



## UU Elevator Speech

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

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May 2019

**Welcome, Chalice Lighting:** *Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a sacred space. We light the chalice in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.*

**Personal Check In:** Briefly share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

### Opening Words:

We are here to abet creation and  
to witness to it,  
to notice each other's beautiful  
face and complex nature  
so that creation need not play to  
an empty house.

~Annie Dillard, *Singing the Living Tradition*, reading # 420

### Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. What does it mean to you to be UU?
2. How do you explain your faith to others? Share some of the experiences you have had.
3. What would you say if asked, "What's a Unitarian Universalist?"

### Readings – see below

### Sitting in Silence (Reflect on questions and readings)

**Sharing** - This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share one or more responses to the session questions or comment on something else that the questions or readings bring up for you.

(This is a good time to take a brief break—breathing, bathroom, snack, etc.)

**Open Discussion** -This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

### Closing reading:

We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight. Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are and, renewed by their grace, move boldly into the unknown.

~ Sara Moores Campbell, *Singing the Living Tradition*, reading # 701

### Announcements/Plans

**Check out:** As we close today, how are you feeling now?

### Extinguish the Chalice

## Readings

I don't actually have one straight up memorized elevator speech. I tend to tailor my response to my audience, and try to pay attention to what the person is asking. Some people just want to know if I go to church. Others want to know the basic values of our religious community. Instead of having a single speech that I repeat, I have four essential concepts that I try to include. Sometimes I'll focus more on one or another, and sometimes I'll include all four. Depends on how many floors in the building!

1. **Our roots are firmly planted in liberal Christianity** – Unitarianism and Universalism as theological positions can be found in the earliest days of Christian history, and in the Protestant Reformation. Unitarian refers to the unity of God (as opposed to the trinity, in which Jesus is one of three divine parts of God). Universalism refers to the idea that all souls are saved (as opposed to predestination, in which only a few are chosen)
2. **We are a religiously pluralistic faith tradition** – Since the two denominations consolidated in 1961, we are no longer specifically Christian, but embrace and learn from many different religious traditions.
3. **We are a relational faith, a people of covenant** – Rather than requiring adherence to a creed to hold us together and stipulate who can be a member, we rely on our relationships. We commit to a covenant which lays out the expectations of relationship and holds us accountable to one another.
4. **We are committed to working toward justice and freedom for all** – Throughout the history of this movement, Unitarians, Universalists, and Unitarian Universalists have been found at the center of most of the major social and civil rights movements. This continues today in our commitments to anti-oppression, dismantling racism and white supremacy, economic and environmental justice, and more.

One way to use these notes is to combine the bolded sentences into one short statement you can memorize, and then be prepared to answer more questions if there is time or interest. Another is to remember the general concepts, doing your own research and figuring out what bits are most important to your story. Either way, I hope they will be helpful to you in clarifying your own speech about this beloved faith tradition of ours.

~Rev. Lisa Bovee-Kemper, Question Box Sermon, May 5, 2019. Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

Talking to others about who we are in a quick elevator speech is important if we care about those who ask and this belief system we invest so much in. It's hard so I try to do short, simple, sweet. Everyone is different - it's what makes UUism so cool - and will say it differently, but this is what I try to do.

"So while UUism springs from the earliest days of Christianity, we actually are a faith that includes people from lots of traditions all over the world. My fellowship here in Greenville includes folks from evangelical and mainline Christian churches, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, earth-centered traditions as well as atheists and agnostics - people who have uncertainty about what to believe."

Many of our Founding Fathers - Jefferson & B Franklin for instance - were Unitarian, and we've always been there for social justice - like the right to vote for women, civil rights for minorities and today we fight for LGBTQ rights. In fact our Pastor, Rev. Lisa is gay, married and loving mom to two great kids.

Rather than a creed of "do's and don'ts" we have a "covenant" - we promise to stand for love and justice. Another way to look at that is that what we do to help others during our life here on earth is more important than what we say we believe in. Really, UUs have many different concepts of what god may be or what our lives lead to - and we're good with that as long as love and justice are at the center of it all.

We believe in the worth and dignity of every person, we work to accept others for who they are, and we try to act with justice and compassion.

Now, the elevator opens, so I give 'em one of those wallet cards I try to keep the "welcome table" stocked with - burgundy and white and says something like "What do Unitarian Universalists believe?"

I say something like, "What I said was too fast and hard to express but here's something that might help you to understand what we're all about. Thanks for asking by the way."

~Steve Hull, Member, Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

Evolving, not revealed. This life, not the afterlife. Actions and experiences, not beliefs. Democracy, not hierarchy. And don't choose between goodness and happiness, insist on both.

~Doug Muder, *Stop the elevator; I'm not done. If someone on an elevator asked you what Unitarian Universalism is, could you answer before one of you reached your destination?* UU World, 12/27/2010  
<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/stop-elevator>

Our resistance to religious language, I believe, helps to account for the struggle that so many of us experience in trying to say who we are as Unitarian Universalists. I always encourage people to work on their elevator speech, what you'd say when you're going from the sixth floor to the lobby and somebody asks you, "What's a Unitarian Universalist?" You've got forty-five seconds. Here's my latest: "The Unitarian side tells us that there is only one God, one spirit of life, one power of love. The Universalist side tells us that God is a loving God, condemning none of us, valuing the spark of divinity that is in every human being." So my version of what Unitarian Universalism stands for is, "One God, no one left behind."

~ Rev. William G. Sinkford, 7<sup>th</sup> President of the UUA, 2001-2009. *Share the Good News with a world that badly needs it. What's your elevator speech about Unitarian Universalism?* UU World, March/April 2003.  
<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/our-calling-marchapril-2003>