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## **RADICAL INCLUSION**

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**2013 Canadian Unitarian Council Annual Meeting**

**Keynote Address**

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Naheed Nehshi, as Mayor of Calgary, and Kathleen Wynne, as premier of Ontario, are emblematic of how diverse Canada has become. Have we, as Unitarians, been in step with this trend or have we been, largely, bystanders?

You noticed that in Mayor Nehshi's video greeting to the Canadian Unitarian Council Annual Meeting his positive impression of Unitarianism was evident. He also offered us good advice. Nonetheless, I am more interested in facts than impressions. Before talking about policies and programs, as he advised, let's talk about who we really are. What is the story of diversity in the CUC?

That an Afro-Canadian is asking these questions indicates something, but what? When I introduce a talk about *radical inclusion* with these questions your minds instantly, natural and involuntarily go in one direction. If you are honest you might admit to steeling yourself to be lectured at about you-know-what...

If the word *inclusion* is code, then so is the word *diversity*. Its meaning you understand. It's shorthand for a cultural conglomerate of Asians and South Asians, First Nations people, Métis and Inuit, Filipinos and Pacific Islanders, Latino/Latina/Hispanic peoples and of course Caribbeans and others of African descent and everyone else I left off so that I can finish this sentence before bedtime. Why do you steel yourselves? Because when we talk about inclusion, or diversity, or people of color, or visible minorities, or multiculturalism or non-white, non-Anglo people, it is often tied to historic and ongoing inequities and injustice. Why should that make anyone uncomfortable? Since the perpetrators and benefactors were often white, like most of you, you feel vaguely implicated.

Better to name this reality than to pretend it doesn't exist. Silence and denial are just ways of pretending it isn't so.

I don't want to pretend, but I also no longer wish to be trapped by our history. Ergo, this reflection on diversity (and inclusion) in the CUC. It will challenge what you think you know, but this ACM is structured so that you'll get time to talk about it. Beyond that, I hope when you return to your congregations you'll invite others into the conversation and decide it is something you want to act upon. That, as you will soon hear, has proven difficult for us.



In the “CUC Diversity Survey” taken in the fall of 2012, people were asked: “Would you describe the membership of your congregation as diverse?” 78% said 'No'. There was agreement that we are largely Euro-Canadian and middle class.

How did this come about?

In the beginning, some Unitarians came from New England, others from England and others from Ireland. Their class location in Canada was a mix. The Boston Brahman Unitarian tradition from which some hailed, and in which they were the upper-class, politically dominant group, was an anomaly. In Canada, the experience in Toronto paralleled that in England. Canadian Unitarians weren't the Establishment. In Toronto they were the aspiring, upwardly mobile middle class; in Montreal they were influential, even snobbish, but not gentry. They were civic-minded business leaders, educators, politicians – prominent people like John Molson in Montreal and Joseph Workman and Emily Stowe in Toronto. The elite in Canadian were Anglophone Anglicans. That said, while Unitarians in Canada didn't have to hide their chapels, as the British Unitarians did, they were nonetheless regularly and roundly denounced.

If you look at the difference between the Unitarians and Universalists, you will find that class was more an issue than theology; the Universalists being more populist, less educated, and less affluent.

Why is our class location of interest? If you look at Unitarians and Universalists on a world-wide basis, liberal religion is more economically diverse outside of North America. Look to Transylvania or to the Kashi Hills in India, or the Philippines or Uganda.

Even though we don't often speak about class, in North America we UUs are bound to it. I travel a lot and have spoken at 200 UU congregations and dozens of conferences. When speaking I have been tempted, but have never asked those raised wealthy to stand. I doubt that they would. Why? They might be embarrassed, or fear people would become solicitous, or they would be deemed suspect. On occasion I have asked people who were raised working class or poor to stand up. Between 15-20% rise. After I do that I thank them for hanging in with our tradition despite the elitism and unconscious classism that unconsciously gets thrown in their faces. I, then, ask: What is it like to be here? What do you give up? Are there things you hide? Do you feel comfortable inviting your birth family? Are you afraid **they** will embarrass you, or **we** will? I'm not going to ask anyone to stand but for a moment think about your class location.

Focusing on class raises questions. Why is Unitarianism so class-bound in North America? Why is the percentage of people who were raised poor or working class that high and yet to-date we have spent infinitely less time discussing class than race or sexual orientation? Is being poor a less oppressive experience? Is it more shameful? Or is it shameful to be rich? What's going on? Why is it we don't talk about what it means to be middle class? Assuming



we would like to welcome more people and all kinds of people into our beloved tradition, why aren't we talking about class? Why this blind spot?

Given, that in the beginning, Unitarians in Canada were the aspiring urban Anglophone middle class, who weren't we?

We weren't First Nations people. They have their own indigenous spirituality, and unlike other faith traditions we made no effort to convert them. Nonetheless this is where, for us, diversity first appeared. George Moses, a First Nations leader, was ordained into the Universalist ministry and served on the Delaware Line Reserve near Hagersville, which is southwest of Hamilton in the 1870s and 1880s. In those same years, 250 km further west, Big Mike Fox, so named by the local Chippewa he befriended, was among the founders of the Universalist Church in Olinda. As a cause we would return to aboriginal rights in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in regard to developing an indigenous constituency we seemed to have reached a dead end with George Moses.

What of our other founding culture? Unitarianism in Quebec was English. But already in 1950 Angus Cameron had an eye on a 1947 French Canadian Meadville graduate, Gaston Carrier. Yet it was not until Rev. Leonard Mason's time as minister of the Church of the Messiah in Montreal, did an effort begin. Mason reports in his diary that he had a lunch with Carrier in March 1965 at which Carrier "unfolded his dream for a French Canadian Church in Montreal." Mason wrote again on March 30, "Gaston Carrier arrived from Burlington...his project is getting on its way."

And then? My understanding is that the attempt to establish a Francophone congregation foundered upon the personality of its lay leadership. A dead end until around 1979 when, as Rev. Charles Eddis, who followed Mason as the minister in Montreal, recounts "we had a francophone on our board in church....she set up a direct mail project aimed at attracting Francophones... We targeted neighbourhoods where we thought there would be Francophones we could attract, – encouraging them to come to the church or write for information.... We did just one mailing. The invitation invited Francophones to come to an evening at the church in French.... We stressed our programs in social responsibility.... only one attended, a social activist already acquainted with us, she was sympathetic. Her opinion was that it was not the time to try to attract francophones [and] we gave up the idea."

However, there was not a French Canadian vacuum; Val Bourdon served as president of the Unitarian Church of Montreal, as later did Denis Barsalo. In 2001, on Rev. Ray Drennan's initiative, the CUC published the bilingual meditation manual *Vers un rêve à bâtir*. Through the late 90s and 2000s, Hannelore Poncelet, "has been the spark plug" of the current effort, bringing together a monthly French discussion group, and working with Rev. Diane Rollert, UCM's current minister, to include more French content and offer periodic fully French services during regular Sunday worship time. Thanks to the internet and growing bilingualism, the church's young adult francophone population (with children!) has begun to



grow rapidly. In recent months, the church is seeing all-French language promotional materials disappearing on Sundays, and in May 2013, the board held a first-ever visioning session in French with a group of Francophones to discuss the future of French in the church. All this change has come in a short time, following years of resistance. After 180 years in Quebec and nearly 50 years after Gaston Carrier's effort, this is where they have finally arrived. The reasons why diversity took so long are complex.

Look to central Canada - in Manitoba there is an Icelandic Unitarian tradition. In the 1890s it emerged in Winnipeg and the Icelandic communities along Lake Winnipeg. These renegade ex-Lutherans formed a conference in 1923. When Rev. Charles Eddis attended his first district meeting in the prairies in 1954, he didn't understand much because it was done largely in Icelandic. But this all waned as Icelanders assimilated and intermarried into the mainstream as the twentieth century progressed.

It is obvious that it has been difficult to break out of the middle-class English Canadian cultural ghetto, and in our most significant success we did not have to: the inclusion of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer/questioning) people. 99% of CUC membership belongs to congregations that have gone through the process that certifies them as Welcoming Congregations to the LGBTQ community. We are proud of that and proud to testify in Parliament in support of same-sex marriage. Settling LGBTQ ministers has become routine, yet this didn't take place overnight or without conscious effort. Our current satisfaction belies the fear, pain and disappointment of the gay pioneers in our congregations and the resistance of many of our members. Prior to the late 1960s, silence is how we dealt with the issue of homosexuality. In Toronto the silence was broken when Elgin Blair moved there from London, Ontario. Joining the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto in 1970, he went to the Social Action Committee and asked if they were doing anything about gay rights. He later admitted to being petrified. The answer was, of course, **no**; it had never crossed their minds. In typical Unitarian fashion, a committee was formed – the Homophile Sub-committee.

That was the beginning. When later the board was asked to allow the Community Homophile Association of Toronto (CHAT) to use the building, the discussion included comments like: “It will give the wrong impression to the children.” “They'll hang around on the street.” “Next they'll want dances.” Disillusioned, Elgin Blair eventually became estranged from the congregation. Let me put this resistance in context. In 1968 the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) “Committee on Goals” reported that 7.7% of UUs believed that homosexuality *should be discouraged* by law and 80.2% said it *should be discouraged* by education, not by law. (p.32). The overwhelming opinion seems to have been that homosexuality was a disorder that could be influenced by education.

The first gay marriage by a UU in the US was performed in 1957; in Canada when Rev. Norm Naylor, the minister in Winnipeg, performed a same-sex marriage in 1974, it was the second



in Canada. The board allowed him to do the wedding, if there was no publicity. It ended up on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation); the board felt betrayed; a few members left. As nonchalant as we may feel about it now in 2013, in 1974 homosexual love was controversial. It seems to have been less alarming in Montreal where during the 70s, gay dances were permitted in Channing Hall. In any case, it was not until 1984 that the CUC Annual General Meeting passed a resolution on sexual diversity; then a month later at the UUA General Assembly a resolution encouraging ministers to perform “services of union” was adopted. The vote was overwhelming but again belied the struggle and behind the scene resistance. Between 1980 – 82, the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto was seeking a new minister, and did a survey. One question asked: What kind of minister the members would have difficulty with? Thirty-five percent said there would be difficulty relating to a gay minister; the response in regard to a female was 5%.

But something happened. Rev. Mark De Wolfe was serving as interim minister at Toronto First. His final Sunday arrived. The ministerial search committee from Mississauga attended since he was one of its pre-candidates. In that sermon Mark referred to the survey and said, “How do you feel about having a gay minister now that you've had one for six months?” The congregation was thunder struck, and afterward a standing ovation. Later someone said, “You've got guts” and Mark replied, “I'm still shaking.”

Let's put in perspective the 35% at the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto who in 1980 said it would be difficult to relate to a gay minister. When nine years later, in 1989, the UUA Commission on Appraisal did a survey, UUs were asked about the acceptability of a gay minister. 66% said it would hamper their ministry. Faced with such attitudes in their own faith community, it took enormous courage - courage from Elgin Blair in 1970, Mark de Wolfe in 1982, Stan Calder from Edmonton, who became president of the CUC in 1993, and Art Brewer from Toronto who has spent nearly two decades shepherding congregations through Welcoming Congregation certification. They, along with allies, like Norm Naylor, and shifting cultural trends brought us to where we are today. It took over 40 years - more than a generation. And, of course, there are still some who would prefer it with the CUC remained silent about LGBTQ Rights.

Still, it's worth celebrating and learning from. What can be drawn from this experience?

It took hope; a few champions who believe we could live up to our principles. It took courage; it took persistence; it took time, and it helped that Canadian society-at-large was becoming more tolerant. This experience suggests that when we have fallen short, it was because we weren't inspired by *hope* based in a vision that we could be a more inclusive community; we lacked champions; and that the efforts we made weren't frequent nor enduring enough.

Diversity appeared in many forms. How have we fared elsewhere? What about theological diversity? You find Humanists and agnostics, atheists and Jedis in our congregations. We



have feminists and neo-pagans. We have Jewish awareness groups and those who favor Buddhism. We have Theists and Deists, but we aren't at all easy with, nor will you find many Christians or Moslems among us.

I do not think it is about differing values as much as metaphors and narratives with which many Unitarians aren't comfortable. Manifesting reactivity, rather than engagement, we send out the not-so-subtle message that those people are not welcome.

The same holds true in the political realm. In 1968, the UUA Committee on Goals asked Canadians “what party did your parents support?” 28% said Conservative, 36% said Liberal and 13% said NDP. When asked which party they themselves supported 53% said NDP, 35% said Liberal and 4.5% said Conservative. I have no current figures to cite, but I have a memory of a congregation member bursting out in exasperation, “Unitarians are the NDP at prayer.” I suspect the political demographics of our membership haven't changed except there are now a substantial number of Unitarians who vote Green.

The point? When it comes to certain theology and political stances - despite our historic commitment to tolerance - we are anything but, much less open, accepting and welcoming to these differences. It reveals a hidden dogmatism and spiritual hypocrisy.

There are other forms of diversity.

My wife, Donna, and I co-ministered to the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto between 1989 and 2005. It is the congregation I know best. Mark Jorgenson is a member there. When Mark claps during a hymn he can carry the entire congregation with him. It doesn't matter that he tremors and is developmentally challenged. Mark comes with his mother; at other times an attendant accompanies him. Friends in the congregation sit with him, too. The congregation has been intentional in creating a space for Mark. In the lead up to the service at which Mark joined the congregation, Rev. Shawn Newton, wrote: “[Mark] loves worship – and it’s safe to say no one enjoys singing hymns as much... [and] he often calls out with a well-timed “Be careful!” just before I preach.” Shawn, then, moved to the point. “Because Mark contends with the world in ways unknown to most of us, the somewhat cerebral nature of our joining ceremony has never offered him a meaningful way to join our community. Until now... we will share in a ritual created for Mark that welcomes him, on his own terms, into our family...” Ask anyone who was there. It was a powerful moment in the life of that congregation. It took intentionality; it took a vision of being a Unitarian different than the way most of us understand it; it took courage on his mother's part and it took persistence. Mark has been attending First Toronto for well over a decade.

Long before Mark, there was Bob McCormick. Bob lived with Tourette's syndrome. Twice he spoke about it from the pulpit. The presence of others in our congregations who are differently-abled, enable us to be inclusive communities living out our first principle – to *affirm and promote* the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Note. There are no



qualifiers attached to it; it doesn't say the inherent worth and dignity of articulate, able-bodied, middle-class, progressive, social activists, Anglo-Canadians. Why is it then that others aren't attracted to our message?

Today, when more often than not, someone says *diversity*, they mean “visible minorities,” the term used by Statistics Canada. With only 4.4% of CUC membership being visible minorities, this faith tradition doesn't mirror the diversity of Canada, a nation in which 19.1% of the population is visible minorities. The United Church of Canada doesn't approach the national percentage either, but at 6.1% it is ahead of the CUC. In raw figures this means that of roughly 4800 Unitarians in our Canadian congregations, around 210 are visible minorities.

Not surprisingly, the percentage is highest in congregations in urban centers - Calgary has 6.4% and Montreal has 6.3 %. The largest absolute number belongs to the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa with 23 or around 5.6%. The make-up is interesting. There are Iranians, Brazilians, Indonesians, Zimbabwean and Nepalese, but the group that represents the largest number are black Unitarians (i.e. Afro-Canadian, Caribbean, African-American, etc.) There are approximately 78 Black UUs making up 1.6% of the CUC membership. This is at odds with the make-up of visible minorities nationally. The largest groups nationally are South Asian and Chinese. They make-up 4.5% and 3.8% of the general population respectively; in the CUC they represent .73% and .56%. Interestingly, Japanese make .45% of the CUC but only .26% nationally. My conjecture about why this is so is that both Afro-Canadians and Japanese have been in Canada longer and seem to me, as a whole, are more deeply assimilated into Canadian culture, and somehow the process of assimilation increases the possibility that one might find Unitarianism attractive.

Who are the visible minorities that become Unitarians? First, in regard to economic and educational status they are like other Unitarians. UUs represent the most highly educated faith in North America. A 1989 UUA Commission On Appraisal study indicated that the educational level of African-American UUs was marginally higher than white UUs. My guess, without data specific to Canada, is that the visible minorities in CUC congregations are likewise highly educated. In addition, we know that 38% of visible minority Unitarians are in mixed marriages, are the children of mixed marriages, or the children of cross-racial adoption. The indications that, as with mixed-faith partnerships, mixed ethnic/racial partners find that CUC congregations provide a supportive environment.

In general, Unitarians are an aging faith community. Over half who answered the CUC Diversity Survey were over 60; however, the age profile of UU visible minorities is significantly younger. This means that we would be still older without them. 34% had been members 1 - 6 years compared to an overall rate of 20% which indicates that visible minorities are more highly represented among newer members. While we can't say we are doing well; we can say we are doing better.



This raises a question: Why has Unitarianism found it difficult to attract Aboriginals, Francophones, visible minorities and working class, while over the last 50 years it became welcoming to LGBTQ people, and saw the number of women in ministry in North America grow from around 20 to the majority? Diversity in the UU context has progressed more quickly when the primary barrier to inclusivity wasn't culture or race but gender or sexual orientation. It wasn't simple, nor without pain or resistance, but it appears to be easier to embrace diversity when we weren't dealing with class, race, culture or politics. It can't it be the essence of the message. It originated in Transylvania and is embraced in the Kashi Hills in India, the Philippines and Burundi. Have we hijacked a message that should be universal and inclusive and made it fit our middle class sensibilities in a way that excludes others?

Here are three examples of why becoming more culturally and racially diverse is a challenge.

A summary of CUC Social Responsibility Resolutions up to May 2002 said under the title “Racism, Multiculturalism:” “It is interesting to note, in the light of the many changes in Canadian society over the past twenty years, that there are no resolutions dealing with racism, multiculturalism, or other inter-group issues aside from the one very vague resolution on language...” This isn't to say nothing had been done. In 1992 at the General Assembly held in Calgary, the Unitarian Universalist Association passed a “Resolution on Racial and Cultural Diversity” and the UUA redoubled its efforts. In July 1992, a CUC Multicultural in Canada (MIC) Co-ordinating team turned its attention to a proposal from Rev. Harold Rosen, then minister at North Shore Unitarian Church. A champion had appeared. Rosen used his sabbatical to journey across Canada visiting 26 congregations. Based on this he launched a program. It was entitled: “Rainbow Making: Intercultural and Interfaith Outreach for Canadian Unitarians and Universalists.” Its purpose to: “help our congregations respond creatively to diversity (the variety of racial, ethnocultural and religious groups in our larger community).” As early as 1963, Canadian congregations had told the UUA that its American approach didn't apply to the Canadian context. “Rainbow Making” however, was made for Canadian Unitarians. What happened? A number of congregations used it, but the general lack of response left Harold disheartened. (Remember Elgin Blair.) Eventually, finding the Bahais’ emphasis on interfaith activities compelling, he left the UU ministry.

When the CUC and UUA separated in 2002, the diversity mandate and programs had been located within the UUA's structure, not the CUC's. However, in 2002, the Canadian Unitarian Council had already adopted racism as a proposal for study “with a view to reducing the undesirable effects of all forms of racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination, in Canadian society.” At the CUC annual meeting in 2003 an “Anti-Racism” Resolution passed. But read the proposed 2002 study and you'll note that its focus was exclusively external; demanding that Canadian government work on the problem. Nonetheless, the 2003 resolution ended up calling for congregational self-study, and amendment in 2007 changed the title to “Resolution on Racial, Religious, and First Nations Equity.” The person coordinating the congregational study and to whom the questionnaire were to be sent, was Harold Koehler



of London, but he passed away in 2007. Another behind the resolution was Rev. J. Mac Elrod. In spring 2009, he recruited Rev. Jessica Rodela to chair the CUC's Diversity Monitoring Group. She was concerned about filling the position: it was the first year of her ministry in Waterloo; she knew the Canadian context was different from the U.S. in ways she wouldn't be familiar with; and as a recent American immigrant, she might be seen to lack credibility. She, then, discovered there were no members in the monitoring group. Given the realities confronting her, resignation made sense. She did, and the position has only been recently filled in May 2013, with an increase in membership.

The resolution on anti-racism came 20 years after the resolution on gay rights. Our espoused values were stronger than our values in practice. We found it easier to voice our hopes and intentions than to change our behavior. Did it make a difference that once the feminist revolution began the critical mass to champion the cause was already there? And probably the number of LGBTQ was larger than the 4.4% people who are visible minorities – a disparate group that lacks cohesion. What this meant was that when those in the CUC who championed ethnicity and race took up the cause they were doing it for others, and their focus was largely external rather than internal. When Jessica Rodela chaired the Diversity Monitoring Group, the people who approached her were exclusively interested in having her make statements championing specific political stands, and they became disrespectful when she demurred.

Mayor Nehshi spoke of three Ps – policy, program and people. The CUC has principle and has passed many resolutions. However, I am not sure we have policies the intention of which is to guide our efforts to become more inclusive. We do have people, but for sure we have no programs that address diversity besides the Welcoming Congregation.

What programs do we have and what have we done? Beyond resisting UUA models - as inappropriate for Canada - when an alternative was offered by Harold Rosen in 1994 and resolutions were passed in 2003 and 2007, why did so little happen within the CUC in regard to ethnic and racial diversity? In regard to the CUC Anti-Racism Resolution, why would the CUC put someone new to Canada in this position? Why, unintentionally, make a decision that was designed to falter? How is it that, while over the last 30 years Canada became increasingly culturally and racial diverse, the CUC put so little time into self-reflection? How is it possible that the CUC, having demonstrated leadership in promoting feminism and gay rights – in the world and within itself, is not aware of (and seemingly not alarmed by) the pervasiveness of its own mono-culture? Where are our champions? What does this tell us about Canadian Unitarians?

A second example: Today we must assume that a person will check online before walking through the doors of any CUC congregation. When they look what do they find? Check out the CUC website and under “CUC Vision Statement” on the “Our Vision and Mission” page, the following: “It respects and affirms diversity both within and among its congregations



and within the Canadian mosaic.” Turn to the “Newcomer” page and the closest it comes to speaking of multiculturalism is a reference to the CUC first principle “Our sense of connection is demonstrated by our respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” There are no pictures and therefore no hint given to what kind of diversity might be represented. In general, browsers looking at our congregational website will find that we prize individual freedom of belief and the diversity of those beliefs. We affirm diversity of sexual orientation and make a quick nod to culture, race and ethnicity using the phrase “welcome all people regardless of age, race, nationality, ethnic origin, ability, gender, or sexual orientation.” This statement appears almost universally, but in the absence of photos illustrating it or a statement that holds up diversity as being of particular value it implies: *It is not important to us.*

The second example raises a different set of questions: What message are we sending about who we are and what we value? Is not seeing someone like oneself a disincentive for those who aren't of Euro-Anglo-Canadian backgrounds? Is there awareness that walking into one of our congregations poses a greater challenge for someone who is a visible minority?

Finally, a personal example: After hearing me preach, my nephew's wife said to my sister that the message was the same as the church she attends but she was glad she'd been to college. That hit me in the gut. I reread the sermon. To my chagrin I could see the elitism in my Latinate word choices, literary references and historic digressions. Our language is only one way we telegraph who we are and who is welcome; there are others. We have gate-keeping conversations when someone new appears. During these we slyly interrogate them: ‘Where do you come from? they ask. Brampton. No, I mean where do you really come from? Your degree is from? Hum. Who did you say you work for? I just flew back from... have you been there?’ And even more subtly we shun *different* behavior and political beliefs with frozen smiles and silence; while a woman dressed to the nines and wearing a hat (which is the norm in a black church) would raise eyebrows in ours. The message, intentional or not, is: *You aren't welcome here.*

What do we find when we compare the ways we have succeeded in becoming diverse to the ways we have not?

- There were champions inspired by a vision rooted in Unitarian principles.
- There was an intention to change which was built upon with persistent effort.
- It took decades as we became familiar with the 'other' and comfortable with change.

What of the approach-avoidance behavior I've described? Does it reflect that we understand what we ought to do, even want to do; but lack knowledge how to, perhaps lack courage, as well? Or is it because we fear the repercussions?

Repercussions? We cannot be open and welcoming of difference and think that we'll stay the same. Is that what we expect? If we are only seeking a change in appearance but not



substance, we are saying to those who would join us: assimilate and we'll accept you. If we say 'Come on in and be just like us' we are asking people to sell themselves out. Who could possibly be attracted under those circumstances, when we want to come to a Unitarian community to be fully ourselves and be accepted as such?

If, in our hope of living up to our principles and sharing them more broadly, we invite a more diverse group of people to enter into our congregations and our lives, we will change. Vision leads to change. Changes cause anxiety. Anxiety awakens resistance. And the only way to deal with that reluctance and resistance is to recognize it, name it, and work with it.

The examples I gave speak to our anxiety and resistance. How are we to dismantle the barriers that make it difficult for certain groups to feel at home among us? How are we to reduce the anxiety that maintains those barriers?

Transforming the CUC into a radically inclusive community requires not only that we trumpet our cherished principles, but that we change our attitude. Welcoming diversity is an attitude. It is not a duty; it is an eagerness. It can't be contained because we yearn to grow in spirit and number, and desire the sort of change that will lead us into living bigger, fuller, deeper, more inclusive lives. What is asked of us? A level of honesty we have, until now, shrunk from; a way of being rather than believing; a way of acting rather than espousing. Being what? Open, accepting, responsive and flexible, rather than opinionated, critical and earnest.

Let us seek connection; follow curiosity; let our eagerness to learn and change and grow and spread liberal religion run wild.