

Dave: Hi Jeremy! Hi Sophia! I don't know about you, but I can feel, in my bones that we're turning the corner on this "pandemic that shall not be named" and that in the not-to-distant-future we'll be at Covid Safety Phase Green and be fully open once again. Finally, after more than a year, things will return to normal.

Jeremy: *(laughing)* Normal!!!??? What makes you think that things will return to normal?

Sophia: Or that things were normal to begin with, prior to the pandemic?

Jeremy: Yeah....Dave, didn't you know that since the year 2000, there are 24 fewer UU churches, 12,000 fewer Unitarian Universalists and 27,000 fewer children in our RE programs.

Sophia: Yes, this is a 43% decrease in the UUA children's participation. C'mon Dave, you should know this!

Dave: No, I did not know this....and, what's wrong with you?.....who keeps such facts and figures about Unitarian Universalism on the tip of their tongue?

Jeremy: Who keeps such facts and figures? **Who doesn't!?**

Sophia: Yeah Dave. We live, eat and breathe Unitarian Universalism...and poetry.

Dave: Ooookaaaayyyyy.....Let me think about this....

(End)

Wow! I didn't know this. I didn't know that since the year 2000, there are 24 fewer UU churches, 12,000 fewer Unitarian Universalists and 27,000 fewer children in our RE programs; and that this is a 43% decrease in the UUA children's participation. That's shocking! And not only that, after looking at the data, the rate of decrease in children's participation is increasing. (show graph). Last year alone, UUism lost over 3400 children. And despite many UU youth growing up in our religious education programs, once they become young adults, they also become essentially non-existent in UUism.

Wasn't Einstein known to have said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result?

Faced with such numbers, we, as a denomination, and as a congregation, simply cannot continue to do the same things that we've been doing and expect different results. That would be gross negligence on our part. Insanity!

Rather than going back to normal, maybe our young adults Sophia and Jeremy are right... it's time to go back to abnormal!

At the start of the pandemic, author and business consultant Simon Sinek, author of books *Start With Why* and *The Infinite Game* was recorded speaking some unplanned, off-the-cuff remarks to his small staff.

Here's some of what he said:

These are not unprecedented times, there are many cases, lists of cases, where change, or something unexpected, has put many companies out of business and made other companies come out stronger. The invention of the internet, put many, many companies out of business; the ones who could not reinvent their companies for the internet age but rather doubled down on the old way they did business.

When Starbucks moved into neighborhoods, many coffee shops went out of business not because of Starbucks, but because they refused to change the way they did business; they still had an old ripped up couch when they could have offered a better product.

Uber is putting taxi companies out of business not because of Uber but because the taxis refused to change. [An app, can't put you out of business.] This is not unprecedented. And so, [it is now] for us to say not how do we do what we're doing, but rather how will we do what we're doing in a different world? And the world is different....

The companies that are struggling are those that are in survival mode rather than reinvention mode... Regardless of how much money they have, it's the mindset, survival vs reinvention. [It's not] "How are we going to get through this?" but "How are we going to change to get through this?" ...The opportunity is "what will we be?" not "how do we preserve what we had?"

I'm so proud of this team because I'm watching people go through this right now, I'm watching people reinvent themselves. I'm watching people think about their jobs differently. I'm watching people think "how can I contribute in a new way?" I'm watching people say "What could we be? How will we bring our message to people in a different way, in a new way.

If you think you're going to do [the same old things you've been doing in the same old way], I got some bad news: that ship has sailed.....

Yet, now the opportunity is magical.

(Simon Sinek, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8lExUWLCyY>)

Recent Pew surveys on religion have proven what has been no secret to most: that religious denominations and congregations in the United States are declining in membership. Yet as Unitarian Universalists, our open, free, flexible faith offers something unique and relevant. John C. Green, a political scientist who worked on the Pew studies says, "There has certainly been an increase in the amount of people who are open to the kind of ideas the Unitarian Universalists have championed....Whether they can convert that into members joining them is an open question. But the opportunity is certainly there (Daniel Burke, "Can Unitarian Universalists Make it Another 50 Years?", HuffPost, 6/29/11)."

Yes. The opportunity is certainly there. The magical opportunity is here. Well, it's actually out there.

I believe that the pandemic has affected people in surprising ways. Many who took social interactions and community for granted may now be hungry; and if they're hungry for a religious community I believe our *ideas* are well positioned to satisfy that hunger.

But it remains to be seen whether or not we can connect with them in the first place. Rather than have them plug into what we do and what we've been doing, how might we reinvent ourselves, do our work differently, so that we can meet them where they are? How can we provide more easy, numerous and varied connection points to those who already subscribe to our values and ideal?

....How will we bring our message to people in a different way, in a new way?The opportunity is not "how do we preserve what we had.....but what will we be" (Simon Sinek)?