporate powers for religious, educational and humanitarian purposes. The primary purpose of the Association is to serve the needs of its member congregations, organize new congregations, extend and strengthen Unitarian Universalist institutions and implement its principles (15, 28, 43)

Several UU congregations have a full mission statement and then they have an abbreviated form of it. Sometimes the abbreviated form contains the words of the full statement. Sometimes the abbreviated form has words not contained in the full statement. Sometimes the only type of statement I could find was an abbreviated form.

Some abbreviated forms include:

Curiosity. Courage. Compassion – Gwinnett UU

Promoting Religious Freedom, Spiritual Growth, Ethical Action – Northwest UU

Welcoming. Multicultural. Green – Paint Branch UU, Adelphi, MD

A Diverse, Spirit-Growing, Justice-Seeking Community – All Souls DC

I was voted to be the 4<sup>th</sup> called minister of this congregation on May 8, 2016. Many might think of that day as a day of new beginning and commitment here at UUMAN. And although that is true in some sense, and it was most definitely a day of new beginning for me personally, the coming day commitment to UUMAN's (i.e. your) fresh, new vision and mission would truly be a day of new beginning and commitment for the Unitarian Universalist Metro Atlanta North Congregation.

Ministers will come and go, yet UUMAN, with its mission and vision will remain. I don't know your personal theology. I don't know if you're a theist, atheist, agnostic, pagan, humanist, etc. I don't know if you believe in karma, the idea that the consequences of actions always return to the agent, the idea that there will be ultimate justice for what you do, the idea that everyone will get what they deserve. And I don't know if you believe that there will be a day of judgement, where the book of your life will be opened and you will be called to account.

I don't know if you believe in these things, but I try to live my life as if these existed to call me to account. I try to live my life believing that the day of judgement takes place every day, that the book of my life is ultimately an open book, and it is examined every day. And I am called to account.

And I think that it would be wise if UUMAN, you all, as a collective, consider this possibility, that your mission and vision will be more than some words on a page, fluffy words that sound sweet to the ear yet devoid of any real meaning and purpose. I think it would be wise for UUMAN to consider your mission and vision to be that which you will be ultimately called to account when the book of UUMAN's life is opened and examined – each and every day and you are asked, “What have you done? What if anything, were you committed to? (Nathan McCall)”