

**Town Hall 2 – UFL
January 28, 2014
43 Attendees**

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: Welcome everyone. It is 6:30, so we're going to go ahead and get started. If you're still finishing up, that's ok, as long as we could just do it quietly. I don't know, I hear some more out there, but I guess they'll join us when they can. Could I, just so that I know, have a show of hands if you did not attend the last – ok – so plenty. So we need to go through the logistics and make sure we introduce it all. If I haven't met you, my name is Michelle Iwig-Harmon, I'm a member of the Mission and Vision Task Force. Is that not loud enough? Feel free to wave at some point if any of us are not being loud enough. Welcome tonight. Other members of the task force are Bob Burbank, Jill Jarvis, John Brewer, Rebecca Gant, and not here Suzanna Emelio, and Barb Thompson, Ted Wilson – did I miss anybody? Ok. And we're really pleased that you're here to join in this conversation with us. Our purpose as a task force is to be listeners and facilitators as we work toward finding what our common hopefully mission and vision are at the fellowship. Just to be clear, we are not a decision making body. We do not have authority to make changes at the fellowship, but we are in gathering mode and we're gathering information from all of you to help inform our process and that is ongoing as we figure out where we're headed in mission and vision. Some of you hopefully attended our history day as we investigated the past of UFL and we've spent a lot of time talking about the future. And we came to the realization that we needed to spend some time talking about the present and that's what we see as these town hall meetings, an opportunity for people to share and listen and come together to talk about what we value about the fellowship.

Just by way of introduction, the town hall tonight is we're eager to hear each person's views, passionate, diverse views as we're finding, and we'll talk more about the logistics and the covenant after we have a chalice lighting.

Rebecca Gant: So the chalice lighting comes from a book from our library called *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* and it's a book of poetry and essays about conversations between people. This is called "Turning to One Another." There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about. Ask what's possible, not what's wrong. Keep asking. Notice what you care about. Assume that many others share your dreams. Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters. Talk to

people you know. Talk to people you don't know. Talk to people you never talk to. Be intrigued by the differences you hear. Expect to be surprised. Treasure curiosity more than certainty. Invite in everyone who cares to work on what's possible. Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something and know that creative solutions come from new connections. Remember, you don't fear people whose story you know. Real listening always brings people closer together. Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world, rely on human goodness, stay together.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: Ok, logistics. Obviously we're going to use the mic tonight. We have a hand mic and we're going to pass it around. We are recording so that we can provide a transcript later to people who are not able to make it. If you could for our benefit in the transcription, before you speak or sometime when you're speaking, say your name so that it's recorded also. With this many people it makes it a lot easier for Suzanna to type it up. And we'll remind you if you forget. Since we have so many new folks that weren't at the first one, I hope that those of us who were at the first one can give them a chance to speak tonight first. We do have a shorter time frame so we'll see how that goes. We do want to try to share the floor as much as possible, so we'll watch for hands to go up and we'll try to cue everyone as best we can, so be patient with us. The transcript will go out as an e-blast like the last one did and we've also been collecting responses from other people who weren't at the town halls, so those will go out as an email as well, so that all the voices can be shared with everyone in the fellowship. Our group will take turns as moderators, so that if there's time for everyone who was here at the last one to speak also, if we have something to say we'll sit down and be part of the group instead of being in the moderator position. Ok, did I miss any logistics?

Ok, so moving on to our conversation. Most of you have probably been in groups where we've had covenants set. To save time we've already written out the elements that we think make the most sense for a covenant for this group. I'll read them so they're in the transcript. And if anyone has any questions or challenges with any of them, feel free to bring that up. We would really appreciate it if everyone could agree to assume good intentions, that all viewpoints are equally valid, that we speak respectfully, that we speak from our own experience using "I" statements and not try to share other people's views or try to interpret those and that we share the floor. And I think if you've been in a chalice circle or been in other elements, if you can kind of think of it in terms of a three minute conversation. If you

divide it, well now 45 or 50 minutes by the number of people here, that'll be about a minute and a half a piece, so we're going to try to... And not everyone is required to speak, listening is great too, just keep that in mind as you're speaking to try to be brief.

As I said, we really want to hear diverse opinions. We want to balance being open and direct with sharing the covenant. Try to avoid personal confrontation. We did great with that last time. We're ok with messiness, we know that this is off the cuff and we're going to be granting each other the respect that that affords. I think, is that everything? That's all, I had bullet points, but I think I got it all. Ok, so the questions that we're on tonight. You saw these last time, but we've added more based on what happened last time. If you can't see feel free to get up and move around. Last time we spent mostly time on these questions. We added new ones. So questions last time were what is making you feel excited, what is making you anxious, what have you lost or gained at the fellowship. And now we're adding in some that grew out of last time's town hall, how are we at UFL accountable to UUism and to other UU congregations, where in our congregation do you find connection and community, what does the word fellowship mean to you, how about the word church, what do you value most at UFL. Everyone is welcome to share what's on your heart or what you came to share. We're open to, I hope all of us are open to everyone's opinions. These are just suggestions if you need something to prompt you or give you some guidance on where to go. And I think that we've said before, but something as a Mission and Vision Task Force is we're really at the end are after what do you value, what do we together value and we're going to be trying to glean that from your statements as we reread the transcripts. So are there any questions? Then I'll open it up. I remember last time it was challenging to get that first person to talk, but, welcome.

Lauralynne Bodle: As a young child I attend Trinity Episcopal Church downtown and again, coming out here at about the age of 11, I think, and later in life I figured out for myself what did I get from these two spiritual communities. And I realized that the Episcopalians taught me how to dress and how to behave and the Unitarians taught me how to live and how to think and to believe in how to live what I believe. It seemed pretty easy to figure out where the balance was on that. The first time I attended a Unitarian church was when our Sunday school class went to St. Louis and the church there hosted us, Lara was in my class, Lara Wilson. We slept on the floor in the Sunday school there and we went to church service on Sunday morning and I was

astounded. It was like, these people are not Unitarians, there's like pews and a service, what is this. And of course, you know, I've gotten to know other Unitarian churches and that's been ok, but the fellowship is really, really important to me and I identify really strongly with the fact that I attend a fellowship and that I'm a member of a fellowship. And I identify very strongly with the people that I grew up with here, the elders that were here when I was younger and I would hate to lose that.

Jill Jarvis: I just have a question that I hope can be addressed in this conversation because I've been confused about this from the beginning, and I hope we can unpack this a little bit tonight. That is, and I have mentioned this before, but there is no such thing, abstractedly, as a fellowship since about the early 1960s. It hasn't existed. So when.... And I understand that individuals have feelings about their experiences that might connect to the word church or might connect to the word fellowship, but when I hear some... And that's what I would really like to know, what that means as a differentiation, because I think when people have been members of UU churches that have been dynamic and thriving and really doing something important in their community and world, that is one experience and other people apparently have other experiences. I'm guessing that it might not have to do with UU churches, I don't know. But since it doesn't mean anything abstractedly, since we're all just congregations and the name doesn't mean anything, what does it mean to you when you say I want to be part of a fellowship or I want to be part of a church.

Ted Wilson: I had assumed that fellowship was a phase in the growth of any congregation that typically or very often congregations organize themselves as fellowships and then as they grew, began, became churches, usually with a settled minister or whatever. But I've done some research recently and that's just not the case. There are fellowships that are 700, have 700 members, they have 3 ministers, they have all the "trappings" of a church. What I think it means, Jill, is that we have a – for me, I'm speaking for myself, not we, me – I have an attached to that idea, that phrase, the fellowship, the Unitarian fellowship. It might be the UU fellowship of Lawrence, maybe that's what we should do. But it still, there's a meaning to it, it doesn't have anything more, significance than that. And it's probably something that I would like to keep.

Joe Gant: I have no preference personally over fellowship or church, but I think when people... First of all, we sell ourself as a religious organization. We're like that in the phone book, in the paper every week. We're

there with all the other churches, so I don't, I'm not sure it really matters what we call it. I do have an issue with being just a Unitarian church or fellowship, and I would, it would be my preference, I think I identify much more with Universalism than I do with Unitarianism, and both of them are old Christian terms, if you take those literal meanings, but I think that's something that I would like in the discussion.

Tom Cravens: I wasn't at the first one. It's been interesting to see where this whole organization, fellowship, church, whatever, you know, has gone. I remember in 25 years ago when we joined, basically because of our kids. It was just the program. And it's been frankly very interesting and heartening to see it develop, you know, the way it is, so I'm all in favor and don't mind change, you know, as it comes along. As far as church or fellowship, frankly I don't care. When we were on sabbatical in Colorado we split ourselves between something that was a Unitarian church and the Unitarian fellowship and it didn't make one wit worth of difference. I'm not allergic to the word myself. But I think as a matter of habit, people tend to think fellowship just for historical reasons, because it's been that way so long. But I don't think in this case the word means too much except that it affects people's habits in what they call it. It's going to be the same thing regardless.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: Can I interrupt just for a minute and just moderate. As a reminder to speak from your own experience and then that's enough and then we'll let other people speak from their experience, ok. Thanks.

Valerie Roper: I started my Unitarian Universalist life in a 600 member congregation known as the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax. I think in some ways, a person feels the strength of feeling for that first organization, the first UU place where they begun UU life. When I was first at the Fairfax – and it called itself a church, congregation – I didn't really care to go to general assembly. I heard about general assembly, I heard about the Unitarian Universalist, southeastern Unitarian Universalist summer institute. I wasn't interested, you know. I didn't care about anything beyond the place where I was because I had found something that was really, really wonderfully meaningful to me and it went into the core of who I was. But I did ultimately go to the summer institute and it was fabulous, filled with other people from other congregations who broadened who I was. Then I went to General Assembly and it was incredible. The first General Assembly I went to actually was from here over

in St. Louis. And I realize that we're connected. I was connected not just to that church in Fairfax, I was connected to a community, a larger community of other people who are concerned with the same kinds of things that I was, who were concerned about making it a better world, who were concerned about deepening spirituality in their own lives. And it's been reassuring to me as we watch world events to know that 1) I don't have to do it all, there are a lot of other people like us out there doing things. I had been isolated where I first started and I have grown deep roots here too and the people here matter, you know, tremendously to me and I have grown here. So this place matters. I think for me it's made a difference in growing in a larger way too.

Jennifer Dropkin: I'd like to just talk about my experience of the words fellowship and church. They're two separate things that I want to address with that, they're not interchangeable to me. One is that fellowship has the connotation that we are people who interact with each other and I don't have that connotation with the word church. It's important to me that there be a connotation of people who are important to each other. So for that reason I have grown to prefer the term fellowship. It carries a lot more weight with me even if it doesn't have any meaning in another context. The other thing is the word church is traditionally Christian. I do not come originally from a Christian tradition so I value a term that doesn't have that connotation. I like to think I'm flexible on that. I don't know if I really am. But congregation I'm fine with. Church I just kind of want to say, well yeah, kind of, but not really. But I just wanted to get it out there.

Curtis Russell: Speaking as a totally new member. You're the only "Unitarian" fellowship in the area. As a new person coming in, the Unitarian fellowship without the Universalist was a little bit off putting. The concept is that it's smaller and perhaps a little bit inward looking. And so I understand the fellowship from a current member, from somebody who is not a member, especially since you're – I won't say isolated – it's pretty easy to get here, but you don't drive by to see the size of the church. So it's very easy for a person who's in Lawrence off of 70 or off of 10 to look around and say, oh there's a Unitarian Universalist church, it's only 20 minutes, 30 minutes further away to consider... I mean, I just think it's a little bit off putting or a little bit of a barrier. And that's speaking totally neutral.

Tim Miller: I would just say to me church implies worship and I don't think Unitarians generally can have proper worship as I understand it, because... [*asked to speak louder*] Oh ok, my sense is that Unitarians can't

really have worship because worship has an object and it's not here. So I don't care about terminology much, but I don't think church is accurate personally. I just want to say a word about my own personal story. I have become much less involved in this fellowship than I used to be. I was very active in it for quite a few years, I was a chair for a year and did a bunch of other things and still do a few. When I was in the east coast I went to two different Unitarian churches sequentially and didn't find much I could relate to there. It wasn't very interesting to me. So when I came back to Lawrence this really wouldn't cross my mind that this was something I would do, but it was suggested by some people I knew who were in it. Came out here, it was terrific. And that's it. To me it was the people of the fellowship. But as the churchification has gone on, I'm less and less interested.

Lynne Bodle: I said most of what I have to say last time, but if people are interested in why some of we older ones feel so strongly about it being a fellowship, there's a book about the fellowship movement. I went through it, I read it, I excerpted, took some pieces of it and made comments about it. If people are interested in knowing a little bit more about why some of our older ones feel so strongly I'd really suggest you read this. I'd hope you would and there's copies of it out there on the side board somewhere.

Susan Cooper: I wanted to talk about a couple of questions. First just to add my two cents worth just about fellowship versus church, in my world, and that's where I live, the fellowship to me means an intentional choice and my connotation about a church, just based on my experiences is that that's where you have to go. And then the second thing though that I really, the question that I really wanted to talk about is where do you find your connection and community at the UFL, and I actually connect and feel closer with everybody not in the service or not in the program, but in the other activities. And it's in the committees in which I'm participating, it's working with the communications team, it's right here, right now, it's doing the things that I can according to my schedule and just being together.

Carol Eades Delnevo: Well, I'd like to speak to the church versus the fellowship issue. When Adrian and I first started going to the UU, which is what we've always called it because we found it really difficult to say ch-ch-ch-ch-church. So we called it the UU, but we did go to a UU church in Southern California. And I have to say that I always found a certain amount of subversive pleasure in saying that I go to a church. And I always enjoyed saying, I'm a Sunday school teacher at a church. Just gave me this little tingle. So with that said,

that's kind of where I came from and those were the kinds of things that I was thinking when I first encouraged my husband and my very, very young children to go to a Unitarian universalist congregation. When we came to Lawrence I found that fellowship sort of rolled off the tongue in, off my tongue in a more natural and easy way. And so I've always been very comfortable using the word fellowship and identifying as a member of the fellowship. But just a little bit of back story. We were in Orange County in Southern California and there were a number of UU churches in the area, but there was also a fellowship in the area in Anaheim and it had a very different personality than the churches in Orange County and in Long Beach. And it was, it had sort of staked out this identify as defiantly lay led, and unwilling and uninterested in any kind of professional leadership. It was a really, it was a do it yourself, and all the neighboring congregations sort of knew what this distinction was. And in actual fact, when I moved here, the idea that we were moving into a town that had a fellowship but not a UU church or a society or anything else raised concerns for some of our friends that were in that other congregation because of the perceived rigidity in some ways of the attitude and the structure and the approach. So anyway, that's what I came with when I came here. Of course I found that it's not rigid at all and it's the perfect hybrid in a lot of ways of the different things that I saw in Orange County. But I think that in some ways that's some of the baggage that the word fellowship carries in the larger UU movement.

Rebecca Gant: What we call it doesn't matter as much to me as long as I still get to do the things here that I want to do, which is to be with people, to learn, to focus on what's important, which is, to me worship is finding what's worthy and thinking about it and spending time as a group talking about it together and learning about it together. So that's, to me that's what's important. To be with the people, to focus on what's important, to help myself move more toward helping make the world a better place. So I don't care what we call it, but that's what I want to do here.

Daniel Bontempo: I probably drift towards the world fellowship. It conjures up everything, like even the Fellowship of the Ring from Tolkien; it doesn't have a churchy feel. I had, early on, before I signed the member book a story that's interesting. My car died one night on the way home from the far eastern side of Kansas City and I'm being towed. And the conversation drifts around and I don't even remember how it got there, but at one point I needed to say, I'm going to – I couldn't just say the UU, it wouldn't have been understood and fellowship might have sounded a little culty – but I did

not want to say church. Aside from the fact that it didn't fit what I was doing, it has a connotation in broader society that maybe, yeah, we could reclaim that word church, we could expand it, but for a lot of people it's not expanded and I'm like, what if this guy says, oh yeah, and let me tell you about, you know, what I just read in the Bible or here's my personal testimony. There were 40 more miles, you know, and you don't get out of it... So I didn't want to open that can because what could pop out. So congregation's fine with me. It's a little between the two. I was doing a thought experiment a few minutes ago. I know very little beyond UFL, I didn't get to the regional assembly, I was ill that weekend and I read on some web pages UUA stuff, but I could imagine and it might just be because of conversations here recently, but I could imagine there's more people or there's more pressure saying to fellowships, you know, there really aren't fellowships any more than there is saying to the first Unitarian church of this or the first Unitarian church of that. You know, there really aren't churches any more. And I wonder if there's a double standard in that.

Martha Burbank: I went back and reread the transcript from the first one and I wrote down several questions, but I'm just going to hit these two for now. On the church versus fellowship, I've heard discussion about whether that's just a matter of semantics and if it doesn't matter. You know, if it's just semantics, then it doesn't matter, but obviously from the controversy and the comments it matters a lot to a lot of people. For me personally a church is a place where you have dogma shoved down your throat. And I know that's... I've been in enough committees and meetings and stuff and heard everybody's or several people's religious backgrounds to know that I'm not the only one that has that feeling about what a church is. So I think for those of us that have that background of a church, that's why we have the negative connotation. I don't hear a lot of why people have a negative connotation about fellowship, so I am wondering why there's a push for there to be a change. I understand and agree with the Universalist being added to the name, but I don't understand why there's a controversy about why we need to be a church instead of a fellowship other than UUA statistics that I think we fit into a certain category. And my second issue was something Tim Miller mentioned about calling what happens at 11 o'clock worship. That's an issue for me. There was some discussion of this quite awhile back and I know from that discussion also that that was a hot topic for a lot of people. But somehow I missed how that slid through because now it's usually called or often called a worship service. So I'm wondering how that came to be because, as Mr. Miller pointed out, 99% of Americans

have a specific meaning for worship. It means you have something up on an idol and you're worshipping it and I don't feel that's what goes on here and I don't think that's what a lot of people feel like goes on here, so, I would just like to ask also how that came to be part of Sunday morning, why it's a worship service and not a spiritual celebration service.

Graham Kreicker: It may clarify to repeat something I said last time, which is, according to the UUA the only institutions we have are called congregations. How we identify ourselves as a fellowship, society, congregation, a people's church or whatever is immaterial as far as the record keeping is concerned in Boston. We just have congregations. So it's up to us to decide what we want to do. And I'm glad to hear people talk about the meaning of fellowship to them, because to me fellowship always means old professors in robes sitting up late at night drinking port. It's kind of a sexist term. I like congregation much better than fellowship, even though I have a lot of fellows here.

Jake Kipp: A long time ago I was part of a Bible, a religious study group at my undergraduate institution. And after about 4 weeks, the congregational minister who was leading it suggested that I should go talk to the Unitarians. Now this dates it, because there were no U's, the other U then, we hadn't joined. And so when I joined this place, I thought I was joining Unitarians. The Universalists weren't even on my horizon. They are now. I am, there's a hymn which I really love. Roots hold me close, wings set me free. Ultimately that's what we're about and we have to do both. I remember in *Fiddler on the Roof* Tivia the milkman is always invoking tradition. And every time he invokes it, he comes to the conclusion that it really doesn't fit, because the world around you is changing. And it's that tension that you have to deal with. There's no easy answer to it, but because we are a congregation, because we are lay led, we have to have discussions and reach conclusions about these things. And if you ask me why I'm most committed Unitarianism, it is precisely that side of it. When Tim says about worship, what always bothered me, not only the priest, the minister up there telling me what to believe, it was also the notion that there was no alternative, that there was no capacity to question. And for me, the questioning is always the most important thing.

Joyce Pearl Jones: In going over the transcript, the one conversation that I remember the most was when Jill was talking about what's happening with the attendance on Sunday morning. And having now been a member of about 8 or 9 congregations, Unitarian congregations

around the country, I have a thought about that and it has to do with I think what Carol was saying for her that the most important part is what we call the interconnected web of all existence, the interconnections that we have with people here. And so the piece for me that's still missing here is the adult religious education. And that is in the sense of, in many congregations, in many fellowships it's part of the Sunday experience. So you've got three choices, you've got the program, you've got the 11 o'clock service, and you've got the adult education. So at any point you can talk with a group of people if you're comfortable with that, you can be with someone up at the front and you can be in the congregation back here or you can be listening to a lecture. But that piece is, for me, the piece that I wonder what would happen if we added that into our mix for Sunday. And I think that was the most important question I heard of all those conversations is, we do need to say why are the seats not filled. And then the other things about the seats not being filled is there is research saying they shouldn't all be filled, so many we need to burst out this wall and make it bigger because there's research that if it's too crowded, people won't attend.

Lee Ketzel: I just want to point out another hazard, it's sort of on a light... Joined the fellowship in the late 50's. I was talking to one of my son's recently, they usually call me on the weekend, and I, why are you home Sunday morning and I said because I very seldom get to the fellowship anymore because the program I'm interested in is too early for me to make it without heroic efforts. And my son said, well that's no problem mom, just run an ad in the UDK and in the Journal World and call for a meeting at the Eldridge and form another Unitarian fellowship. I said, do you realize I'm in my late 80s? I just want to say, before I left home having read some of the 16 pages, as many as I could cram in, I looked up the word worship in my old Heritage College Dictionary and it sent chills down my spine. It said, reverence and love for a deity, an idol or a sacred object and the ceremonies that pertain thereto. I'm not for worship.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: I grew up in churches and for me, that's my vernacular and that's the word I use to apply to this place. Others using the word fellowship does not take anything from me one way or the other and we use it fairly interchangeably in our family. What it means to me, whether we call it a fellowship or a church, what this place means to me is the place that I come to be with people who I love and who love me and want to have meaningful time together whether it's in conversation or in communal gatherings and to provide that experience for my children. Because I grew up in

churches, in loving environments, which I enjoyed, I have a positive connotation. And it provided for me this echo in my mind that even though I didn't go anywhere for awhile, when I was looking for something I knew what I wanted and I found it here. It's not the same place I came from, but it fills the need that I had. And what I value and what I'm most excited about right now is – you've probably, most of you, not you new people but, have heard me talk plenty of times about how important RE is to my family and that's definitely a big part of why we're here. But what I'm excited about now is that I get to have my children with me in the service. I don't see it as worshipping a deity, but I do see it as an opportunity to give my children that echo in their mind, to have the ritual of coming together as a group to experiencing what it's like to have your voices joined with others. I think cultures throughout history have created ritualistic communal gatherings for a reason and for me, because it gives me strength. I don't know if my children will choose that in the future, but I want to have given them this base, so that they have the opportunity to choose it in the future if they desire, whether it's UU or some other type of communal gathering. I can see in them already the difference it makes to them. You know, they're very different kids if you know them. One of them is very excited about the music and the singing and wants to get up and help with everything that's going on. And the other one is internalizing it all and it doesn't maybe come up for weeks, but it does come back up. He was profoundly affected by Daniel's spiritual celebration last summer with a person who shared their life story about being transgender. And I've seen that come up in his newfound rage about LGBT issues, he's writing papers at school about it. It changed his heart. And I don't know that he would have gotten that same experience in a small group gathering. And so for me, and our family, there is power in having our children amongst us when we celebrate those times and I appreciate that.

Andrew Brown: My family's looking to be wooed by Unitarian Universalists, no, we are searching for a church home. I think what bothered me though was the word fellowship because one of the things we're looking for in a church community is a community that uses liberation theology or liberation language and that just really smacks to me, again, of male imagery, male sexism, and so I think there's a much better term than just fellowship, whether it's the more generic term community gathering or whatever. You know, because it is exclusive. And being a special ed teacher and other things I'm very much for inclusion and not exclusive and having a daughter, I also want her to feel welcome and, you know, that is a masculine word. And I think

part of it is I stand on the heritage of my mother who worked in the Disciples church to get her church to use liberation language and it really bothered me when I attended the Episcopal church as well as the Disciples church here in Lawrence that many churches haven't moved beyond using the male imagery or all of the masculine language, including fellowship. If you're saying you don't want to be part of a traditional denomination theology, then that means we also have to liberate the language that we're using and come up with our own language.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: I'm just going to jump in and let everybody know it's about 17 after and were going to wrap up in 5 to 10 minutes and then we'll have to quick put the chairs back so that the choir can practice.

Tom Miller: This is real short. How about Unitarian Universalist Lay Led Communion.

Shannon VanLandingham: I had the same background with church that Michelle did, I have no negative connotation, and I think it struck me last night that it's kind of the same that I just grew apart from that. I grew not to fit anymore in that, but it doesn't mean that it was bad for me. And I kind of think about it as my marriage also, I grew away from that, it didn't fit me anymore. I don't think marriage is bad, it doesn't have a bad connotation for me, but I just didn't fit in that particular one anymore. So I think there are different ways to think about church too.

Valerie Roper: I've been sitting here thinking about the question of worship for awhile. In my wildest dreams I hadn't, or nightmares, I haven't considered what we do on Sunday mornings here to involved deities at all, and yet I do think of it as worship in the sense of it being a safe place, a sacred place for exploring the questions of religion, not merely in an intellectual way, but a kind of sharing of the spirit that comes when people are gathered together in ritual, concerning and making an effort to open ourselves to what it means to be human, what it means to live, what it means to die, how we're connected and why we're connected. And what connects us, what of the spirit connects us and gives us strength to go on through our own lives and to be there for others as they go through theirs.

Mark Lenz: I first came here during the mid-90s and my wife and I really found it a wonderful experience. Like I said, we came here pretty steadily for two years, my wife got pregnant and we had several other members here who were in the same birthing class. Unfortunately we lost our child, and they didn't and it just caused us to

not come because of the pain we felt – not for them, we were joyful for them, but for our loss, so we stepped out. One of the members here knew that I like to sing and said we need help, we need men voices. So I came here for that purpose. Then as I started coming to the service, I really, really enjoyed all the different perspectives I was getting and the openness and the sharing and all the learning that I was getting done here and the widening of my visions on so many different aspects. And I have many friends here now. I mean, I love this place. And I want people to know that that can happen. I was a Lutheran and raised Lutheran, was happy, the nice thing is you knew what the service was going to be every Sunday. The words change, but you know a song came here, a verse came here, a song came here, and so you go all the way through. And my wife and I got married and about 10 years later we thought we need to get really into this, so we went to an advanced Bible study there and as we did that we started asking lots of questions and then a couple other people did that as well, and at the end of that class, the minister pulled us aside and told us that six of us were no longer welcome in the church. So we wandered around and like I said, then we came here and we were separated and now I'm back joyfully and it's wonderful. I like the way both services, both the 9 and the 11 work for different reasons and so I value both of them.

Jill Jarvis: First of all, I'd like to say how much I appreciate that perspective about the inherent sexism and male privilege in the word fellowship. I had to train myself to say it here. Before that it rolled off my tongue in conversation just like brotherhood and mankind. So there's that. The other thing is I spent the day reading *We Unitarians*. Didn't exactly mean to spend the day reading it, it's just the history of Unitarianism and this congregation up until the mid-90s I think, and it is very detailed. And I honestly just read the whole thing not just because of tonight but in preparation for something else I'm working on. But I got really involved in it and as much as I have read that, as many times, I read it with a different lens every time and today I realized, wow, this conversation about who are we, do we have a mission, has been going on for decades. It's not just now. And I remember some of you who were here who have read that, a letter from somebody, I think it was in the 70s or 80s, said to the board, what are we doing here anyway. We want this for our kids, but what is it that we want. We seem to have no purpose, no mission, what are we doing together on Sundays. Shouldn't Unitarians, shouldn't a religious community being doing something, one thing, all together on Sundays that they feel together. And it seems that after that letter they took a survey or something and I can't see that it was ever

resolved. But it kept coming up, it kept coming up in subsequent years. And I'm really surprised that and a little dismayed at some of the framing of some of the conversations we've had in terms of we need to remember that we all have different interests and we need to have many expressions of who we are, because I never thought that was ever at issue. We're Unitarian Universalists, that's what we do. We're diverse, we have, we make as many opportunities as we've got money and volunteer time to do and respect that. But I'm also dismayed at the push back against that idea, that there's one thing that we should all be doing together to express that cohesiveness as a community. So a challenge that I would like to throw out there as we continue the months long conversation that we're having is this. Looks to me from my experience since I've been here and what I read today again, is that this issue was never resolved about who are we and who do we serve. And somehow because of Score happening – that's the grassroots effort to provide professional leadership during the last 15, about 15 years ago – once you got that consulting minister, once Megan got here for a year, then the service started to grow. And then we just started to grow but there was never that conversation that it was resolved about who are we. A big part of that is what does it mean to have a minister. And right now, here we are with that never having been resolved and, you guys, it's really hard. Because I bring the Unitarian Universalist tradition with all its words, with an expectation that I spend a good half of my time doing worship, planning worship for you and involving you in that as a community participation thing and I see that there's not an understanding of what it means to have a minister and I worry about the future for that, because since we are in Lawrence, to get eventually another minister is going to, there has to be an understanding of that. Because I kind of happened accidentally actually as many of you will recall. That I'm here, it's just been a lucky match to this point. But that conversation needs to happen as part of this mission and vision process this year so that we can decide what we want to do. Do you want to be what I would say is a UU church. But, by the way there's nothing on the table that I know of to change the name. I didn't mean to imply that as much as what I said I feel about the fellowship. So that was my real question to what do you mean by that. What I meant is do you want to be a religious community in the UU tradition with a minister – by the way, we are not lay led, because if you have a minister that just means that you're not lay led. It's minister led and we are right now. Do you want to be? So let's talk more about that conversation or about that question as part of this process.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: We need to finish up. Thank you, thank you every one for sharing what you've shared tonight. [*Clapping*] A quick metaphor that we've been working with lately, although we keep changing on the mission and vision task force, but the way we see it currently, I think most of us, is the covenant that we work with are the boundaries on the path. The path is the mission, what you're working on together as you go and the vision is the destination or what's on the horizon. And so we're going to take what we are learning from you to try to look toward the horizon and see where we're going and bring that back to you. We haven't talked about whether or not we'll have another town hall. We had the two scheduled, but we'll see from here. What are the dates quickly of the next one. And if everyone could help us put chairs back really fast, thank you.

Rebecca Gant: Ok, February 21st from 10 am to noon probably in this room we'll have a speaker from the region to talk about the liberal religious landscape, what does it look like out there in the world where UUs are and other liberal religious denominations. March 7th, which is a Saturday, from 9 am to noon is the World Café, which is a really cool experience. You start at a card table with 4 people, you discuss a question and then after a certain time you switch and go to another table, talk about the same question, hear about what they talked about at that table before, then switch again. So you talk about the same question with different groups of people and we gather up all that information. It's going to be cool. And the last events are the dialogue circles, which will be small group events, probably in people's homes or here. It's maybe 10 people together sharing. And we're going to really get into that meat of who do we want to be, what do we want to do in the world, what's our work here, who are we accountable to, all those big questions.

Michelle Iwig-Harmon: Thank you. If all of you could give us a hand, that'd be great.
