



# UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK  
Spirituality · Community · Justice

**No Permanent Waves:  
Rising Up Again after an Election**

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13 November 2016

[frederickuu.org](http://frederickuu.org)

On Wednesday evening, many of us gathered in this sanctuary for a Post-Election Vigil. I used the following subtitle in the congregation-wide email announcement to indicate the spirit in which the vigil was intended: “**Healing Our Hearts, Healing the Heart of Our Democracy.**” We have too many blocked hearts and broken hearts in this country. There is too much meanness, incivility, and cruelty. As I said Wednesday, in the wake of any election that I can remember — regardless of which party won — I have never before felt compelled to schedule a vigil the next day. But this election season has been particularly divisive.

As I have preached before from this pulpit, **it is possible to be a religious liberal and a political conservative**. When we say that Unitarian Universalism is a *liberal* religious movement, it is a reference much older than contemporary liberalism, reaching back to the Latin root *liber*, meaning freedom. Unitarian Universalism is a *free* religious movement, which includes the freedom to choose politically conservative positions. And we have many examples from our history of Unitarians who were political conservatives — most famously **William Howard Taft, who served as a Republican President of the United States and later as the President of the Unitarian General Conference.**

But irrespective of the partisan divide, it is important to call out that in this particular election season, **Donald Trump has been a bully. He has regularly proclaimed misinformation with confidence. And he has fanned the flames of racism, anti-Semitism,**

**misogyny, and Islamophobia.** While all of that is true, I am *not* saying that it is the whole story of the Trump campaign, nor am I saying that all Trump supporters are racist, anti-Semitic, misogynistic Islamophobes. There are, for example, many individuals and segments of our country that voted for our first African-American President (named Barack *Hussein* Obama) and his promise of “Change you can believe in” in 2004 and 2008, *who* also voted this year for Donald Trump’s promise of change. **But even though Trump represents change and hope to some American voters, the centrality of bigotry to his campaign means that many oppressed groups in our society feel particularly vulnerable** in the wake of his election — much more so than after any election in recent memory.

Although I was aware that holding a post-election vigil entailed the possibility of being misunderstood, I felt it was worth the risk to offer a safe space for people who were feeling vulnerable, alienated, and alone to process their feelings in community. I felt it was also important to reassure this congregation that we will continue to be a beloved community answering the call of love. **Regardless of this or any other election, we will continue to be in solidarity with Muslims, women, refugees, people of color, and people with disabilities. We will continue to advocate for the equal rights of Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning citizens of this county.**

There are many different reasons people join Unitarian Universalist congregations, but one of the most consistent themes I have heard over the years is that when many of you first read our [UU Seven Principles](#) you thought, “Wow. That’s what I think! I didn’t know it was possible for a religious community like that to exist.” And **in the wake of this or any other election, it remains the case that we covenant to affirm and promote:**

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

For some of you, Hillary Clinton was your dream candidate. For others of you, she was a compromise. Still others of you — or friends or family members — voted for a third-party, voted for Donald Trump, or didn't vote at all for a confluence of complicated reasons.

There is not time this morning for me to attempt a nuanced analysis of this election, nor is there any reason for me to replicate what increasing numbers of people are already doing in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and elsewhere. I will say that I'm skeptical of simplistic explanations. As many of you have heard me say before, I am a proponent of **intersectionality**. (The word intersectional uses **the analogy of a traffic intersection** in which oncoming traffic is coming from many different directions at once.) **Any full accounting of this election should, at minimum, consider the intersection of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, and age**, and how they played out differently among individuals, groups, and regions for complex historical and cultural reasons.

Regarding the divides in our country, I'll limit myself for now to one story from a white, midwestern, heterosexual male, a former Evangelical Christian who later became a religious atheist, a political leftist, and a college professor. In wrestling with the political divides within his immediate family, he writes:

My parents are good people. They are honest, they work hard, they are generous. My dad makes friends everywhere he goes. **My mom went to college late in life to become a teacher specifically so that she could help underprivileged black students.... They both voted for Trump, as a lesser evil.**

What was disturbing to me was [my mom's] inability to even hear why I would find Trump especially problematic. It was as though it was just another election.... If I decided to cut them off, or even skip Christmas this year while the wound was fresh, it would not be a teachable moment, any more than the time that my dad's favorite talk show host, Rush Limbaugh, casually slandered me to a national audience. My dad offered to call in, assuming that he could explain that

my comment was all just a joke and Rush of all people should be sympathetic with someone getting in trouble for an ill-considered joke. And anyway, harassment campaigns happen on the left, too.

No, if I chose to break contact over this, I fear it would be evidence that I was totally lost. **Even that most extreme gesture would not be able to cut through the armor of misinformation and innuendo and false equivalency that they have built up.**

We are a divided nation in many ways. But we continue to need one another more than ever, and we must continue to answer the call of love, while also discerning what boundaries we need to draw.

More broadly, Brexit (the United Kingdom's recent vote to withdraw from the European Union), the election of Donald Trump, and the potential election next year in France of far-right leader Marine Le Pen are all reactionary movements against globalization. But **with the rise of climate change and the Internet, and in view of how economically-entangled the world already is, it is far from a given that a nativist retreat from internationalism is even possible.** As The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said fifty years ago when he addressed the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in 1966:

We have inherited a large house, a great world house in which we have to live together...a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.... **Together we must learn to live as [family] or together we will be forced to perish as fools.**

As UUs, we are poised to help model a “big tent” way of building multicultural beloved communities. We are far from perfect, but we have a lot of experience with bridge-building amidst diversity.

That goal of building beloved community connects with my sermon title, “No Permanent Waves.” As many of you know, I sit down each June to plan my sermon topics for the next year. So in early summer, when I reflected on what might be helpful to preach about on the Sunday after the presidential election, my gut inclination was to preach about the history of the women’s

movement — because it felt like an appropriate topic regardless of which candidate won the election. Given the prominent role many of our UU forebears played in the women’s suffrage and liberation movements, if Hillary won, it would be an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the first female President of the United States — and all the people who have sacrificed to make that possibility a reality. If this election turned out not to be the election of the first female President, it nevertheless felt appropriate to remember times when the women’s movement faced setbacks before rising again to fight the good fight. **There are no permanent waves. But when a wave crashes, another begins the process of rising up again.**

Scholars and historians weighing the history of U.S. feminisms have discerned and named three periods, or “waves” of feminism in describing the cresting and crashing waves of gendered protest and backlash that have brought us to this present moment. **The first wave of the women’s movement in the U.S. began to rise almost 170 years ago, in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, with the first women's rights convention.** That first wave crested ninety-six years ago in 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex” (6). There’s a wonderful story that when:

“Tennessee became the thirty-sixth and final state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, the final and deciding vote in Tennessee belonged to twenty-four-year-old Harry Burns, who changed his vote after receiving a telegram from his mother reminding him to “be a good boy” and “vote for suffrage.” (54-55)

As an example of how long political waves can take to crest, **only one of the original signers of the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments lived to see women win the right to vote in this country in 1920, but that 1848 groundwork was vital to the victory that came seven decades later** (55).

After four decades of rebuilding, **the second wave of the women’s movement began in the early 1960s, emerging alongside many other counter-cultural movements. And that wave grew in size and strength to achieve many successes** including the passage of Title IX in 1972, which “prohibited sex discrimination in schools receiving federal funding” and created a sea change in athletic opportunities for girls and women (98). And 1973’s Supreme Court

decision of *Roe v. Wade* advanced reproductive justice for women. But despite these and other successes, **second-wave feminism began tragically crashing with the slow death of the Equal Rights Amendment**, which said: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.” Although the ERA passed the House of Representatives and the Senate to triumphant celebration in 1971 and 1972 respectively, it was ultimately defeated a decade later in 1982 when “North Carolina tabled the amendment and Florida and Illinois rejected it” (100).

After a backlash to the women’s movement in the 1980s, many historians date the **resurgent third wave of the women’s movement to the rise in consciousness about sexual harassment triggered by law professor Anita Hill’s allegations against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas in 1991** (103). The sexist way the all-male Senate Judiciary Committee treated Professor Hill inspired many women to run for Congress the next year, resulting in the election of five new female senators and twenty-four new women members in the House of Representatives (118). The second and third waves of the women’s movement have also become increasingly intersectional, embracing race, class, sexual orientation, and transgender perspectives.

We’re still too close historically to declare an end to third wave feminism and/or a beginning to a fourth wave. But the more important point is that there are no *permanent* waves in any justice movement. As explored in the anthology, No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism, the wave metaphor also does not mean that “The decades excluded from the wave — before 1948 or from 1920 to 1960 — are feminist-free zones” (5). When a wave crashes, another begins the process of rising up again. Any surfer will tell you that as glorious as it is to ride a wave, **you can’t continually spend all your time on top of a wave; that’s not how the ocean works.** But in the words of my colleague, The Rev. Rebecca Gordon: **“Our job is to keep scanning the horizon for the next wave. It will come.” And our call is the contribute to building that wave.**

As I have been reflecting on this wave metaphor, the poem that keeps coming to mind is Marge Piercy’s “The Low Road” from her 1980 collection titled The Moon is Always Female:

**What can they do**

**to you? Whatever they want.**

They can set you up, they can  
bust you, they can break  
your fingers, they can  
burn your brain with electricity,  
blur you with drugs till you  
can't walk, can't remember, they can  
take your child, wall up  
your lover. They can do anything  
you can't stop them  
from doing. How can you stop  
them? Alone, you can fight,  
you can refuse, you can  
take what revenge you can  
but they roll over you.

But **two people** fighting  
back to back can cut through  
a mob, a snake-dancing file  
can break a cordon, an army  
can meet an army.

Two people can keep each other  
sane, can give support, conviction,  
love, massage, hope, sex.

**Three people** are a delegation,  
a committee, a wedge. With **four**  
you can play bridge and start  
an organization. With **six**

you can rent a whole house,  
eat pie for dinner with no  
seconds, and hold a fund raising party.

A **dozen** make a demonstration.

A **hundred** fill a hall.

A **thousand** have solidarity and your own newsletter;

**ten thousand**, power and your own paper;

a **hundred thousand**, your own media;

**ten million**, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,

it starts when you care

to act, it starts when you do

it again after they said no,

**it starts when you say *We***

**and know who you mean, and each**

**day you mean one more.**

We are in this together, and I am grateful to be on this journey with you. For now, I'll conclude with these words of support from my colleague The Rev. Ashley Horan:

**You are enough, you are precious, your work and your life matter, and you are not alone.** You are part of a “we,” a great cloud of witnesses living and dead who have insisted that this beautiful, broken world of ours is a blessing worthy of both deep gratitude and fierce protection. Whatever happens [in the wake of this or any other political election], **our ancestors and our descendants are beckoning us, compelling us onward toward greater connection, greater compassion, greater commitment to one another and to the earth.** Together, we are resilient and resourceful enough to say “yes” to that call, to make it our life's work in a thousand different ways, knowing that we can do no other than bind ourselves more tightly together, and throw ourselves into the holy work of



showing up, again and again, to be part of building that world of which we dream  
but which we have not yet seen.