

**“Now Is the Time”**

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This past summer at General Assembly (where the annual business of our Association is conducted every June) I was asked to participate in a clergy focus group. The UUA was planning to sponsor a national marketing campaign, entitled “Now Is the Time,” and wanted our feedback on the advertisements. As the ads were slowly passed around and I saw the words I knew that something big was about to happen. Some of my colleagues sat and nitpicked (in that old UU habit we can’t seem to drop). There were concerns about the timing (too soon), the preparation (not enough), the use of funds collected (transparent and accountable?). But I looked at the ads and thought, “This is good, this is big, this is what we have been waiting for.” Now is the time. As one of my colleagues said to me last week “I have been waiting for this for fifteen years.”

For those of you, like me, who ran out to get the first advertisement in *Time*, you can see what I mean. This is on page 62 of the October 15, 2007 issue of *Time*. This was one of the ads that I saw last June. No picture, one color, full page ad “Is God Keeping You from Going to Church?” A provocative, theological question about religious community and the groundwork of faith. Who’s God? Any God? Who is God? Who owns God? How is God defined? This one sentence articulates the thrust of our faith; reason, freedom, tolerance, and love. One sentence, and provocative.

You must have had the conversations I have had with neighbors, family and friends. “Are you a cult?” “Aren’t you the people who believe anything?” No and no, but like me you might have stumbled to explain exactly who we are and why you are here. For two decades American liberal religion, including Unitarian Universalism, has been reactive (“Stop the Religious Right” – after the religious right made gains in public religious conversation and politics; “Support gay marriage” – after gay marriage became an issues,). All reactions, never proactive. It was like we had a self-esteem issue. Someone else, another faith or religious interpretation was always leading the dialogue and definitions, and we were following up with our version/lament/dispute/interpretation. We were the pesky younger sibling saying “Gee, that’s not fair” instead of being more mature and saying “This is who I am and where I stand” before an issue developed. This is our space on the public, religious domain.

Here is a prototype advertorial that will appear in an upcoming issue of *Time*, “Find Us and Ye Shall Seek; Seek and You Shall Find.” Without a lengthy conversation on liberal religion and how revelation is continuous (as opposed to the beliefs of our orthodox neighbors), two phrases put it out there. We come to seek and in doing we find comfort with questions and continuous revelation. We struggle to understand life and death, growth and suffering with open hearts and minds. We find like-minded seekers, good people in this religious community doing the same. We discover the values of freedom and respect for all people, which deepens the respect and freedom we have for

ourselves. I look at these ads and I am proud of who we are, of what I represent and teach and preach as your minister.

This is the first national media campaign we have launched in fifty years and it is well conceived. There are four major goals to the first phase; 1) To inspire members to take greater pride in our identity, 2) To encourage us to invite friends and family for a visit, 3) To raise name and brand awareness of Unitarian Universalism, and 4) To give us a voice in the national discourse about faith, spirituality, and values. Over the next eight weeks a variety of advertisements and advertorials will appear in *Time Magazine*. Over twenty million people read *Time* during the week. It is the number one news magazine for adult's age 30 – 44 who listen, watch, or contribute to NPR and PBS, and for those in the same age group who share environmental concerns. People like us, who might not even know we exist.

The UUA has launched this campaign for all of us and what we believe, and here is how they ask us to help. They are asking each member to consider a donation of \$50 and, to promise to share their faith with others. As always, some folks have \$50 to share and some do not, so we give what we can when we can. The Malones have made a generous leadoff pledge because they believe in our faith and our ministry. Thank you, George and Ruby for your leadership. You have been stewards and teachers to us for almost fifty years. Due to the last minute vision and generosity of other Unitarian Universalists, there is also a matching \$500,000 dollar gift on the table. Every amount we give will be doubled, up to \$500,000. So the Malone's gift of \$250 just became \$500. My gift of \$75 just became \$150. What can and will you give?

Fifty percent of the money we donate will fund the national marketing campaign you see before you. Twenty five percent of what we donate will support congregations and their ministers of color, yes, attempting to break the diversity barrier when the opportunity presents itself. The final twenty five percent will go to congregations interested in growth outreach and social justice, something we have an investment in at First Church. Money for growth outreach will be allocated to UU Districts (we are the Heartland District) based on how much the District raises, and the funds will then be distributed by the District Board, so a percentage of our money even stays local. You can bet that at the Fall District UU Minister's workshop I attended last week I stumped for "Now Is the Time." Quite simply, the more we give, the more we get back.

I also don't want us to forget the other request from the UUA, the one that is harder than giving money, that we share our faith with our neighbors, family and friends. That we invite someone we know, who we think would be interested, to a service or activity – that we spread the good news of what we have to share. How many of you have invited someone to a congregational offering in the last two years? Thank you. It is time for us to stop hiding our light under a bushel and do this more often.

There are two more reasons for us to give generously. First, the President of our Association, the Reverend Bill Sinkford is a member of this congregation. He has ably led our Association for the last six years and some of you knew him when he was in high school or refinished porches before he went on to work in marketing, ministry, and outreach. This campaign is very much a part of his vision and I believe that we need to support our loyal members who humbly serve us with a compelling vision for our faith.

Even more importantly, we need to give generously because the UUA chose to feature two of our members in a publicity photograph for the campaign. Who do you see

before you? Yes, that is a smiling Dick Bozian at General Assembly in 2006 and who is the lovely lady next to him with the green sweater and her arms in the air (extra points for correctly guessing)? That's right, our own Board President, Barb Rider.

So now is the time. Today you have an opportunity to shape the future of our faith, so please give generously. In conjunction with the advertising campaign, the UUA has produced a new DVD that we will be showing to visitors. We are going to preview it for you during services. It is ten minutes long. While you watch it, consider what you are moved to give. There are contribution envelopes in your order of service (if you brought your checkbook). Please make your checks payable to the Unitarian Universalist Association (or UUA) and seal them in the envelopes. If you want to give cash, just place it in the offertory plate. Envelopes and cash will be collected after the DVD has concluded. If you forgot your checkbook, you have one week to send me a check and I will see that it goes to the UUA or you can go online and contribute at the website [www.uua.org/giving](http://www.uua.org/giving). When asked, please indicate that you are giving from First Unitarian Church in Cincinnati, because 25% of the money comes back to our District, and they can only know which District if you tell them where you worship. Please give generously and enjoy the DVD. (Extra bonus points if you can find another First Churcher in the DVD, and a First Church family that contributed to its production). We can do so much more together than we could ever do alone. Now is the time.

