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DATE

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DURATION

37m 5s

5 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

Speaker3

Speaker4

Speaker5

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:05] Speaker1

Oh, my gosh, there's people you're not boxes on a screen, hello, everyone. And for those of you who are boxes on the screen, yeah, your box is on a screen and you're here, you're all here with us today. For those who maybe need a reminder, I'm Beth monHollen. I am your ministerial intern for the next two years. It's actually, I'm sad to say, down to a year and a half now, but we'll forget that part. This is my friend and colleague Caroline Bright, and she has been so gracious to agree to be with me here today. So in and part of our series on neighbors and helpers, so we've been learning so much. If you've been zooming, not zooming, that was an unintentional link to Zoom. If you've been tuning in to the message series where we've heard from so many wonderful people in Montgomery and Chester County counties about the work that we and WellSprings can be part of and are part of doing to make our community more thriving and vibrant. And I was thinking as part of this more broadly about neighbors and helpers, and I thought, Oh, as a person new to WellSprings, new to Chester Montgomery counties like so new that I'm not even permanently here. How do how do I think about not just getting to know people in specific organizations, but who are our neighbors and helpers and Unitarian universalism itself? And that's where Caroline comes in, because Caroline is one of my seminary friends and Meadville Lombard Theological School. And while she is a neighbor in faith, Caroline is a neighbor in truth because she lives just 45 minutes away.

[00:01:53] Speaker2

Caroline, tell them more about yourself.

[00:01:55] Speaker1

They don't need to hear from me and feel free to sit. We do have the stools. I told Caroline I have a trouble sitting, but she is seven months pregnant and so she probably wants to stay.

[00:02:04] Speaker2

Or at least perch sometimes. Hello, neighbors, this is exciting. My name is Caroline Bright and I live just down the road in that city. You may have heard of Philadelphia. I am not originally from Philly. I am originally from Vermont, the frozen north, about five minutes south of Canada, in fact. But I made the strategic error of swiping right on a nice Philly boy. And now here we are. It happens to the best of us and I'm so excited to be here in person with Beth. We were saying earlier we've been in school together for two years and this morning was our first time meeting in person. It was very, very exciting. Thank you. So I'm so thrilled to be here and thank you all for this gracious welcome. And in Philly, I'm a member of the Unitarian Society of Germantown. But in an exciting twist this fall, I will be starting with mainline Unitarian as their intern. So we're I'm thrilled to visit WellSprings and I'm like, Wow, maybe I should do a tour of the whole Philly cluster. Well, we'll go on the road, but it's so exciting to be here with you all today to have this conversation about Unitarian universalism and what that means in terms of this broader umbrella that we fall under. Being part of these individual congregations. So thank you.

[00:03:21] Speaker1

In addition to Caroline, I actually invited quite a few of my other seminary friends to also be part of this conversation, and I imagined it and I the invitation I sent out was, Hey everybody, I want your dreams about the future of our faith. What are the aspirations of who we as a people, no matter where we might be and no matter what congregations we might or might not belong to? Do you dream about and a number of people answered that call, and what emerged from those conversations was actually three different strands. And so that's where we're going to shape today's conversation. The first theme was about how we found our way to Unitarian Universalism, so finding Unitarian universalism. Also, some of what I call a Unitarian Universalist leader, Paula Jones has a brilliant sermon and and phrase that she uses of community of communities. How even within Unitarian universalism do you find your people within that and then wrapping it up with actually, what are our dreams? What are the aspirations of who we as a people of faith and then we as WellSprings want to be? And so I want to first and I know that the screen might, might not work for us, but I want to I want you to hear introductions from the other folks who are virtually part of this conversation. So we'll play that intro video.

[00:04:47] Speaker3

No, here they are. I am Anthony Jackson. My pronouns are she and hers. I am physically situated in Kingston, Jamaica, and I am doing my internship at Neighborhood Unitarian Universalist Church in Pasadena, California. I am in my second year at Meadville Lombard Theological School, where I'm studying for my master. Of Divinity, Master of Divinity. I can't. Would you like me to invite somebody or do you want to invite Ronnie?

[00:05:27] Speaker4

Hey, my name is Ronnie Boyd, and I use she her pronouns. I am situated in Oakland, California, on a lonely island. I am a first year student at Daqing School for the ministry. I'm fairly active in Drum. I used to be on the drum steering committee and I have been E.E.U.U since I was 19. I am now thirty three, so it's a little over a decade. And my hope is to do spiritual direction, work with young, young adults of color because I think that demographic of people. If you don't have college going on and you don't have a community support, young folks can get caught up in the ills of society and into capitalism where money becomes their religion. Apart from the divine and having a divine calling. So I want to help young folks find their calling and to live out their lives with that, with that purpose. It's great. I'll pass it to Sarah.

[00:06:58] Speaker5

Thank you. So my name is Sarah Burrell, Harrop. I use she or they pronounce interchangeably. I am living on stolen Catalan's, which is known as Dallas, Texas, and I am a second year student at Meadville Lombard Theological School, working on a call to community ministry, specifically chaplaincy. And possibly organizing along with that.

[00:07:42] Speaker1

To dream and to and to a plan to share with you. Sarah is what I call a magical unicorn because she is a lifelong you. You. She was raised your use, she stayed. You, you. She is super active in her home congregation in organizing and with the UUA, the rest of us found our way to Unitarian universalism in various ways. Ronnie and Angelyne both found their way into Unitarian universalism, and Angelina will share a little of this. But through organizing and I found my way to Unitarian universalism through a little bit through activism as well. Twenty five, yup, I had to do the math. Twenty five years ago, I volunteered in Milwaukee with a local organization to be an escort for patients who were going into reproductive health clinics for services and to be a human barrier between them and protesters. And I had been raised. Some of you know this. If you've heard any of my sermons, I have been raised in Pentecostal churches and had left that when I started college and was unchurched and I had no concept of progressive or liberal. I didn't know you existed. And as I showed up every Saturday morning and donned a volunteer vest with other volunteers, I began to hear their stories and who they were and how they got involved. And because it was Milwaukee in the cold, snowy days of winter. We were invited in pairs and in shifts as volunteers to walk down the block, literally a block and a half away to go into a church and get some coffee and warm up. And I thought and I remember asking, Does that church know what we're doing right? And they were like, Oh yeah, it's a Unitarian Universalist church, and the minister of it actually founded this organization.

[00:09:35] Speaker1

And I said, what? I got to check this out. And so I actually started attending a few services there and was really like, I just did not know how to take it in. And I distinctly remember one of the services, the minister of that church, giving a sermon about Unitarian Universalist theology. And he said, Look. Unitarian Universalist, it's not that we can believe anything we want. We don't, we have things we believe, and it's not that we don't believe in God, it's that we don't have to believe in God. And I sat there like someone had knocked me over the head and thought this, this is my religious and spiritual home, and when I am ready to commit to church on a regular basis again, this is the place I'm coming back to. Well, it took another 15 years because I was in my 20s and 30s and doing all kinds of things that did not make time for Sunday service, but when I was starting to get thirsty, for a connection and for spiritual growth again, I immediately knew where to go and I looked up a service and I found out there were times and 10 years ago now I started going to my home congregation and immediately joined and knew this. This faith, this people, is where I belong. So mine was a stop and start kind of journey, but with a surety from the first message, I heard that it was for me. Caroline, tell us your story.

[00:11:16] Speaker2

Well, I joke that I grew up you. you without actually knowing that I grew up you, you. I come from a family where my mother's master's degree is in religious studies and her doctorate is in wait for it. Female Islamic leadership in Indonesia. So we we spent my entire childhood traveling all over the globe, and when we lived in England, we went to Anglican services. When we lived in Indonesia, we went to Baptist Evangelical Church Services in the basement of the local Radisson Hotel, where I watched a lot of VeggieTales and it was a good time.

[00:11:51] Speaker1

And then when we were

[00:11:52] Speaker2

Home in Vermont, we were Episcopalian and sometimes congregational. Because it's New England, you can't be in New England without being at least a little bit congregational. So that really piqued my interest in how different people kind of do faith and how churches look. So as I got older, I kind of stumbled into a religious studies minor thinking, Oh, this is interesting because if you understand religion and people's spiritual beliefs, you can understand people better. And I found that really intriguing. So I just started attending random services while I was traveling as a flight attendant, which is what brought me to Philly in the first place. And I had a great time exploring different churches and different communities all over the country, all over the world. And then one day I was off and it was a Sunday, and I was like, Huh, that that First Unitarian church has a really deep historical meaning in Philadelphia. I should see what it's about. And I sat in that service, and it was the first time in my life that I hadn't had to edit the theology of a service in my head. I didn't have to think, Oh, OK, I'm not going to use that language. It everything made sense. And I thought to myself, what just happened? And I left. I walked out and I called my mom and I said, Mom, I'm pretty sure we're Unitarians.

[00:13:06] Speaker2

And she said, Yeah, that's not the first time I've heard that. And I was like, You knew people told people said this and you knew about it. So from there, I just kind of started exploring Unitarian universalism, learning all about it. And then I got hit over the head with a called a ministry, which I was like, Whoa, hold on. This is my career in politics, and I took a break to be a flight attendant. And now this like this is not where I thought we'd be going, which is how I know it's a true calling because it's to military chaplaincy of all things. And I hate running and I hate push ups and it's going to be an interesting adventure. But that's kind of how I found my way to Meadville Lombard because when I was like, Oh, shoot, what do I have to do to be a minister or a military chaplain? Like, what are the stuff now I have to go back to school. I was so excited to not do that and and I was looking into the different educational options, and I learned that there are only two Unitarian Universalist seminaries that are still in existence. I also learned that in fact, my undergraduate institution was founded as a universalist seminary, so I don't know how I missed that at St.

[00:14:14] Speaker2

Lawrence University in Canton, New York. But that's fine. It's fine. So I was like, OK, there are these two schools and there are other schools where you can go to get an emptive and still be you minister. Absolutely. But it was really important for me because I hadn't grown up within this denomination explicitly to have that denominational grounding when I was getting my emptive. So I found my way to Meadville, which has been a wild ride. For those of you who don't know, our unofficial mascot is the Honey Badger, so that tells you quite a bit that you need to know about our school. And so now, now here we are. You know, kind of I've gotten to really know Unitarian Universalism as a denomination through Meadville through visiting all these different congregations, and I continue to do that after I stumbled into that church while this one was in Sydney, Australia. And that's I'll tell you the story of coffee hour. But it got exciting and it ended with egg curry sandwiches. It was, yeah, it was an adventure, but that's kind of how I ended up here by accident, I guess, and then on purpose.

[00:15:19] Speaker1

I want to share with you, thank you, thank you. I forgot that our unofficial mascot is a honey badger. How can I forget that? I want to share with you. Also a short clip just about three minutes of our colleague Angelina Jackson, who is Jamaican and lives in Kingston, sharing how she, as a Jamaican, found her way to Unitarian universalism. So that's our next.

[00:15:45] Speaker3

Coming out of the Brethren Church, I I wanted or is that 20, so 20, I was kind of in the space of rebellion. I don't want church, I want church, I'm gay, I don't want church, I'm gay, I can't have church. Just a lot of that that was going on. And I ended up meeting a couple, an individual specifically and then a community of developing a community of friends that were more along the lines of agnostic atheist. And so that kind of caught my attention for for a little while and then moving from that into science of mind and the space of metaphysics and being interested in that and then moving out of that and finding myself in metropolitan community church spaces and feeling some of that space. But it was a little bit too Christianity to Jesus for me and wanting something that was a little bit broader in that way. Now, during that space, I was involved in LGBTQ activism, and I met Reverend Adam Darrow, who was doing his internship at our church in San Diego. And Adam and I got on like a house on fire, and we just kind of kept in touch since 2014, and we just were really.

[00:17:10] Speaker3

Every month we'd have a talk talk for about an hour or so and. I had met Unitarian Universalism, that's how I put it, I met you in 2012 when I was doing activism work, and I was housed by a lovely couple from the Arlington, Virginia, church. And that was kind of my exposure to you. You and I was thinking, Wow, this is amazing. Where can I find this? This doesn't exist in Jamaica. How do I connect? And it just kind of fizzled. And it stayed at that interest base 2012 to 2014, meeting Adam, getting back into the space and then fizzling again with Metropolitan Community Church. And, you know, if what it eventually ended up with was I started reading some more about Unitarian Universalism. I read it like whole. It was a I call it, a nice little ball that I can put all the pieces that make up my theological space, my identities, all the things that make me me can just fit into this you.you bowl. And I realized that this is what I really need. This is a community that that can make sense for me that I can make sense of. I'm not told how things are. I can, you know, I can work through my things, on my own and in community and.

[00:18:35] Speaker3

Adam then suggested he knew I had to call into ministry, wanted to be in the ministry and he knew I had applied to seminary, I hadn't continued forward. And so he asked me one day when he was at GE if I was still interested in seminary. And when I told him yes, he sent me information about Meadville, read about it, got really interested. And I said, This is this is what I've been looking for. And so from that space, you know, getting into seminary. But when I really knew that you was my place, I went to finding our way home in 2019. And that is it's finding our way home, which is a conference for religious professionals of color. And I went there and I found my people like you. It was was my space, but I went and found my BIPOC people and I said, This is it. This is really I feel at home here. I feel this love. I feel this community. And this is a space that I want to continue pursuing the spiritual discipline and development, but also the space of ministry.

[00:19:43] Speaker1

Coming. Fell right, I. As soon as Angelina said that when we were having that conversation, I obviously was having the conversation in the context of wanting to bring something to you all. But I thought, Oh, that's actually what I've heard so many people at WellSprings say, because just as all of us up on the stage and on the screen have had different paths into this faith. I've heard that from all of you that some of you were lifelong. You use my magical unicorn people that I love. And some of you have been at many different you churches. Some of you have been at your churches, all over the area and all over the country. Some of you, this is your first year. You home because you like me for I hate using the word reject. I don't think of it that way, but left the religion of your childhood because you found it wasn't spacious enough for you. So we have all these different paths to get right here into this room, onto the screens wherever you are joining us from. And that's what I think is beautiful about where we are. But finding our community of communities, finding our people even within these spaces is a blessing, and it can also be a little bit of a challenge.

[00:20:56] Speaker1

Just a little bit, because there are lots of ways that our identities in all of their various forms. Aren't welcomed in spaces we have experience all of us. I would dare say all of us have experienced that in some way. Some part of who we are isn't welcome in the space where we show up. And that hurts us, and so within our congregational spaces to actually be radically welcoming of everything somebody brings is an ongoing process and challenge. I want to play the next two little video clips, a short one from Ronnie, she mentioned in her intro that she used to be on the board of Drum and she'll explain what that means. And then a follow up video right after that from Sarah, who is serving on a UUA committee that is in partnership with Drum. So as a way of just sharing some of the community of communities within Unitarian Universalism. We'll hear from them. And then Caroline and I have a few things to share about that.

[00:22:01] Speaker4

So drum dance for diverse, revolutionary Unitarian Universalist multicultural ministries. And it's the BIPOC ministry. A group of U.S. And they are, I guess, led by a steering committee, and it's a membership based type of group, so people of color that want to be a part of drums like healing program, spiritual sustenance and any sort of like or or organizing work can become members to to get connected. And they've been around for over 20 years. Yeah. And I've kind of been like the pipe, the BIPOC voice of our faith movement. Yeah, there's an interesting history there because. Uh, there's a time when Drum was funded by the UUA, and it kind of set things back within the organization for some time and. It hasn't been until recently in the past couple of years, has John kind of made a comeback and been a community presence? But I think with the current. Socio political climate, there's been a greater demand for drum species, and we're also seeing the same thing with blue need for black spaces, which is yeah. So as an organizer like, I get excited when these groups are formed. But then it's also a little saddening that they're being formed because it's also a result of it's also a sign that needs aren't being met. Hmm.

[00:24:17] Speaker1

And Urdu inaudible, it's not what it's called in football. So not a sports person. We're going to skip. I'm I'm conscious of our time and while I want to stay here with you all day, I'm just going to skip the next video. I'm looking at my tech career. If it's OK, we do that. Yeah, that'll do us a little time. Here's what I want to say. I love that Ronnie acknowledged how exciting it is to create community of communities, but particularly for people who have really visible and invisible marginalized identities. That idea of what needs aren't being met and how can we come together to meet them? The next video clip we would have played is Sarah talking about allies for Racial Equity, which is the the white caucus group within the UUA that really partners and supports the work of Drum. They are really active in saying, Does Trump have a fundraiser that's coming up and they do in May, then let's make sure that some of our resources as people in the center is going to pull that work further into the center. Ari is great and so is drum, and they both are serving needs that aren't being met elsewhere. But in addition to our racialized identities and I'm looking around this room and people visibly, I do not know your identities visibly, most folks in here look white. I'm not saying you all are because I do not know that. So that's a visible marker of identity that has meaning out in the world. Um, Angelina talked about being an LGBTQ activist and the movement to create welcoming congregations with specifically in response to the ways in which our LGBTQ family were excluded in religious spaces.

[00:26:07] Speaker1

So how do we create welcoming environments that people know it is OK for me if I am gay to bring my wife? If you are trans part of why we? Use our pronouns here is to signal that it is OK for you to be who you are with us. But there are other ways, and Carolyn and I had a great conversation about a thing that sometimes also happens in Unitarian universalism is that we get good practice at being a welcoming congregation for LGBTQ folks. We are leaning into what it means to create racial justice and equity in the world. I'm not saying we're great at it, but we're at least leaning into that. Where we sometimes lean back is when there are. And Caroline used this phrase and I loved it. Marginalized theologies. And I know from conversations I've had with folks at WellSprings that having in a place where it was OK to do an experience what Angelina called that container for your beliefs, which means maybe you do want to use God language and you do want to use the voice of prayer, and you want to have a little bit more embodied worship, which feels sometimes in some you spaces like it is not welcome. That is another way as Unitarian Universalists that we need to if we're talking about and this is a critically important practice in Unitarian universalism widening the circle that we mean that in all of its various forms. Caroline, is there anything you want to add to that?

[00:27:39] Speaker2

Well, I often describe Unitarian Universalism as the faith of yes. And if you're familiar with improvisation, you know that when you're doing an improv sketch, you always say yes. And this other thing you never say no, because that stops the improv, right? It cuts everything off when you say, no, not this idea. This other thing in Unitarian universalism, we are empowered to say yes and yes. I believe this and also these other things. Yes, I believe this and you believe this other thing. And that's good, too. And creating that space for theological diversity can sometimes be really challenging in certain spaces or certain congregations. But I think it's something that we really need to pay attention to and pay attention to our heritage as a Unitarian Universalist Unitarian Universalist. And and what those things mean and what our history brings to what we're experiencing now and what we want to bring in terms of theological diversity and acceptance into the future of you. Youism. And I think WellSprings is a phenomenal example of that. It's right on the cutting edge of what we need to be doing as a denomination. And I was like, Oh, I'm there in my backyard. This is wonderful. So I think this is such a great example of what we need to be doing. So as much as we're bringing this message here today. I'm also very excited to bring this message of what you all are doing here to other spaces as well, because it is so critically important.

[00:29:04] Speaker1

One final video clip actually is the bridge from what we were just saying into our dreaming about the future. So I have a just a short clip of our colleague Sara Ali talking about what pluralism can mean.

[00:29:18] Speaker5

When it's true pluralism, when is like, yes, new black trans women, you you can show up here, you can be one hundred percent yourself, you're Muslim too wonderful, you know? Yeah, that that where it's true pluralism, where we're not enforcing a culture or a viewpoint or worldview when we're actually able to to share and allow people their own particularities. I, I think that might not be colonialism, but we got to watch it. I think Jimmy Carter used to say who Jimmy Carter was moderator for quite some time. She, I heard her say, When we're we're, we're the religion. Where? We don't ask you to give up the religion that you grew up with to be with us. And so we are are we we aspire to be a pluralistic religion, but is that is that reflected? Is that reflected in your services? Is that reflected in your music? Is that reflected in your life span, religious education?

[00:30:40] Speaker1

We aspire, we aspire as a people to a lot of things. And so I wanted Caroline to share, so I'm putting her on the spot, although I'm not entirely. I was like, Caroline, I'm going to ask you to do this. Maybe and and I'm framing this because I, uh, as a as a mother, if you don't

[00:31:00] Speaker2

Mind me saying that she doesn't, she

[00:31:02] Speaker1

Loves her kid and soon to be alive to kids. When you think about your own not just role as a minister, but your role as a mother who is going to raise some magical unicorn, lifelong Unitarian Universalists. What are your dreams and aspirations for how you want your children to engage in religious pluralism with congregations?

[00:31:23] Speaker2

So my becoming a parent is absolutely tied to seminary. Like, I literally found out that I was pregnant with my daughter the week I started classes at Meadville, and so I figured out what's to seminary babies? Why not? Let's let's do that range. And and it's been really fascinating considering Ministry Unitarian Universalism while also being like, Wait a minute, my kids are only ever going to know me as a minister. What is this? And and I think we're in a great place to move forward as you use and to look at what that means. And it really is that pluralism. It's that piece where we're making space for folks with all of their identities and not just the ones that we are comfortable with. Right. It's it's making space for people who might hold identities that make us feel uncomfortable. Maybe that's a theological identity. Maybe that's another form of identity. But that's my hope in the future is that my kids will grow up in a Unitarian universalism where there is space for all identities, even the ones that make many of us uncomfortable because that is true pluralism and that's what we need to be bringing forward.

[00:32:31] Speaker1

Thank you. The title of this today specific message you may not have noted is the company we keep. And there was a song running through my head the entire time I started even thinking about this service, and it is a song by my muse, a duo that you may be familiar with. And the song says this. I'm going to try to sing it on the spot. We shall be known by the company we keep by the ones who circle around to turn these fires. We shall be known by the company we keep, and I think about that in this series of neighbors and helpers, we have been learning about the people in our community who are circling around to 10 fires of justice and love. And we are part of that WellSprings. We are a part of it here in our counties and we are part of it in our larger faith movement. One of my seminary friends who who did not hear from today, but now you will, through my own voice, said a brilliant thing in a final presentation in a class in the fall, and she is specifically going into community ministry. She specializes in what she calls and other people do spiritual entrepreneurship. And she is not seeking ordination. And so she said in this. We we will not all be ministers. But we all have a ministry.

[00:34:10] Speaker1

And I would say we all have ministries, and we as a WellSprings community have many ministries. We are supporting many ministries together and and we are at a liminal time, not just because of this pandemic, but because of the changes that are taking place with Reverend Ken leaving his position as our founding minister with as I didn't know, I was going to reference this. But when I read her letter and heard her message, which you can all please, please engage with about leadership development, we are in a time when all of us can discern who this community together. This congregation will be what we can move into in terms of taking WellSprings into the dreaming space, the aspirational space of what we in good company want to make real. And I am so excited and honored that as your intern, I get to participate in that. And these next 18 months, I'm excited that I have amazing colleagues who helped me dream outside of the space so I can bring the dreaming here. And so I welcome each of you in the coming days and weeks and months to think about the company you are keeping and know that you also are good neighbors, good neighbors here and good neighbors in our faith movement. Carolyn, would you pray for us?

[00:35:39] Speaker2

Absolutely. In the spirit of bringing in words from other you use beyond just these walls and even beyond this wonderful region of the world that we find ourselves in? I wanted to share a prayer from Elizabeth Bukky, and it's called a world of beauty and love is coming. So if you'll join me now in a spirit of prayer. God of many names, Spirit of Life, Love, which holds us, we gather in reverence and thanks for you. We are grateful for the gift of another breath and for each moment of connection, beauty and truth. Cry with us in our pain for our world, remind us that we are loved just as we are. Remind us that we are connected with all that is. Remind us that we do not journey alone.

[00:36:30] Speaker1

Hmm.

[00:36:30] Speaker2

Give us what we need for today. Call us back to our promises, commitments and values. Help us love ourselves and each other. And to show that love in our actions make us instruments of justice, equity and compassion. Free us from all that is evil. We declare that life and love are stronger than tyranny and fear that a world of beauty and love is coming and we must shape it together. May it be so Amen.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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